

PRAYER

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FASTING

2024 LENT GUIDE

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CHURCH



2024 Lent Guide

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Set-Up Your Fast

Choose Your Fast

TYPES OF FASTS

Fasting isn't exactly one-size-fits-all. In Scripture there are multiple types of fasts—normal, partial, and absolute. Each type can vary in length.

- A *normal* fast is giving up food—but not giving up water—for a designated period of time. In Scripture, the most common normal fast was sunup to sundown (12-hours).
- A *partial* fast is giving up a particular type of food and/or drink for a designated period of time. In Scripture, Daniel only ate water and vegetables for a time (10 days and 21 days).
- An *absolute* fast is giving up food *and* water for a brief, designated period of time. In Scripture, the fast before the Day of Atonement was from sundown to sundown (24 hours).

LENT?

Our season of fasting will, Lord willing, begin on Wednesday, February 14, and will end on Resurrection Sunday (3/31). This season is called Lent.

The early disciples of Jesus began to honor this 40-day season before Passover with fasting and prayer. As Augustine argued, Moses fasted for 40 days in the Law (twice, actually), Elijah for 40 days in the prophets, and Jesus for 40 days in the Gospels, so the whole Bible testified to the fast. Nearly all Christians everywhere fasted during this season. It was a season of seeking spiritual renewal.

At Oikos, we're embracing Lent as a season, not a strict plan. Let's be clear: we're not asking anyone to fast for 40 days straight. Instead, you're invited to fast at least once a week for the 7 weeks leading up to Easter. We encourage you to break your fast on Saturdays to remember the rest of God and on Sundays to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

CHOOSE YOUR FAST

For health concerns, job requirements, family needs, or other reasons, our fasting will take different forms and frequencies. That's up to each person to decide. We are recommending 3 different options for fasting in this 7-week journey.

- *Option 1: Fridays.* Practice a normal fast from Thursday evening until Friday evening.
- *Option 2: Weekdays.* Practice a normal fast from sunrise to sundown every weekday.



- *Option 3: Create your own plan. Customize any of the options above, or make your own.*

For those with children, consider how to include them. Involve them in the decision making and in the reflection time throughout the journey. Even if they don't fast, it may be helpful to talk about why you are. May the Lord grow their desire for discipleship to Jesus as they watch you.

Getting Ready

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you begin, remember Jesus' warnings about fasting for earthly rewards. He says you will get them, but you forfeit the reward of God Himself (Matthew 6:1-4, 16-18). If you're fasting with your family or Oikos Group, encourage one another and check in, but avoid comparison, pride, envy, and recognition. God honors small beginnings, so don't feel the need to impress or overstretch yourself. The point of the season is spiritual renewal, not a fasting accomplishment. Remember that God is gracious and merciful, understanding our weakness. If you slip, hop back up and keep going. Like a parent with a toddler learning to walk, the Lord delights when we continue to take steps toward Him.

PREPARE YOUR HOME

Depending on your fast, you may need to prepare your home. Tasty treats can make it more difficult to honor your fast. You may also want to communicate your fasting plans to the people in your home. It can be helpful to have family supporters because, sometimes, they'll pick up on your hunger pains before you do 😊. If you're fasting and have children or roommates, consider how to embrace this as an opportunity to cultivate in them a hunger for God and for the practices of Jesus.

PREPARE YOUR BODY

Before you fast, you may need to consult a physician, especially if you're pregnant, nursing, or have other medical issues. It's not wise to gorge yourself leading up to or when breaking a fast. It's better to avoid sugary foods. Drink plenty of water before and after your fast.

PREPARE YOUR RHYTHM

Choose a time to fast when the hunger pains can move you to reflection and prayer. Consider replacing meal times with prayer and worship times. Allow this guide to help you on your journey. Each week has a unique focus, a daily reading plan, a prayer to repeat each day, and some reflection questions to help guide you.

All right. You're all set. You may be a beginner to fasting, but you can do this! Let's go.



Week 1: Hunger for God

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the first week of Lent is hunger for God. Hunger is, of course, the desire to eat. It's that uncomfortable feeling that comes from being undernourished. Hunger wants more, because it isn't filled up just yet; something's still lacking.

Prayerfully consider your hunger for God. Hunger for God describes our spiritual longing or desire for God. It's that uncomfortable feeling like there's not enough, like He's far away, or like He isn't moving. It can feel like a homesickness for God and His kingdom. Hunger means it's not yet fully satisfied. This is why hunger walks hand in hand with lament. We lament what we do not have or what we want more of. Use this first week of prayer and fasting to locate within yourself this longing for more of God. Where do you want more of God? Where do you want God to move? What do you want God to fill up and satisfy?

