

***Scriptures & Teachings on:  
Praying, Fasting & Giving***

***by***

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**Matthew 6:2, 5, 16**

**So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.**

**And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.**

**When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.**

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Jesus expected his followers to give, pray, and fast. The question was never, "Should these things be done?" The question was, and still is, "How are they done to honor God and benefit the follower?" Since January of 2000, the Westview Church of Christ in Greeley, Colorado has begun each calendar year with forty days dedicated to an intense time of seeking the will of God. Every year brings new experiences, new insight, and new growth. Sometimes God's movement in our lives, both individually and collectively, is dynamic, exciting, and amazing. At other times He has chastened, disciplined, and purged us in order that we may grow as He desires.

What we have learned is that God honors the sincere heart that is determined to seek His will.

The experience of these forty days is not only different from year to year, but is also different from person to person. We have seen that God not only respects the unique character of each person, but works through that individuality. We begin our forty day trek the first of January. Every church member is given a booklet with daily devotionals, guidelines, suggestions, and reminders. While similar from year to year, the booklet is also unique to that year's needs, activities, and theme.

More constant are these Biblical teachings and exhortations concerning prayer, fasting, and giving. These spiritual disciplines are timeless, transcending the changing ages, cultures, and trends. No matter what, God calls us to pursue Him. **Prayer** can always be a deeply spiritual experience between the believer and the Father. **Fasting** can always be a testing time of growth as God disciplines us spiritually through physical challenge. And **giving** is always a trademark action of the believer – our representation of God in a world that is desperate to see Him.

We encourage you to use this information as a reference and reminder during this year's forty days experience. There are scriptures and teachings that are immutable. There are also suggestions that can help you approach these forty days with a plan and a discipline. Suggestions aren't binding. Many

will choose to approach their prayer time, fasting, and giving in a different way. We urge you, no matter what, to demonstrate commitment to these forty days by developing a strategy through which you can best encounter God and learn of His will and guidance in your life.

The following pages are:

- ◆ An eight-step approach to **prayer**
- ◆ Guidelines and teachings on **fasting**
- ◆ Biblical principles concerning **giving**

Our prayer is that God will amaze you as you actively pursue His will and guidance.

## **Prayer**

### ***Thanksgiving***

Come before his  
presence with  
singing.... Enter his  
gates with  
thanksgiving.

*Psalms 100:2b,4a*

Most people come to the Father in a state of grumbling or complaining, or in the “Help me God!” mode. We tend to wait until a moment of desperation before we feel the need to pray. After all, much of life on this earth is one crisis after another. But it is important to understand that when we enter His gates with thanksgiving, we immediately enter His rest. *For we who have believed (adhered to and trusted in and relied on) God do enter that rest....* Hebrews 4:3a (Amplified Bible). It is always best to get the Victory *before* you start the battle!

Above all, thank Him for salvation. Say: “Thank you, Lord, for saving me!” Say it often! There are then so many other things to be thankful for. “Thank you, Lord, that you love me, which is far beyond what I deserve!” Thank Him for specific things He does for you. Be personal. If possible, journal while you pray. The Holy Spirit will remind you of your blessings and deliverance for which you are thankful.

The purpose of this first step is to simply acknowledge that He is God and that He has done something for us! Thank Him for what He has already done, what He is doing, and what He will do (past, present, future). *The works were finished from the foundation of the world.* (Hebrews 4:3b). *Being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 1:6)

Give thanks to Him in everything! God is love. If God only offered *conditional* love, then it would be hard to continually thank Him. I would expect Him to bless me and do good for me because of my good deeds and obedience. But, because He is *unconditional* love, He loves me and blesses me for no reason that I instigate, so I am continually grateful, especially since there’s no way to get to heaven except through being perfect. Only HE makes me perfect. I need help. Therefore, He insists that I die to myself, then He blesses me, and He receives the glory. When I was lost, He rescued me! Everything He’s given me is a gift. Entering His courts with thanksgiving places us in a position that bows before

Him and acknowledges that He is God! *Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that made us, not we ourselves; we are the sheep of His pasture.* (Psalms 100:3)

God doesn't want us to be sophisticated in our thanksgiving. He just wants us to be like children, praying with innocent faith. Listen to a child's prayer of thanks. It will teach you so much.

