



**ORIGIN CHURCH
FASTING AND PRAYER GUIDE**

Origin, we are walking into a new season for our church, and I am so thankful for the response I have received from people who are also excited to grow in prayer and are longing for Spiritual Revival in their own lives and our church community.

2018 is a season of opportunity for us. We don't know if God will answer our prayers the way we are asking. We don't know what God will do at all, but the opportunity is for us to experience God and for him to work in us and around us in new ways; ways we may not expect but will prove to be the grace of God when we look back on this year. This is an opportunity for us to come together as one body and together cry out to God for our whole church, each of us stewarding and interceding for the entire body. It is an opportunity to confess our sins of ambivalence, intentional disregard or even sins of omitting what we know God has called us to. This is an opportunity to participate with God and his sovereign rule over the world. This is an opportunity to unite our hearts to the heart of Christ and his mission to save the lost. This is an opportunity to grow and even stumble along the way, always being held by that grace in which we are saved.

I cannot wait to see what God is going to do and whatever he does, he loves to do it through our praying and our seeking. I am praying God awakens our church in a new way. I am praying we are all called into greater holiness and affection for God. I am praying a vision for church planting and missions is spurred. I am praying for new Christians and more baptisms than we have ever had before. I am praying that God fills us full of joy and the Holy Spirit as the early church in Acts is described (Acts 13:52).

These 40 days of praying and fasting are just a starting point in our desire to pursue God. Maybe you have never fasted as a Christian. Perhaps you have always wanted to but didn't know where to start or even how to use your time. I wrote this guide to give help in understanding prayer and fasting. I encourage you to read it even if you have experience in both. It helps us all get on the same page together and align our theology and our practice as one praying community. I pray it enables your praying and fasting to be the most fruitful you have experienced.

It's a new opportunity, and you are invited to join me with the rest of the church in setting our minds and hearts on God and seeking first his kingdom together.

*Hidden behind the cross,
Pastor Mark*

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is not a conversation.

Many of us have been told that prayer is a conversation. The concept is a good one. We are in a relationship with a living God. He hears, and he speaks. The problem is the “conversation” understanding of prayer misleads us. It gives us expectations that ultimately leave us wanting. Prayer, defined as a conversation, sets us up for disappointment. It causes us to believe that we should be hearing as well as speaking. If we don’t define prayer as we ought, then we will be left disappointed in God, disappointed in ourselves, or discontent with our prayer lives. We may feel like something is wrong with God, us, or prayer as a whole. When this happens, we stop praying. But prayer was not designed to be a conversation. God does not talk to us in the way we speak to one another. Although there are examples in Scripture of God having conversations with people (Adam and Eve, Moses in Exodus 33:11, Jesus with the apostles, Mary, Martha and even the prostitutes), they were not prayer. Prayer is not merely us talking to God and God talking back to us. Prayer is different. One day in the new age we will experience both prayer and conversation, but they are separate and distinct.

Although God doesn’t typically converse, He does reveal. Think back to the Israelites meeting God for the first time at Mount Sinai. It wasn’t a conversation. It was a revelation. It was God explaining himself to his people. They couldn’t speak back. They couldn’t even get close to the mountain. God revealed, and they listened. Consider when Jesus appeared to Paul or Peter during a rooftop prayer. Hebrews 1 tells us God has spoken (notice the past tense) through his Son - Jesus. Jesus is the penultimate of God’s revelation. God’s audible voice may be quiet but he has revealed everything through the Bible. Where there is no missionary, no Bible, and where the name of Christ has yet to be proclaimed, God may indeed still speak. I have heard stories of such cases, and there is no reason to distrust them.

Prayer is God revealing himself and us revealing ourselves back to him. God has revealed his attributes, his desires, his will, his commands, his righteousness, his gospel, ultimately his Son and what is our response? It’s to reveal ourselves to him in light of what he has revealed to us. Prayer is a revelation of our lives, praise, hearts, mind, sins, control, hopes, desires, wants, hurts, fears, anxieties, weaknesses, needs, and thankfulness to the Lord in light of his revelation. Prayer is an act of release and surrender. It is to cast our cares onto the shoulders of the Lord so we can, as Hannah was able, to eat and smile even though her circumstances didn’t change at all (1 Samuel 1:18). If the success of our prayer is that God answers us, then we have entered into a religious way of relating to God. Prayer is giving ourselves away, releasing our outer and inner lives, ultimately revealing ourselves to the God who has shown himself to us first. When we redefine prayer our success in praying has nothing to do with God being conversational with us. It also disconnects our praying and our needing some response or spiritual experience. We pray to release because God has revealed himself as a God who listens. He doesn’t need to prove he is listening, he has told us so, so we give ourselves to the God who hears (Psalm 34:17).

