



**21
DAYS**

PRAYER + FASTING
STARTING JANUARY 1, 2020

Welcome to 21 Days of Prayer + Fasting with Riverview Community Church

We are so glad that you have decided to participate in an extended time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. Prayer + fasting provides us with the time to seek the heart of Jesus for us as individuals and as a church. Our hope is that this time will refresh you personally and our church.

This 21 Days of Prayer + Fasting was intentionally designed to be flexible so you can participate at any level. This packet includes: a Biblical guide to fasting, different fasting options, prayer guide, brief devotional thoughts and reflection questions. We will also be coming together on Wednesday, January 8th, 15th, and 22nd at 6:30p for worship and prayer. Each Sunday you will be able to pick up that week's prayer and fasting resources. If you are unable to make it on a Sunday, you can go to www.riverview.cc/grow find the prayer and fasting guide there.

As you prepare for the next 21 days, think about why you are fasting. Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, healing, resolution of a problem, a major decision, clarity, wisdom, for the Holy Spirit to continue working in your life from the inside out, heart first. Whatever it might be, make the primary goal of the next 21 days to know Jesus more.

During the next 21 days, I am praying and believing God for:

We are praying expectantly with you and for you,

- The Leadership of Riverview Community Church

Fasting Guide |

The following has been adapted from *Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer*, by Dr. Bill Bright, via Campus Crusade for Christ International and Fair Haven Church in Hudsonville, MI.

Fasting and prayer has the potential for significant impact in our lives. Through fasting and prayer is one way that the Holy Spirit begins to change our lives from the inside out, heart first. When we fast and pray with the intention of seeking God's face, with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, God hears from heaven and heals our lives, church, community, nation and world.

Biblical fasting is denying oneself something for the sake of seeking and honoring God. Pastor and Author Stovall Weems says that *"prayer is connecting with God; fasting is disconnecting ourselves from the world."* Generally, fasting is going without food but in addition to food, it can also be from things that keep us connected to the world. This can include television, social media, video games, phones, and more.

What does the Bible teach about fasting?

In the Old Testament, Israel celebrated annually with fasting. The most prominent being the Day of Atonement. There were also occasional fasts that tied to specific events and individuals. Some of those occasions include: grieving (1 Samuel 31:13, Nehemiah 1:4), repenting (1 Samuel 7:6, 1 Kings 21:27), to express humility (Ezra 8:21, Psalm 69:10) and also expressing a need for God's guidance and help. With each of these fasts, we are reminded of our dependence on God.

In the New Testament, Jesus assumes that fasting will be part of His disciple's spiritual life (Matthew 6:16-18). Throughout the New Testament, we are taught that God's Word nourishes us (Matthew 4:1-4), doing God's will sustains us (John 4:31-35), and that Jesus Himself will sustain us (John 6:48-50).

What is the purpose of fasting?

Fasting is designed to intensify our dependence on God by weakening our dependence on food and other things. How does this happen? Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food and other things to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating. Richard Foster, an author and theologian says, *"More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, 'I humbled my soul with fasting' (Psalm 69:10). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear - if they are within us, they will surface during fasting."*

Fasting also teaches us that we can go without getting what we want and survive. Fasting can teach us moderation, self-control, not only in relation to food but in other areas of our lives as well. It can also teach us contentment (1 Timothy 6:6).

Lastly, fasting helps us express and deepens our hunger for God. Again, Foster says, *“Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God:’ (Matthew 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, ‘All things hold together’ (Colossians 1:17). Therefore, in experiencing of fasting, we are abstaining from food or other activities and feasting on God’s word.”* Fasting is always centered on God and must be about him.

01) Clarify the purpose of our fast.

Why are you fasting? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

02) Specify the kind of fast you will do.

Jesus believed that fasting would be a spiritual discipline of his followers (Matthew 6:16-18, 9:14-15). Before you fast, decide how up front: what type of fast, how long, how much time each day will you devote to prayer and God’s word? Determining these things ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life’s pressures tempt you to abandon it.

03) Prepare your heart, mind, and body for fasting.

Fasting is not a spur-of-the-moment thing. We must prepare. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin can hinder your prayers. There are several things you can do to prepare your heart. Fasting requires some precautions. Consult your physician if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some people should never fast without professional supervision. If you are choosing to fast food, prepare your body by eating smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high fat and sugary foods. Eating raw fruits and vegetables prior to your fast is helpful. Prepare your heart and mind through confessing your sins, accepting God’s forgiveness, seeking forgiveness from all whom you have offended, forgive those who have hurt you and make amends as the Holy Spirit leads. Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16-17). Lastly, in Matthew, Jesus instructs us not to let others know about our fasting. The strict details of your fast should not be something you constantly talk about to others. It remains between you and God.