## **Praise**

Praise God for Who he is. Enrich your praise vocabulary by studying the Psalms for descriptive terms. Praise Him for He is able, He is merciful, majestic, holy, faithful, trustworthy, mighty, all-powerful, loving, good, all-knowing, ever-present, etc. There are countless words that may be used to praise Him. Discover them for yourself.

Praise Him for all that He is and all that He's done. Pray the Psalms; pray straight from the Bible; give praise to God using His own holy words. Use your own words and expressions. Give Him praise!

The purpose of this step is to celebrate - to shout "Hallelujah" to the Lord (allow your spirit to dance!), no matter what your circumstances. It prepares your attitude to approach the steps that follow. God dwells in the praises of His people. Praise activates the power of God (II Chronicles 20:22). Praise silences the avenger (Psalms 8:2). You will feel the presence of God when you begin to praise. It is important when you implement all eight of these steps into your daily prayer life that you remain in the praise phase as long as it takes to feel God's presence. It *will* happen, and you will learn to recognize it and know when to move on to the next step. Some days you will spend more time here than others, depending on the Spirit's work in you. Learn to participate in praise with joy and exuberance! *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4)

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and enter his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name.

*Psalms 100:4*

## **Adoration**

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

*Luke 1:46-47*

Simply declare to God with your mouth, "I love you! I love you! I love you! I adore you! I worship you!" He is blessed when you do this. Steps one and two are more passive in nature; they are focused on God and Who He is

and what He has done for us. This third step (adoration) is the first step that is active in nature. It is our response and our gift to Him. We didn't start out automatically loving God. We learned and grew to love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19). Adore Him even if you don't "feel" like it. Do it by faith. Do it no matter what. Say it enough that it spills over into your emotions. The goal in prayer is to experience God. If you invest a few minutes of your busy day here, it may save you hours... because this step energizes and empowers you. It's worth it!

This moves us past knowledge to relationship. In step one, we thank God. This is the most basic of positive steps to God. He has done so much for us. In step two, we praise God. Again, this is a natural response to the recognition of how God blesses us and what he does for us. Praise follows such recognition. But, adoration...that is a different emotion.

Adoration proclaims intimacy and closeness. We begin to *know* him, not just know *about* him. During your prayer life of during the forty days, and beyond, make a conscious effort to end each prayer with the final statement, “God, I love you.” And remember – He adores you!

## **Confession**

Steps 1-3 are to help you see God. Every time you truly see God, you’ll see your own sinfulness. His holiness

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 3:23

*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Romans 8:1

always exposes our un-holiness. The next natural step is to confess our un-holiness. Be specific. “Generic” confession of sin or to simply admit that “I have sinned” when you have not really been convicted of your sinfulness is just playing games. It contributes to hypocrisy. It does not allow Him to crucify the flesh. The Holy Spirit will convict you of the things you need to confess. We must understand and confess that we are totally and completely wicked without Him. We must see how ugly sin is. Satan, the accuser, loves to hurl condemnation at us. He tells us we are not good. When we respond to him with “I already know that, Satan;” you are not telling me anything new!” we expose the enemy. God, then, can demonstrate His power in our lives.

*He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world.* (1 John 4:4) When I acknowledge the horror of my sin, my flesh (the old self) dies and my spirit (the new self) comes alive, and I am no longer unstable in all my ways. You see, it’s not scary to know that there’s nothing good in me *when I know that I’m already loved for no reason at all. I can be wonderful and perfect because of Him!*

## **Confession of Righteousness**

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.

1 John 3:1

Confession of sin should always be followed by confession of righteousness. When we are convicted of our sin and confess, we must immediately acknowledge His power to cleanse us and make us holy. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9) Therefore, I am clean, but only because of Him and through Him. By Him, I am absolutely and totally perfect. This is the basis for the prayer that confesses righteousness. It is *His* righteousness in us, not our own.