PRAYER PROVES GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER EVERYTHING.

Changing our view of prayer being a conversation helps us over other hurdles as well. One of those barriers is to understand how God’s sovereignty and our praying connects. Saying God is sovereign is

another way of saying God is king over his creation. A king has sovereign power over the kingdom he rules. For God, his kingdom is the whole universe to the farthest star and between the closest atoms. For God to be sovereign is simply to say that God knows everything, God rules everything, God decides everything. If this is true then what is the point of prayer? If the hope of prayer is not about a conversation but instead one of revelation, then we pray because God has revealed himself as sovereign. Just read what Hannah says about God in 1 Samuel 2:3-10. There are dozens of places God reveals himself in this way. There is no getting away from it.

So why pray if God knows and God rules and God decides? It's not as disconnected as it seems. Here are three reasons and they're just the tip of the sovereign iceberg. First, prayer is not about changing God or getting him to act because he's ambivalent. When we think of a rodeo bull, we think it as mean, dangerous, and likely to impale me. We don't think of a cow. But a bull is a big, dangerous, scary, unpredictable cow. When left alone in a field it does what other cows do - eats grass, moos, and other cud related activities with a little more angst. It becomes a bronco when it's forced to be by "painful" means. I'll leave it for you to do your google search on that. The point is, God doesn't need to be forced by religious prodding. He is ready to act. He is set to act. He is listening to act. God is a God of available action. He is the better boy scout, always prepared. Our prayers are about releasing ourselves to this sovereign God, not to prod or force God's hand. Prayer changes us, not him.

Secondly, and frankly quite merely, God likes to be asked. God doesn't need our prayers, but he does want to be asked. He is a loving father. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:8 the "father knows the things you need before you ask him." So why pray? Because he wants to be asked. He loves the relationship between father and child where our dependence is made known; where we trust our dad to do what is right for us. Often I know what my kids need before they know. Sometimes I want to jump in and rescue, but then they don't learn to humble themselves, to acknowledge their weakness and need for help. Those characteristics are as important as confidence and boldness but they need to be developed in my kids, and they need to be formed in us. In James 4 we are told we don't have because we don't ask. Think about that. God is ready to get involved. Prepared to provide. Willing to help. Ready to carry the weight but we may miss the opportunity because of our pride or doubt.

Thirdly, God uses our praying to accomplish his sovereign rule. God's sovereignty isn't two dimensional; it's three dimensional. God is not the only sovereign over what but how things happen. Praying is often the sovereign way God works out his sovereign rule. Meaning, God ordains our praying to be the means by which he carries out what he has decided will take place. Let's say he wants to save your friend and call him into faith in Christ. He could just do it in an instant; however, God may desire to save a friend of yours and waits to accomplish his purposes until it is met with your prayer. What a radical relationship we are in with a sovereign God through prayer. Our simple, doubt-filled, imperfect prayers become means by which God oversees the universe. Don't ever think your prayers don't matter. God is ruling all things through them.

HOW TO PRAY

Crying out to God is natural but prayer is a learned skill. A baby naturally cries to say they are tired, cold, hot, hungry, lonely, mad, whatever they feel at that moment. But the words to articulate their wants

comes later. At first, a child can only cry. At some point they can use sign language, then speak, eventually having all the words needed to express every experience. This is a learned skill that comes through years of watching, listening, experiencing affirmation from family when new words come, books, teachers, tests, papers and a thousand other ways. Why would we ever assume that praying comes easy? We need to learn how to pray. The desire is innate, but the ability is developed.

Jesus seems to know this when he begins to teach those around him how to pray. We call it the Lord's prayer, but it was a lesson. It was a way Jesus wanted to grow the disciples in prayer. Did the disciples need to know how to pray? Why Jesus' assumption? Jesus teaching the disciples would be like being taught what side of the street to drive on. There are a lot of things to learn about driving, but our lessons don't start with ten reasons we drive on the right. If you learned to drive in the UK that might be lesson one but when you are always seeing and experiencing driving on the right, you wouldn't need a lesson about it. This is what a lesson on prayer would have been like for the disciples. They grew up praying. They grew up in the temple and Synagogues, seeing prayer displayed. They didn't need a lesson; so why the lesson? It is because something had changed. Something was different. The lesson was necessary because with the coming of Jesus, it's like the whole world has shifted and there's whole new learning curve. God became incarnate. The promises were being fulfilled. The kingdom had come near. The Messiah was a man who would suffer and die to obtain victory. Grace was on the horizon. They didn't need the rules of prayer; they needed to understand how to pray now-now that everything was changing. It's as if Jesus is saying, "[Now because I'm here] you should pray like this:" (Matthew 6:9 CSB)