Types of Fasts

Biblical fasting almost always concerns food. Since the purpose of fasting is to focus on God, to humble ourselves, and to remind ourselves that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then the task in fasting is connecting our “going without” to “hungering for God.” Fasting is a discipline that can take a very long time to understand well. Do not let this fact keep you from fasting or intimidate you.

01) Abstaining from certain types of foods (meat, sweets, etc.) - Daniel 10:3

This type of fast is good for beginners to fasting or those with health needs and special or restrictive diets. Choose to abstain from something like breads, sweets, sodas, coffee or caffeine, red meat, etc. Stick to only fruits and vegetables.

Determine the timing and duration of your fast and begin. You may choose to go without the specific type of food on only certain days like Wednesdays, or you may go without during the weekends, or other certain days. This fast is for 21 days but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the time and duration ahead of time and stick to it.

02) Abstaining from all food - Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9

This is a much more difficult fast but can be broken up time and duration. This seems to be the most common fast we see in the Bible and it is also the most intimidating, but don't let it scare you. Fasting from all food is not scary if you determine beforehand when you will do so and for how long. Some ideas to help: (1) Start slow. Begin with fasting for only a part of a day. Do that for a week, or perhaps three days a week. (2) Fast from food but not beverages. This means that according to your timing and duration, you would not eat any solid foods but only water, juices, smoothies, or simple broths. (3) 24 Hour fast. This means you would get up and eat a good breakfast and drink only water or juice until the following breakfast the next day. Set aside specific times for prayer. (4) As you have progressed, maybe do a two or three day fast.

03) Abstaining from entertainment - Daniel 6:18

Fasting from entertainment can be particularly helpful and accessible to kids and teens. Think about abstaining from television, social media, video games, streaming services, phones, music, texting, etc. for the duration of your fast.

The plan you choose is your decision. We are all at different places and our spirituality is never a cause for comparison or competition. Your fast should present a level of challenge in it, but know your body, know your options, and most importantly, seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. It is also important to not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. This is a time to disconnect with your regular patterns and habits in order to connect with God more closely.

Even if you do not choose to fast, please seek God with us in prayer.

21 Days of Prayer

Day 1 | January 1, 2020

Psalm 51:1-12, 16-17

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. ² Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. ³ For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. ⁴ Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just. ⁵ For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. ⁶ But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. ⁷ Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸ Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. ⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

¹⁶ You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

1 John 1:8-9

⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

Happy New Year! The first day of the new year is always a weird day. Some of us are waking up late after being up all night and others of us are up and at it and ready to take on the new year with all that it has in store.

40-45% of American adults will make one or more resolutions this year with the top 3 usually being weight loss, exercise programs and to stop smoking. An additionally popular resolution deals with debt and better money management. By June of that year, 50% of those making resolutions have given up.

As with New Years Resolutions, as followers of Jesus, we always want areas of our life to be more like Jesus. We make resolution like decisions in our faith and try to follow through but when we fail to do so, we give up completely in that area. In order to make significant changes in becoming more like Jesus, we have to let the Holy Spirit change our lives from the inside out, heart first. No amount of will power will make you more like Jesus. Only the Holy Spirit can make you more like Jesus. What we can do is be like David and ask God to create a clean heart in us and begin to change our heart.

Reflect:

- (1) Are there areas of your life you need to confess to God and ask for his forgiveness?
- (2) How are you planning to hear from God and spend time with Him during the next 20 days?

Prayer Focus:

Pray prayers of confession and prayers asking the Holy Spirit to open your heart, ears, and mind so you can hear from God.

Day 2 | January 2, 2020

James 1:2-7

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. ⁵ If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. ⁶ But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Matthew 17:20

“You don’t have enough faith,” Jesus told them. “I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.”

James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

What are your expectations when you pray? When we pray with expectation, we are exercising our faith. Praying with expectation can produce wonderful results, and the most earnest prayers come from us recognizing our need for God.

When we pray for the seemingly impossible, it is easy for us to shrink back but we must remember that nothing is impossible with God. When we know the promises of God, understand His character and the principles by which He works, we can pray with confident expectation and trust God that He will answer.

In the past, what has caused you to waver in your expectation with God? James reminds us that faith and wavering are contradictory. We must know that God never wavers in His love for us. You can trust Him completely.

Reflect:

- 01) What are you trusting God for in this season?
- 02) How do you line up your expectations with the Scriptures when you pray?
- 03) Find God’s promises in the Scriptures that answer your need and write them down.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray to better understand God and His character
- Pray the promises of God that you found in Scripture.