At this point, when we declare righteousness, any residual or hidden sin still left in us will come out. His holiness exposes ALL our sins and His cleansing is total and complete. *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.* (Romans 8:1-2) It glorifies God when we can pray to Him, “I acknowledge my sin, but that’s not really me. I am in Christ, who has saved me! He has set me free. He has made me righteous. I am righteous because He has made me so. Hallelujah!”

## **Petition**

Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.

*1 Kings 8:28*

This is when we say, “Lord, this is what I ask You to do for me. Now that I know that You love me; now that I’ve thanked You; now that I’ve praised You; now that I’ve adored You; now that I’ve expressed my love for You; now that I’ve seen my sin and confessed it; now that I’ve confessed that my righteousness is because of Your perfection... I still need Your help! Give me my daily bread; give me wisdom; give me victory over and protection from my enemies...”

Ask for everything! Ask boldly! Again, be very specific and personal about what you are asking. God is not unconcerned about what concerns you! The small details of your life are important to Him. *Do not worry about anything, but in **everything** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* (Philippians 4:6) God WANTS and WAITS for us to ask Him! He said, “Ask, and it shall be given.” (Matthew 7:7) “If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:14) “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, then ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.” (John 15:7) If He said it, it is so!

It is important to understand that this step is not an act of selfishness. This is an act of dependence on God, a proclamation of our needs and desires to the Giver of all good things. It is a demonstration of faith in His power to accomplish absolutely anything! Understand, though, that it is step six in the process, not step one. **The previous steps prepare us to come before the throne with righteous and pure requests, humbly accepting His will for our lives and His determinations concerning our requests and needs.**

## **Intercession**

The prayer reference to the left is Nehemiah’s prayer *on behalf of others*. Why is this step *after* petition? Many may think that intercessory prayer for others should precede personal petition. However, God says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:31) This infers we must love ourselves before we are capable of loving others. We must establish our personal relationship to Him first. We must address our own personal needs from God before we can truly focus on the needs of others. All those who have traveled by air know that the emergency oxygen should first be applied to one’s self before assisting others. When our basic needs are met, we are much freer to serve. By experiencing God’s power through prayer in our own life, we then approach intercessory prayer with a stronger faith and deeper understanding.

This step is where we say, “Lord, I also ask you to bless (someone). I need you to protect (someone). Please comfort/heal/touch (someone)...” Be specific. Pray for those that are on your heart. Don’t attempt to pray for everyone in the whole world. Keep the prayers personal. Pray by the

O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.

*Nehemiah 1:11*

Spirit. Listen to Him. He will bring to mind those for whom you need to pray. Some days will have longer lists than others.

Intercession is one of our highest callings. We are urged to intercede for the saints, for the lost, for our enemies, for our families, for our friends, for our community, for our nation, and for our leaders, both worldly and spiritual. This step will change our behavior. This is behavior modification in its purest sense. When we pray for others, it is difficult to despise them. The only way to change ourselves is to simply look at God. *But we all, with open faces, **beholding** as in a glass the glory of the Lord, **are changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as **by the Spirit of the Lord**.* (II Corinthians 3:18) By simply beholding Him, we are changed by His Spirit! What a glorious thought! We don't have to *work* at changing ourselves; we must simply keep our eyes on Him, and the results are worked in us.

This is also the step in which we must pray for protection from the onslaught of the evil one and his forces, that no weapon formed against us will prosper. (II Corinthians 10:3-5; Isaiah 54:17) Call upon God's heavenly angels to surround, protect, and minister to those who are the subjects of your prayers. (Psalms 91:11; Hebrews 1:14) Pray for the Holy Spirit to intercede in their lives.

## **Commitment**

Then I heard the voice of  
the Lord saying, "Whom  
shall I send? And who will  
go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I.  
Send me!"

*Isaiah 6:8*

Now, it is time to say, "Lord, I am ready. Here am I; send me. (Isaiah 6:8) I commit myself this day to walk with you, to obey your voice, and to obey all you have commanded."