The Lord's prayer gives us a structure for praying. A structure helps shape our prayer, so we know what to say, or pray through the less obvious parts of our hearts. Structure helps release to God our whole selves. Even the Lord's prayer is merely a tool. Jesus didn't say to only pray the words of this prayer. He used this prayer to be a way to pray, not the prayer itself. Repeating the Lord's prayer over and over may be nothing more than words if there is not a real release of our praises, our confession, or our needs. In light of the structure of the Lord's prayer, the most helpful prayer structure in my life has been the acronym TACTS - Text; Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; Supplication. You may have heard or use the ACTS part of this way to pray. The missing piece for most Christians is connecting the Bible to our praying. Remember prayer is not a conversation but a revealing of ourselves to God because he has revealed himself to us. Our revealing needs to be in light of what God has said and has shown himself to be. The Bible is the engine, and the Holy Spirit is the fuel that fruitfully drives our praying. If you don't have a suitable structure for prayer, you might try praying TACTS.

HERE'S HOW:

TEXT - Before you pray you take time to read the Word. This may be a section of Scripture standing out in your daily Bible reading. It might be a passage that has ministered to you for some time. It might be a passage you have memorized. It might be in the Old or the New Testament. It could be a Psalm, one of Jesus' parables or Paul's apologetic. Either way, the text is the beginning of praying. You begin to fix your mind on a specific revelation of God so that you can reveal yourself in light of that revelation back to him. Take time to read the verses you have chosen. Read them through a few times. Get out your prayer journal and make some observations about the text and what it says about God, our world, humanity, your heart.

Make a note of God's commands, promises, grace. Just a few minutes asking these kinds of questions will ignite your prayer.

ADORATION - All too often we move too quickly to our requests in prayer. We do this because what we want God to do is the pressing matter on our minds. This is because we are needy, but it's also always because we can easily talk about ourselves. It's much harder to talk about others. In this case, to talk about God. To give praise to God - to adore him. Have you ever struggled to come up with good reasons why you love someone? Part of it is because we haven't taken the time to see them and to see their unique strengths. It's possible we struggle to think of new ways to praise God, or we struggle to notice the ways God deserves our praise. This could be because we don't take our eyes off of ourselves but it could also be because we are not spending time reflecting on what God has revealed about himself in his Word. If you want something to praise, connect that praise specifically to what you are thinking about in the Word.

CONFESSION - In the 95 Thesis that started the Reformation, Martin Luther's very first one states, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance." As Christians, we live continually in repentance. Christians are forgiven when they trust in Jesus. However, confession is the means by which God continually applies that forgiveness, and we get to experience the grace of God in real time. The truth is we sin, and we need to confess those sins. If we hold onto them and try to hide them, we tie ourselves back to the sin we have been freed from by Christ. When we attach our confession to the text we are thinking about, then we are given an opportunity to think about the nuance of our sin against God. When connected to text, you may see areas your life do not align with what God has said. Confession is us revealing the areas we are out of step with what God has shown.

THANKSGIVING - Do you know that it is a command to be thankful? What a weird command. It seems counterproductive to command someone to be grateful. But God does. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 commands us to be thankful in every circumstance. This is not just a request but a command. It would be a strange requirement if it were not for the Holy Spirit in us drawing out our gratitude. Jesus demands it because God is worthy of it and because of God we have every reason to be thankful. He also requires it because he lives in us to empower what is impossible in ourselves. The text we are meditating on will give us new characteristics about God's work in our life or our world that lead to gratefulness. If you find your heart unwilling to be thankful, then this is an opportunity to ask the Spirit of God to help you to release thankfulness to the God who has poured his grace upon you.

SUPPLICATION - This is a big word for asking God for those things you need, want, desire, or hope for in your life and the people around you. I find it most helpful to my heart and my willingness to trust God to keep this part to the end. I want God's revelation to set my heart in the direction - the direction of glorifying God. Now that I have adored God, confessed my misalignment, released my gratitude for this God I love, I can now begin asking the Lord to work in my life with my mind and heart focused on God. My asking will be more in line with his revelation. So as I reveal my needs, I have put God before my eyes in such a way that my requests reflect making Jesus look good in my life and in our church instead of asking for things I selfishly feel entitled to have. This is what Jesus means by "whatever we ask for in Jesus' name will be done." It doesn't suggest just putting Jesus' name at the end of prayer but instead asking for things that are in line with the plan, purpose, fame of the name Jesus. If your prayer is in line with what the Bible has revealed about the heart and desires of Christ, then the answer to that prayer is a resounding yes! Do you want to see God answer more prayers of yours? Begin to ask for things the Lord loves and values. He

will blow your mind. James tells us that one reason we do not get what we pray for is that we are praying for things to use for our purposes. When we begin to pray for needs and for the use of his provision to make Jesus look awesome, you will find your prayers answered.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

[This is an abbreviated prayer but I put it here as an example of what it would look like to apply this to your praying.]