Readings: *Search the Scriptures each day.*

- 2/14 Psalm 42
- 2/15 Isaiah 41:1-20
- 2/16 Isaiah 44:1-5, Isaiah 49:1-13
- 2/17 Isaiah 48:12-22, Isaiah 50

Prayer: *Pray this prayer each day this week.*

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore, I will remain with you of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give.

Martin Luther

Reflections: *Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.*

1. *Where are you experiencing hunger and thirst for something more?*
2. *How is the experience of hunger and thirst described in the scripture readings?*
3. *What is the Holy Spirit doing in you as you read these scriptures?*



Week 2: Lesser Things

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the second week of Lent is how our hunger is often satisfied by lesser things. John Piper in his book, *A Hunger for God*, says, “The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie.” What he means is that when we hunger for more of God, we go to the nearest or easiest thing to dull the ache of hunger. We often choose lesser things that numb us to the hunger we feel. We exchange simple pleasures that distract us from the true banquet and feast God has for us. As Romans 1:25 puts it, we “worshiped and served created things rather than the creator.” Use this week of prayer and fasting to discover and confess to the lesser things you have been using to distract or dull your deeper hunger for God.

Readings: Search the Scriptures each day.

2/18 Psalm 139
2/19 Isaiah 44
2/20 Isaiah 55; Galatians 4:8
2/21 Psalm 51
2/22 1 John 1:5-10; 2:15-17
2/23 Psalm 32; Luke 14:12-24
2/24 Psalm 103

Prayer: Pray this prayer each day this week.

O Lord, you see that all hearts are empty
Unless filled by you,
And all desires are frustrated
unless they point to you
So give us light and grace
To seek and find you,
That we may be yours,
And you may be ours, forever.

Christina G. Rossetti

Reflections: Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.

1. *How do the Biblical authors confess to the Lord? What do they say and do?*
2. *What lesser things have you been using to distract your deeper hunger for God?*
3. *How is God calling you to respond to your times of prayer and reading?*



Week 3: Righteousness

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the third week of Lent is on hunger for righteousness. Jesus says to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). This week, prayerfully consider God’s nature and character. He is righteous. He is good and holy. He is faithful and loving. His kingdom is just. During your time of fasting, allow your hunger to move you to times of contemplation over the injustices and unrighteousness in the world. “Lament, mourn, and weep” for the sinfulness around you (James 4:9). Reflect and pray for God to send you into the world as an instrument of His peace.

Readings: Search the Scriptures each day.

2/25 Jeremiah 9:17-24; Psalm 107:1-3

2/26 Isaiah 1-2:5

2/27 Isaiah 58

2/28 Psalm 89:1-18, Exodus 34:6-7

2/29 Psalm 33

3/1 Matthew 5:1-11

3/2 Matthew 6:25-34; John 10:1-18

Prayer: Pray this prayer each day this week.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

Francis of Assisi

Reflections: Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.

1. *How is God’s righteousness and justice described in these texts?*
2. *What injustices or unrighteousness most weighs on your heart? What is God calling you to do?*
3. *Where in your life have you not believed God is faithful and good?*



Week 4: Presence

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the fourth week of Lent is God's presence. We believe that when we ask, seek, and knock, the door of his presence will be opened to us. When we "seek for God, trying to feel our way toward him to find him," we discover, "he is actually not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). It's not God who was far away. Use this week to pursue God's presence through confession and prayer. As Scripture says, "Come near to God, and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).

Readings: Search the Scriptures each day.

- 3/3 Psalm 63
- 3/4 Psalm 27
- 3/5 Psalm 145
- 3/6 Psalm 34; Zephaniah 3:9-20
- 3/7 Jeremiah 31:1-14
- 3/8 John 15
- 3/9 John 16; Revelation 21:1-6

Prayer: Pray this prayer each day this week.

Open unto me, light for my darkness
Open unto me, courage for my fear
Open unto me, hope for my despair
Open unto me, peace for my turmoil
Open unto me, joy for my sorrow
Open unto me, strength for my weakness
Open unto me, wisdom for my confusion
Open unto me, forgiveness for my sins
Open unto me, tenderness for my toughness
Open unto me, love for my hates
Open unto me, Thy Self for myself
Lord, Lord, open unto me!