Day 3 | January 3, 2020

Psalm 24:1-6

¹ The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. ² For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths. ³ Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. ⁵ They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God their savior. ⁶ Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob.

James 4:7-8

⁷ So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Romans 2:4

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

How can we sincerely draw close to a God who is all powerful, all knowing, and fully aware of all the reasons we do not belong in His presence? It is common as followers of Jesus for us to be insecure when we think about approaching God. At times, we feel unworthy, disqualified, or not 'holy' enough. The reason we struggle this way is because we know ourselves and our propensity to sin. We know our inability to give God everything He deserves.

However, God knows our struggles and He is the answer to our struggles. Our confidence in drawing near to God is not based on our performance but what Jesus has already done. Therefore we can come to God with boldness and confidence and we will find grace.

Additionally, our confidence is based on God's love for us. We know that we can trust His love. The things that disqualify us - sin, weakness, failure, flaws, etc. - these things provide convincing proof of God's love. God knows our past failures and our current weaknesses and still loves us. Through our sins and weaknesses, we are given the opportunity to really know God's love for us and we can trust His love.

Reflect:

01) Ask God to reveal anything in your life that would hinder your ability to come into God's presence.

02) According to Romans 2:4, what leads us into repentance?

03) Write down and reflect on where you have seen God's love in your life.

Prayer Focus:

- Pray to experience God's love and presence in your life.
- Pray that others will be able to experience God's love as well.

Day 4 | January 4, 2020

Matthew 5:6

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.

Mark 1:12-13

¹² The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

2 Timothy 2:20-22

²⁰ In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. ²¹ If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work. ²² Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

Throughout the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John), we see Jesus disconnecting from the world, His ministry, the demands of the crowds, and even His closest friends so He could fast and pray.

There are times that we also need to pull away from the things of the world so we can focus on God. This includes more than just food. We have so much to distract us like television, movies, social media, phones, the internet, streaming services, and so much more. There is nothing wrong with these things but they are things that can mentally and spiritually drown out God's voice in our lives. We tend to use them in an attempt to bring nourishment to our souls. Fasting is a means of disconnecting from the distractions of daily life and consciously choosing to bring God into greater focus in our lives.

During this time of fasting, we may feel physical hunger, but let's be intentional about cultivating spiritual hunger as well. Like Jesus, let's come away from the crowds and lay aside all the things that can distract us from hearing God's voice. Let us hunger for righteousness and for the things of God.

Reflect:

01) Are you disconnected from the things that we use to attempt to bring nourishment to our body and soul?

02) What do you need to deny yourself so that this can be a powerful time of focusing on God?

03) Think about the amount of time you would normally use doing other things to bring nourishment to your soul. Use that time to read the Scriptures and pray.

Prayer Focus:

- Ask God to give you a spiritual hunger for more of Him in your life.
- Ask Jesus to use you on His mission to refresh others and help heal the world.

Day 5 | January 5, 2020

Psalm 111:1-8

¹ Praise the Lord! I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with his godly people. ² How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in him should ponder them. ³ Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty. His righteousness never fails. ⁴ He causes us to remember his wonderful works. How gracious and merciful is our Lord! ⁵ He gives food to those who fear him; he always remembers his covenant. ⁶ He has shown his great power to his people by giving them the lands of other nations. ⁷ All he does is just and good, and all his commandments are trustworthy. ⁸ They are forever true, to be obeyed faithfully and with integrity.

Psalm 27:8

My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.” And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.”

Matthew 4:18-20

¹⁸ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” ²⁰ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

Each day God is inviting us to come and talk with Him. How do you respond to that? During times of fasting and prayer, it is easier for us to respond with, “I’m coming.” However, when we are in the routine of our normal day, how do we respond? “In a minute” or “I’m trying” or “Maybe tomorrow” or “Not right now.” When we take the opportunity to worship and pray and spend time with God, it is responding to God’s invitation. It is in these moments that we better understand God’s heart and God’s ways and what he is calling us to.

Calling us to prayer, worship, conversation with Him is not the only thing we are called to. Jesus also calls us to follow Him. He invites us to join Him on His mission to help heal the world. Just as God calls us daily to spend time with Him, Jesus invites us to be on His mission and invites us daily, moment by moment to help heal the world. How will you respond to both of these invitations?

Reflect:

- How has the last five days being in God’s presence began to change you?
- Are you listening and responding to God’s call to come and talk with Him?
- Are you listening and responding to Jesus’ invitation to join him on the mission to help heal the world?

Prayer Focus:

- Pray that after the 21 days of prayer and fasting you will daily respond to God’s invitation to come and talk with him.
- Pray that you will see where Jesus is inviting you to help heal the world and respond with action.