TEXT

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. - Matthew 19:29-30

Observations:

- This is a promise.
- The assumption is that those who follow Jesus will have to make decisions to give up in some form, an excellent and meaningful thing.
- What gives fulfillment now is what feels like the essential necessities (like houses, or families, or securities (lands)) could take away real achievement.
- I must choose what reward I am pursuing in every option before me.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Lord Jesus, I recognize that you are worth every sacrifice and you are better than any earthly good. There is not a gift that I could give you that would suffice to communicate your beauty and value. You are like a pearl that is worth selling all I have to purchase. You are a treasure hidden on some deserted piece of land that would make me look crazy if I were to use every asset I have to purchase so I could have you.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, I confess that often I don't find you worthwhile. I say you are my God with my words, but with inner thoughts and my actions, I communicate something different. Lord, I love my stuff. I love my life. I spend my effort pursuing the things that bring me significance and status. I like what people think of me, and if I were to make you my treasure, I am worried what they would say or think about me. I am afraid of walking away from dreams or relationships if you were to call me to give those things up. I am scared of losing security if I were not to plan for my future or have the kind of salary I feel like I need. I am scared to join you on a mission of self-sacrifice because I am attached to the life I am trying to build. That is my sin. I am connected to a life that is robbing me of real fulfillment. Please forgive me for not thinking you great; for not believing you worthy; for not acknowledging your value in thought or action. Forgive me for not even having you on my mind, let alone being willing to sacrifice.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Thank you that you call me to follow you. You deserve someone better. Someone more capable and I am neither of those and yet you invited me to be a disciple. You came to me even though I dug my heels into the ground and refused, and in some ways still, do refuse to go to you. Thank you for the promise that whatever I lose I don't miss out. You promise everything will be returned to me, multiplied in a way I would never experience here. Thank you that you want me to follow you and you patiently pick me up when I fall. You gently lift my face, to look me in the eyes, to tell me you still want me. Thank you, you empower me through your spirit to sacrifice for your name's sake and not just talk about it.

PRAYER OF SUPPLICATION

Lord Jesus make yourself look this good to me. Plant this verse in my heart to remember as I shop, allured by stuff, power, control, security. Create a desire and empower my decisions. I pray that I will trust this promise even when I can't see the reward and I only know the sacrifice. I pray for Origin as a church that you will look this good to all of us. As a church, we will see Jesus as so good that we will be a generous community with our time, skills, and money. I pray for my co-workers who watch me. I pray my words, my work, and my priorities will demonstrate Jesus is worthy and they too would also come to see him in the same way. Lord you know I need a new car because mine is about dead. Jesus, will you help me purchase a new vehicle in light of this passage? Will you provide a car that will meet my needs and will allow me to make you look good in the way I spend money? Will you help me not live for the reward of the car but use this vehicle for the prize in Christ?

SUMMARY

The expectation is not that every prayer must look like this or hit every one of these areas. Often you have just a moment to offer up a prayer for someone as the Lord puts them on your mind. Those prayers are good and right. This way of praying is for your dedicated time of prayer. You could use a form of this every time you pray whether it is before a meal or in your car or kneeling by your bed. If you struggle with knowing how to pray and what to pray for, this structure will give you so much more vocabulary and content but remember it's a learned skill. It may start young and intelligible, like a baby's first word, but it will turn into prayers that are rich, deep, and transformational.

FASTING

There were many reasons for the fasts in the Bible. Some fasts were to prepare to meet with God. Some fasts were to recognize and confess sin. Some fasts were to mourn loss, death, or God's discipline. The circumstances were different, but the goal was the same - to carve out intentional time to know themselves and to know their God. As they did, we may also have various reasons for a fast, but the goal is

still the same. It is a voluntary surrender of dependence on food to recognize our greater dependence on God. Fasting and Prayer along with putting yourself under preaching in a local church; tangibly serving the church; living in community; making disciples; regular Bible reading, and other disciplines have come to be known as spiritual disciplines. Spiritual Disciplines are those actions we participate in as Christians to train our hearts, minds, and souls to walk with God.