Howard Thurman

Reflections: Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.

1. *Based on the readings, how would you describe what God's presence is like in your own words?*
2. *In the readings, how do people respond to God's presence?*
3. *How does your experience and idea of God's presence compare to what you read in Scripture?*



Week 5: Worship

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the fifth week of Lent is worship. Throughout Scripture, the response to God's loving presence is worship. When we encounter the One we hunger for, we celebrate and dive in, as at a rich feast. If we have been wandering in the desert almost to the point of death, and discover the life-giving water, we drink and sing for joy. It is the same when we have been hungry for God, when we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we respond with worship. Scripture points us to whole-hearted, full-bodied, all-out-abandon worship of God.

Readings: Search the Scriptures each day.

3/10	John 4:1-45
3/11	Psalms 104
3/12	Psalms 146
3/13	Psalms 73
3/14	Psalms 47
3/15	Psalms 100
3/16	Revelation 4-5

Prayer: Pray this prayer each day this week.

Too late have I loved you, O Beauty, O Beauty so new. Too late have I loved you! You were within me but I was outside myself, and there I sought you! In my weakness, I ran after the beauty of the things you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The things you have made kept me from you, the things which would have no being unless they existed in you! You have called, you have cried, and you have pierced my deafness. You have radiated forth, you have shined out brightly, and you have dispelled my blindness. You have sent forth your fragrance, and I have breathed it in, and I long for you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst for you. You have touched me, and I ardently desire your peace.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Reflections: Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.

1. *Based on the readings, how would you describe what wholehearted worship to God is like?*
2. *As you consider whole-hearted worship, what tensions arise in you?*
3. *How is God calling you to worship with more heart, soul, mind, and strength?*



Week 6: Surrender

Focus for the Week

Our focus for the sixth week of Lent is surrender. Desiring more of God is not just for our own sake and satisfaction, but so that we can be used more for God's work for the world. We must learn to genuinely say and believe, "Not my will but yours be done." This level of surrender comes from encountering the true God of holiness and love. The more secure we are with God—the more rooted our identities are in his love and grace—the more surrendered we're free to be. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Readings: Search the Scriptures each day.

- 3/17 Psalm 91
- 3/18 Proverbs 3:1-12
- 3/19 Isaiah 6
- 3/20 2 Corinthians 4
- 3/21 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Matthew 16:24-28
- 3/22 Luke 7:36-50
- 3/23 Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 2:6-15

Prayer: Pray this prayer each day this week.

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me in any place of services,
rank me with any type of people.
Put me to work, put me to suffering.
Let me be useful for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you brought low by you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to your pleasure and for your use.

John Wesley

Reflections: Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.

1. *Where is God calling you to give up more of yourself so you may be more open to God?*
2. *What has this season of fasting and the scriptures from this week taught you about surrender?*
3. *How does God respond to our obedience and dependence on him?*



Week 7: Gospel

Focus for the Week

Our final focus for the seventh week of Lent is the gospel. Allow the readings to remind you of the price of our salvation and the suffering of the Messiah. May the Lord move you to godly sorrow and deep gratitude for the gift of Jesus Christ. There is a tension here when we fast in light of the gospel. For Christians, we fast as people who are forgiven, hopeful, and Spirit-filled. And yet, we do fast. We continue to weep and mourn. Though Jesus has *already* come, we fast, like the disciples of John the Baptist, as we wait on the return of the Bridegroom. In this hope, we are saved. Lord, come quickly!

Readings: *Search the Scriptures each day.*

3/24 Isaiah 53
3/25 John 13
3/26 John 14
3/27 John 17
3/28 John 18
329 John 19
3/30 John 20-21

Prayer: *Pray this prayer each day this week.*

O God of all nations upon the earth! We thank you, that you are no respecter of persons, and that you have made of one blood all people. Rend the heavens, O Lord, and come down upon earth. Send your gospel, we beseech you. May the nations, which now sit in darkness, behold and rejoice in its light. Destroy, we beseech you, all the false religions which now prevail; and grant, that they may soon cast off their idols. O, hasten that glorious time, when the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea; when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the falling together, and a little child shall lead them. We implore all these blessings and mercies, only in the name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Absalom Jones

Reflections: *Reflect on these questions in prayer this week.*

1. *What is the Spirit doing in you as you read these scriptures?*
2. *How does the Gospel story move you to deeper devotion to God?*
3. *What parts of the scriptures are you feeling called to share with someone?*

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