Commitment denotes "Christ in me." It is not ME doing it. "Me" has to always confess imperfection and sin. *I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me*

*and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20) Commitment is by faith. Our service becomes an expression of that faith. We can serve Him. *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13) Commit to God and to serving Him this day. Pray that He will reveal to you your unique ministry and calling if you do not know already what it is. Spend your day listening for His voice and being obedient. He will amaze you!

You do not have to do all eight in one prayer session. But you should try to do that occasionally in your extended prayer time. A suggestion: make a card showing the eight steps of prayer. Carry it with you in your pocket, wallet, or purse. Make a second card to keep in your Bible. On many days, God's Spirit will guide you to the particular aspect of prayer you may need to immerse yourself with. Listen to Him! Experience the power of prayer!

## **Fasting**

The word “fasting,” in its purest sense, refers to the denial of sustenance (food and/or water) to the body during a time of spiritual seeking, distress, or celebration. The purpose of this type of fast is to focus the practitioner on the spiritual aspects of life while being tested physically.

It is recommended that every person, if at all possible, go through a time of legitimate, physical fasting during the forty days of seeking God’s will. We encourage you to make the commitment to avoid food for a specified period of time. We also realize this is new to many and recommend that you do not overextend yourself in this commitment. While this intention is honorable, it may not be feasible or safe.

**We also realize that there are several reasons why a person cannot practice “fasting” in this legitimate, pure sense of the word.** A person may have a health condition that disallows a true fast. There may be the need to eat food while taking a specific medication. We do not recommend fasting in this way if it in any way *endangers* a person’s health.

With this in mind, we have broadened the understanding and definition of the word “fasting” to include other forms of self-denial with the intent to grow spiritually. On page nineteen, there are some suggestions that we call “fasting alternatives.” These are simply suggestions to help you consider other ways of “fasting” if you feel you cannot participate in a pure fast. A time of fasting/self-denial is to discipline ourselves physically while we receive a spiritual benefit. It can take various forms. The challenge is to seek God’s will and heed His teaching and instruction.

For simplicities’ sake in this booklet, we will continue to use the word “fast” when describing this discipline even though it may at times be referring to other forms of abstinence and self-denial.

## ***Warnings:***

Do not fast in the traditional sense if you are:

- Diabetic
- Hypoglycemic
- Taking certain medications with food
- Receiving treatment for an eating disorder
- Fasting for the praise of men (Matthew 6:16-18)

## ***Periods of Fasting:***

One Day ..... *Leviticus 23:27; I Samuel 7:6;  
14:24; Jeremiah 36:6;  
Nehemiah 9:1*

Three Days... *I Samuel 30:12; Acts 9:9*

Seven Days... *I Samuel 31:11-13; I Chronicles  
10:11-12; II Samuel 12:15-18,  
21-23*

Fourteen Days ... *Acts 27:33*

Three Weeks.....*Daniel 10:2-3*

Forty Days.....*Exodus 34:28;*  
*Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; I*  
*Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:1-2*

**Fasting Alternatives:** If you are following an alternative fast plan, it may be beneficial to extend the fast for several days since it does not involve the sustenance needed through food. Some Biblical references that show a “fast” from specific foods or activities include:

- Fast from television or other entertainment. (*Daniel 6:18*)
- Fast from certain food groups, including breads, sweets, fast foods, drinks, or meat. (*Daniel 1*)
- Abstain from sexual relations by agreement. (*I Corinthians 7*)

The purpose of a dedicated period of prayer and fasting is to humble ourselves before God, seek His will, and ask Him to empower us to do His will. Jesus expected his disciples to fast. In Matthew 6: 16, Jesus said, “when you fast” indicating an expectation that His followers would fast.

When we fast, we deny our bodies something we desire in order to receive from God something our souls need.