To understand the place of spiritual disciplines we all need to know something about the red and white martyrs. Were you aware martyrs are color coded? They aren't, but there are distinguishable differences. Red martyrs are those who physically suffered or were killed for their faith in Jesus. Like the early Christians whom Paul arrested and approved their slaughter. They were those who like Polycarp (under Marcus Aurelius in 160's AD) said to the Roman Proconsul, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?"; They were those of the missionaries who sailed to faraway islands only to be killed and eaten in the first hour of arriving on a tropical shore in the 1800's. Don't forget about the modern martyrs of entire populations of Christian cities who were rounded up and drowned, shot, buried alive, lit on fire, or beheaded by ISIS in the Middle East. They are called the red martyrs because they were persecuted, they suffered, and many of them died for the name of Christ.

The white martyrs are those Christians who have lived in peaceful times and peaceful places. The white martyrs didn't shed blood because they lived in a time or place where there was no opportunity. Some of the early church fathers seeing Christians becoming comfortable, metaphorically fat and lazy believers, began to draw the Christians to spiritual disciplines. Sacrificing time, comforts, wants, to have self-imposed suffering to align their lives with the goodness of Christ. It's important to realize, although some use suffering as a way to earn God's favor, earning grace was and even now is not the point. The spiritual disciplines were ways to bring us into circumstances that would point our hearts to Christ. Spiritual disciplines are self-imposed. They are a type of suffering, although I use that term very loosely because waking up before the sun to be in the Word is not suffering no matter how much we tell ourselves it is. The red martyrs didn't need spiritual disciplines because as people, we tend not to ignore God when we are suffering. Places unfriendly to Christianity and suffering for the faith tends to drive a Christian to prayer, God's Word, Christian community, evangelism, and of course, fasting. Our 40 days of prayer and fasting is a way to unite ourselves to the martyrs. Not to say we are the same or that we are even doing something so bold or courageous for the name of Christ. But we are saying, through self-imposed loss for Christ's sake, we get the benefit of being driven to the Lord and thereby the benefit of walking carefully with him in faith as the martyrs did.

FASTING REMINDS US WE ARE NOT SELF-CONTAINED CREATURES

We rely on all kinds of necessities to live and be fruitful. We are not self-contained creatures. Cutting out food reminds us of this. We need something from outside our body to live. We are not a nuclear reactor. Reactors maintain themselves. As long as nothing breaks down, a reactor can go on for decades, producing heat and electricity. As much as we want that, we don't work that way. We run to out of energy fast. A reactor can go for decades. I can't go a couple of hours without feeling hungry, and if I don't get something, then I become hangry. God created it this way. He made our bodies to run out of energy and need food.

We fast to remind ourselves that there is someone behind everything we have received. This moves our minds and hearts away from the gift and to the giver. The company on your direct deposit receipt may be paying your salary, but it is God behind that check, through his grace orchestrating your gifts, education, opportunity, even job interview which got you the job in the first place. The point of a fast is to remind us of this reality.

MEAL...REPLACEMENT

Does the term meal replacement make your mouth water? Has anything tasted good that is marketed as a meal replacement? Meal replacements are low calorie, low flavor bars or shakes we convince ourselves are satisfied, but we know better. In a fast, we do use meal replacements. But for the Christian, the thing we replace our food with is better, more tasty, and more satisfying. Maybe not for our tastebuds or empty stomach but our hearts and empty souls. Not eating is only half of the fast. Replacing the time, we would eat, and the substance of our meals with the Lord in his word and prayer is the second half. The fast is helpful because at the minimum we get three already carved out time blocks in our day where we can eat from God's table.

HOW DO WE EAT AT THE LORD'S TABLE DURING A FAST?

THE MAIN COURSE

The meal in our fasting doesn't begin with our own experience and expectations, but as with prayer, it starts with the Scripture. The Word of God is the meal. Jesus said, "Man cannot live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Matthew 4:4)." Notice even prayer is not food; it's part of the meal, but it's not the whole meal. One of the reasons we struggle to pray is because we try to pray detached from God's Word. Which leaves us empty of content for our prayers. Without the Bible, we don't know how to pray. We don't know the God we are praying to. All too often we pray, but we are empty. Our spiritual stomachs are hungry, and so our prayers stay on the surface. Our attention wanders. We come up blank with what to say. We don't know why we are thankful to God. We don't know how to be with him. So we merely ask for some things and say Amen. We know that it could be more, but we are empty. This is because first, we need to eat the meat. Once we feast on God's character, goodness, will, desire, decree, plans, purposes, promises, and all the more in his Word, we will be filled up to pray.

DIGESTION

The eating is only as helpful as the body can separate the nutrients needed for life. There are also spiritual nutrients needed for spiritual vitality. The word must be digested so the soul can be healthy and ready for the work of loving God and loving neighbors. This happens through prayer in all the ways already discussed above.

DESSERT

Dessert is the icing on the cake of a great meal (see what I did there?). If this is true around our tables, let's not think for one moment that around the Lord's table dessert would be any less spectacular. But what is for dessert? The dessert of our fasts is an experience of worship and celebration. With each meal we eat during our fast, we are being energized and filled up. Where does that energy get expended? It gets expended on celebrating and worshipping Jesus between the meals. We are thinking about what we read. We are thinking about how our prayer times were rich and deep. We are alive with the realization of God's present love and grace. Worship is the dessert - worship is just enjoying being with God. Often the dessert is the most memorable part of a meal. I love a Crème Brûlée. There is something about breaking that torched sugar shell then tasting the creamy, sweet, sometimes flavored, custard inside. It's the highlight of special dinner out. Crème Brûlée is not only a dessert; it is an experience. This is what worship is on our days of fasting. It is sweetly experiencing God through affection. It may be by listening to worship music. May I recommend Rend Collectives latest - Good News? It might be by singing out loud or just under your breath. We worship through the smile on our faces that appear as we think of our times with Jesus, even though we may be starving. It shows we are growing content with God alone. Worship becomes our posture and our experience as the fasting and praying begins to elevate our thoughts. Remember, it was God who compared himself to dessert first. Taste and see that the Lord is good, the Psalmist writes.

SNACK

During a fast, it is right to use meal times to pray and be with Jesus. However, Paul encourages us to pray without ceasing. We can call this snacking. We may spend intentional time eating at the Lord's table during the three meal times, but the fast is meant to lead us to a kind of continual praying. The gift here is during a fast we are not only hungry at meal times. Hunger continues, and so we need to snack. Our hunger becomes for us a constant whetting of our appetite for God. Continually praying for our day doesn't mean praying every second and give up working, taking care of our kids, or doing the other things we need to do in a day. Paul didn't do that, and his expectation is not that we would either. He is talking about a regular and constant acknowledgment of God's presence and works around us. As a little pang of hunger hits, it reminds us to seek God. A simple prayer in between meals could be, "Lord I know you are with me." or "Thank you, Jesus, that you have supplied all I need and I am full." They become moments of directed attention from ourselves and our hunger to God and his goodness. This is also where the Holy Spirit may lead our fasting and prayer through prompting of other's needs. Remember God sovereignly works in people's lives but he also sovereignly works through the prayers of his people. Meaning the Holy Spirit may be prompting you to specifically pray for Origin's pastors, kid's ministry, the new prayer series, new attenders who may not be Christians yet, your neighbor who has been sick or recently lost a husband. These are promptings by the Holy Spirit and invitations into God's sovereign work. It's snacking. The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, once said of his own prayer life, "I never pray for more than 5 minutes at a time, but I never go more than five minutes without praying." (PB pg 93) It's a posture, not an action. In this way, you can pray without ceasing through your fast and afterward.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT'S THE WIN?

There are many examples of fasting in the Scriptures, but there is little instruction. Jesus himself gives some of the most explicit instruction about fasting. However, unlike prayer, Jesus doesn't give us a how-to but rather a what for. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus is more concerned about what to be or not to be while fasting versus the nuts and bolts of fasting. Jesus says, "don't be gloomy like the hypocrites"; don't be obvious in your fast so that people are impressed. Instead, be secret, be aware that the one who matters is the One who can see you. There are physical rewards to fasting like weight loss and breaking the sweet tooth. There are emotional rewards like accomplishment and self-denial. There are spiritual rewards like encouragement, sanctification, and discipleship. However, the greatest reward is being seen by the Father. Jesus ends his small but important teaching on fasting by saying, "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Like prayer and the other spiritual disciplines, fasting doesn't change God, although God could use the time to accomplish his eternal will. Fasting is about being seen by God. God sees your desire to know him. God sees your dependence upon him. God sees you finding your sustenance in him alone. God sees you, and that is the reward. If at the end of a fast everything remains the same, was it for waste? No, not if our being seen by God was our greater priority over our doing the fast.

FASTING IS SUPPOSED TO BE HARD.