## Purposes of Fasting

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To change our relationship with each other  
*Isaiah 58:3b-8*

To empower us  
*Esther 4:15-16; Matthew 9:15-17*

To bring the body under control  
*I Corinthians 9:27*

To humble ourselves before God  
*Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Ezra 8:21*

To receive understanding and insight  
*Daniel 9; 10:2-3; Luke 2:37*

To seek the will of God  
*Acts 13:2*

To sorrow over sin.  
*Daniel 9; Acts 9:9; Ezra 10:6; Deuteronomy 9:18;*  
*I Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2; Joel 2:12*

To be heard by God  
*Ezra 8:23; I Samuel 58:4 ,9*

To begin a work for God  
*Matthew 4:2ff; Exodus 34:27-28; Acts 13:2-3*

To change God’s mind  
*Jonah 3:5, 10; I Kings 21:27-29; Joel 2:12-1*

# Examples of Individual Fasting

*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Matthew 6:16-18

*His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.'"* II Samuel 12:21-22

*They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.* Nehemiah 1:3-4

*Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.* Psalms 35:11-13a

*So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lion's den.... Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him and he could not sleep.* Daniel 6:16,18

## Examples of Corporate Fasting

*The Lord establishes the Day of Atonement*

Leviticus 23:27; Acts 27:9

*The people fast to celebrate God's blessing on Jerusalem*

Zechariah 8:18-19

*The church fasts as she seeks God's will to commission workers for the Lord*

Acts 13:2-3

*All Judah fasts to seek help from the Lord*

II Chronicles 20:3

## Fasting tips, pointers, and reminders:

- If you have no medical reason or eating disorder that prohibits you from fasting, you are encouraged to fast by abstaining from food for a predetermined period of time.
- Usual meal times should be replaced by prayer and Bible study.
- If you have never fasted before, begin with a fast of shorter duration, probably no longer than three days.
- Fasts longer than one day in duration should include water and/or unsweetened fruit juices.

- Do not use appetite suppressants to help you through the fast. This is not only medically risky; it places your trust in something other than God’s guidance and power.
- Avoid *vigorous* exercise during your fast.
- Longer fasts are best accomplished with an accountability partner.
- Expect some lightheadedness, bad breath, and irritability – particularly in longer fasts.
- When fasting longer than three days, seek medical advice.
- Consider fasting one specified day a week for the span of the 40 days.
- Do not determine your fast time strictly on your schedule in order to make your fast more convenient. Live your life normally, but without food during the fast time.
- In times of struggle or weakness, give even more fervent attention to prayer and spiritual seeking. Continually seek God’s will for your own life, your family, and this congregation.

## **Giving**

**But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be done in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**     *Matthew 6:3-4*

One of the greatest expressions of the Christian faith is how we handle our money, use our possessions, and demonstrate our godly walk with the Master in our stewardship. God enjoys blessing us in this world. His intent, though, is that we use those blessings to draw the attention of people to Him. Paul told Timothy to teach people about the blessing and privilege of wealth. (I Timothy 6:17-18)

Money is mentioned more than 2,000 times in the Bible. Jesus focuses on giving, money, greed, and generosity in the Sermon On the Mount. In chapter six, along with praying and fasting, he pinpoints giving as a physical action that reflects spiritual values. It’s in that discussion that we hear well-known phrases about money. We must remember that in this sermon, Jesus is describing the heart and actions of the citizens of his kingdom.

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain.... Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

- Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.
- Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
- For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- No one can serve two masters.
- You cannot serve both God and money.

As we focus on praying and fasting in our desire to learn of God's will, He may open our eyes to needs, opportunities, and challenges that we can honor through financial giving. We have such abundance! Will we be faithful stewards?

God issued this challenge in Malachi 3:10 – *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*

**One of the great disciplines of these forty days is to give sacrificially and honorably towards God's call. There are several ways to do this:**

1. Tithe for the forty days in your church contributions (tithe on the gross – God should be given to before the government is).
2. Deny yourself something – a restaurant meal, an item, entertainment, etc. – and give those funds to the Lord's will in some way.
3. Increase your current contribution significantly during these forty days, with prayer being the determining action that leads you to the amount to be given.
4. When you fast, give what you would have spent on food to the Lord in some benevolent way.
5. Ask God through prayer to lead you to someone in need with the intent to help them in any way you can.

**After telling Timothy to teach people about godly generosity, he also says, “In this way they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (I Timothy 6:19)**