People want God to be comfortable. In one way it is easy. Relationship with him has been given to us as a gift by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. That's that natural part. Being with the Lord, getting to know all the nuances of God, indeed understanding him and what makes him tick is hard. Initially thinking Kristy was cute the first time I saw her was the natural part. Even dating when we knew little of each other, there was very little at stake as teenagers. Even getting married was easy. It's every day following, pursuing her and getting to know her and what makes her unique and special that's harder. It's not easy to see those things. It takes sacrifice. It takes dating and investing in her. It takes listening, responding, time, and presence. It's not easy, but it is worth it. People complain the Bible is too difficult to understand. Have you considered that God knew not only what to write but how to write it and when to write it? Did he not consider all the factors? Of course, he did. Could he have written a more simple book? Of course, he could have. Why didn't he? It's because getting to know God is an invitation into eternal depths. Praying and fasting are intensive. They are work. They take some grit and willingness to labor at them. They are not easy, but they are worth it.

It may be hard, but we are not without help. We are not to seek the kingdom and get to know God in our own strength. God has called us to hard things, but he didn't leave us without help. I mean the kind of help that a charged battery is to a phone. The phone has so much potential, but if the battery is dead, it's merely brick. We are called to do amazing things - like an iPhone - but without the Holy Spirit, we will fail. The Holy Spirit empowers the very thing that God has called us to be. It doesn't make it easier. It still takes effort. It always takes decisions. The Holy Spirit doesn't do the work for us, but he does make the task fruitful in our lives. He does empower our desire to be with Jesus and seek him. Hard, yes, but alone? Not even close.

Replacing food with some other felt need only continues to find support in things other than the Lord. The point is to lean on God.

Productivity is not the point. Just working on your lunchtime to get more calls in is not the point of the fast. It's only transferring our dependence on food to some other thing but ultimately away from intimacy with God.

Consider food along with other things that might distract from the purpose of the day.

Maybe you can't fast food due to a health issue. Feeling hungry is not a medical issue. But some people can't fast. Do the best and closest thing, but you could also think about other options. Keeping in mind the purpose of the fast is to lean into God and stop leaning on other crutches, we might consider other areas of distraction and support columns in our life along with food. It wouldn't make sense to fast from food but still not pray or be with the Father because of the Netflix series you are catching up on. Fasting from food and just replacing it with another thing is only leaning on another insufficient support. A fast is one way of being faithful to Proverbs 3:5-6

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.”*

Our understanding is what makes good things turn into little gods we worship. Transferring what we lean on from food to some other comfort will never transform; only leaning on God through trusting that he is better than any piece of food or any other luxury.

DAY OF FASTING

Maybe this is your first time fasting and you know that a fast is giving up food but maybe you are not sure about the rest. Here are some things to keep in mind

- Don't panic — you are suppose to feel hungry.
- The typical fast is fasting from food and only drinking water. For fasts longer than a few days, some people add fresh juice once or twice a day. Because of medical reasons some may fast from solid food but drink broth. For a one day fast I recommend the full fast and drink only water. You can do it!
- You may feel more tired than you usually would or maybe light headed for a bit because of blood sugar levels changing. Unless you decide otherwise, we are only asking Origin to fast a day at a time.
- When should you start and when should you break-fast (the meal to break the fast)? Well since we use the phrase every morning maybe that's a good time to break our fast. Fast breakfast, lunch, and dinner then eat a glorious pile of pancakes the next morning. Another option may be to begin fasting dinner, then breakfast and lunch and break the fast at dinner time. This fasting schedule is great when you are fasting and praying as a family, friends, or gospel community. Our gospel community is going to choose 2 days to fast personal and one day all our GC will fast and then together on our GC night we will break the fast together and share about our time fasting. Think 24 hours not only 12.
- Stay the course and be wise. You know your body and you can't really pray if you are passed out on the couch.

40 DAYS OF PRAYER GUIDE

The hope of the 40 days of prayer is to participate together in corporately praying for God's work in our church for the 40 days. This doesn't mean those things personal and private happening in your own life are not important. Those things should very much be part of the 40 days of prayer. However, our focus is to go beyond praying for ourselves or our immediate family and friends. It is to seek God as part of a community of faith and on behalf of the people in our church. These 40 days are a way to intercede for the church and ask God to be gracious to our church and to make much of Jesus through our church. We are desiring to cover our church in prayer asking for spiritual revival, new Christians, needs to be met, finances provided for, people cared for, leaders strengthened, and more. Below are ways to be praying specifically for Origin during the 40 days and beyond.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

I would encourage you to use the TACTS way of praying during your longer more focused prayer times during your fasting day. However, you may want to focus on different areas for each of those prayer times. For example, you may take the breakfast time to pray for God's work in your own life. Lunchtime for your family, friends, relationships. Then for dinner pray for our church using the prayers below. Another way you could spend your day would be to divide each of your prayer times into the three different corporate prayers we are praying for as a church - breakfast is Disciples making disciples; lunch is Building hope in the city; dinner is church planting. You may come up with a different way altogether. Again, at the minimum, we hope to be covering the church in prayer in these three ways, but there are a thousand other ways to pray beyond them as the Holy Spirit prompts.

TO GET YOU STARTED

Everything starts with a text. Again, like what to pray for, you may want to use different Scripture passages through the day or just use one passage and weave all the areas of prayer through them.

Psalms 24

Psalms 31

Isaiah 58

Isaiah 53

Matthew 5:3-12

Matthew 20:20-28

Matthew 28:18-20

John 3

Romans 5

Philippians 3

Galatians 5

Ephesians 3:14-21

Ephesians 4

1 Timothy 2:1-4

1 John 2:28-3:24

Hebrews 12

ORIGIN'S 3 PRAYERS FOR 2018

DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES

Praying God would grow our church by a 100 new family members through growing us in our calling as disciple-makers.

- Pray that Origin, as a church, would care about the Great Commission and making disciples.
- Pray that God would give you a desire to see spiritually lost people saved.
- Pray that God would bring unbelievers to Origin who would meet Jesus.
- Pray for those who are attending Origin who have yet to trust in Jesus.
- Pray God would give you eyes to see guests on Sundays and help them connect with the community.
- Pray for people in your life you desire to meet Jesus and would call Origin home.
- Pray for greater opportunity to befriend unbelievers and to invite people to Origin.
- Pray that we would have all our serving needs met on Sundays so that as new people show up, we would have the ability to serve them and their kids well.
- Pray for Origin's ministries (Sunday Gatherings; Origin Kids; Student Discipleship; Ladies/Mens Discipleship; Connect/Usher/hospitality team; Worship; Gospel Communities and facilitators; Pastors and Leaders)
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would cause God's Word to transform all of us who attend.
- Pray that our church would feel and demonstrate that we are spiritually alive people, full of joy and the Holy Spirit.
- Confess areas of fear or missed opportunity to share the gospel with unbelievers you know.
- Ask the Lord to grow your non-Christian friends so that they may meet Jesus.
- Pray that God would fill our seats with people to hear the gospel preached.
- Pray, we would have more conversions and more baptisms than any previous year of Origin Church.
- Pray that we would experience a true spiritual awakening in our church.
- Pray our Sunday mornings would be full of life and joy in the Lord.
- Pray that God would bring people to mind to pray for their salvation.

BUILDING HOPE IN THE CITY

Praying Origin Church is a community every man, woman, culture, and ethnicity can flourish.

- Pray specifically that the men of Origin will flourish as deep and abiding disciples in our church.
- Pray specifically for the women of Origin, that they will flourish as disciples and fulfill their calling as half of the church, unique and necessary image bears of God.
- Pray God raises up non-white Elder/pastors in our church who will help lead our church and we can reach more people with the gospel.
- Pray that God will grow our diversity to reflect the unifying power of the gospel.
- Pray Origin will be a reconciled community of faith.

- Pray our church will be willing to lay down cultural preferences for the sake of the flourishing of minorities.
- Pray God would give our church a desire for reconciliation, restoration, and repentance of our ignoring oppression and injustice around us.
- Pray God would empower our church to fulfill our Isaiah 58:6-7 calling.
- Confess your sin of ignoring oppression and injustice.
- Confess the sin of your comfort and cultural preferences and their impact in keeping other cultures and ethnicities away.
- Pray Origin will be a community which exudes the fruit of the Spirit towards all people.
- Thank the Lord that our church is strengthened and blessed by many Slavic people and the growing number of Latino and Hispanic people who call Origin home.

PLANTING CHURCHES

Plant a church in the Sacramento area in 2020.

- Thank the Lord, recognizing ten years ago Origin didn't exist but that God created a calling and provided the means to begin our church.
- Pray God will give our church a heart for planting new churches beginning by increasing your heart for seeing lost people saved.
- Pray for a spiritual awakening in the Sacramento area this year.
- Pray for spiritual awakening in your neighborhood, job, family, etc.
- Pray the Holy Spirit would cause your heart to match God's heart for church planting.
- Pray God would raise up a planting pastor in Origin.
- Pray our giving this year would enable us to put lots of money aside in preparation for this church plant.
- Pray the Lord would make clear where he desires a church to be planted.
- Pray God would be raising up the team of people who will be sent out to plant.
- Begin now to pray for the many people who will meet Jesus in this new church.

“You do not have, because you do not ask.”

James 4:2