

EASTER

PREP GUIDE

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REDEEMER BIBLE CHURCH

AN EASTER PREP GUIDE

The book you have in your hands is simple. There is nothing magical about these pages. However, much prayer and thought has gone into what you hold. We've been asking the Lord for months that this book will stir your affection for Jesus as you prepare for Good Friday and Easter. With that in mind, let's walk through a few things regarding how to best use this book:

- 1. LAYOUT:** You're going to see that each page is very similar. The only difference is the scripture. However, don't let the repetition of the format lead you to tune out or rush through. Each word from the Scriptures is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We approach the Word of God with a sense of anticipation and a commitment to search the scriptures for what God is saying.
- 2. THEMES:** Each week has a theme that guides which scriptures were chosen. The goal is to prepare our hearts for the reading of the events of Holy Week. The focus of each week is as follows: who God is (*Week 1: The Character of God*), what God has done for us in and through Jesus (*Week 2: The Gospel*), our response to who God is and what he has done (*Week 3: Brokenness*), and then the events of Jesus' last days on earth (*Week 4: Holy Week*).
- 3. QUESTIONS:** As we come to the Word of God each day we want to be careful of *eisegesis*. You might be thinking "I would be careful of that if I knew what eisegesis was. What does it mean!?" Well, I'm glad you asked. Eisegesis is when we read into the text what we want to see or hope to see. It happens when we read into the text something that isn't there. We're after *exegesis*. This word means "to draw out".

It's a practice that leads us to see what the text says and conclude what the text concludes. Barry Cooper of Ligonier Ministries says *"... the question is not, how can I make this biblical text say what I want it to say, but how can I read this text so that I myself get out of the way, and allow the biblical text to speak for itself. Will I allow it to challenge my ideas (exegesis), or am I really only interested in confirming them (eisegesis)?"* With this in mind, this guide will provide 5 questions each day to help guide you in the text. You don't need to feel pressure to try and finish all 5 questions every day. They are there as a help and a guide. They are there to lead in the reading and reflection upon God's Word within the boundaries of exegesis. You'll see the questions below:

- I. What does it say? (Observation)
- II. What does it mean? (Interpretation)
- III. What does it reveal about God?
- IV. What does it reveal about people?
- V. How should I pray? (Prayer)

4. FASTING: One of the things that God continued to bring to the forefront in the preparation for this resource was fasting. Fasting is another way that we will seek the Lord and allow Him to work on our hearts during this month of preparation. For some of us, this is something we do for dietary reasons but have never done it for spiritual reasons. For some of us, the idea of a fast is foreign and not something we've ever done or thought about. For some of us, it seems impossible. Wherever you are on the spectrum, the next couple pages offer an explanation of what fasting is, why we fast, and some practical ideas for how to fast in the month of March.

“Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger
of a homesickness for God.”

JOHN PIPER

WHAT IS BIBLICAL FASTING?

Abstaining from **food** (or *food and water*) for a period of time in order to hunger and thirst more deeply for God and to commune with Him through prayer and Scripture. Fasting is an outward expression of an inward commitment to pursue God.

WHY FAST?

So what’s the point of fasting from food? Is it a form of punishment to atone for our sin? Do we do it for health benefits or to treat our body as a temple? Is it just for gain? And is it optional, or is it a spiritual discipline that’s vital to the Christian walk?

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we see some interesting language regarding fasting:

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you”. - **Matthew 6:16-18**

Notice that Jesus doesn’t say *if* you fast, but he says “*when* you fast.” It’s more than a recommendation or a suggestion. Jesus’ words are clear: **his followers will fast.**

The early church took his words to heart. Fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays until 3 pm was a staple of the early church. They did this in remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion on Friday and resurrection on Sunday. At the turn of the fourth century, fasting, among other disciplines, became much less practiced as worldliness increased and persecution decreased. While many theologians in the days since have spoken about the importance of fasting and implored believers to partake, it has become a much less observed discipline than say prayer or Bible reading.

The assumption in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that his followers would fast didn't come with a condition that only his early followers would fast, but rather, his followers for all of time will fast. He didn't give a command as to how often one would do so, but scripture is filled with examples of fasting, and the various reasons behind it.

- Jesus himself began his ministry with 40 days of praying and fasting in the wilderness in order to prepare for the three years of work He had been called to do (Matthew 4).
- The people of Nineveh fasted as an act of repentance in Jonah 3, and when God saw them turning from their evil ways, he "relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and did not do it." Fasts of repentance are also seen in 1 Samuel 7:3-6, and God calls his people to "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;" in Joel 2:12.
- We see Jehoshaphat and all of Judah fasting in 2 Chronicles 20 to seek help from the Lord when facing great danger and battle.
- The army of Israel fasts in Judges 20:26 to seek direction from the Lord.

- Nehemiah mourns and fasts in Nehemiah 1:1-4 upon learning of the walls of Jerusalem being broken down and the gates being destroyed by fire.
- We see a three day fast in Esther 4:16 for wisdom, discernment, protection and guidance.
- Matthew 17:21 and Mark 9:28 give us examples of prayer and fasting to break strongholds.

All throughout Scripture we see a variety of fasts, and we see fasts for a variety of purposes. Whether it be an act of repentance, an act of grieving, a seeking of direction, or a reminder of what Jesus has done for us, fasting is a key component of the Christian walk, and as Jesus said, one that we are expected to partake in.

While we see examples of victory following a fast all throughout scripture, it is important to remember that we don't fast simply so God gives us something, or to earn his favor. Just as a yet-to-be-answered prayer request grows our dependence on God, so does fasting. God doesn't owe us for sacrificing a meal. We fast because of who God is, what he has done, and what he has called us to do. We don't fast to change God, we fast because it changes us.

HOW DO I FAST?

In a sense you can choose your own adventure when it comes to fasting – depending on your personal circumstances and what you feel God is calling you to do. However, while abstaining from other pleasures (such as TV or sugar) can certainly be beneficial, when the Bible speaks about fasting and prayer it is almost always talking about fasting from food. There is something about *physical* hunger that heightens *spiritual* hunger, and because

fasting immediately “costs us something,” we are automatically more invested in the experience. In going without one of our basic necessities we are reminded of our frailty and forced to lean heavily on the Lord moment by moment.

Below you’ll see some options for fasting this month. You are encouraged to try an option each week. It could be the same option. You might want to try different options each week. Keep in mind that something is better than nothing. If you’re nervous about this, start small but don’t stop there. However you choose to navigate this, it is always a blessing when we live in accord with the Word and fasting is an example of doing just that.

- **Option 1: Meal Fast** - Choose a meal to skip, and in place of the meal, devote that time to prayer and seeking the Lord. Allow the hunger pains you feel throughout the day to remind you of your need for God.
- **Option 2: Hebrew Fast (24-hr Food Fast)** - This is most commonly practiced when you begin a fast after dinner and do not break your fast until dinner the following day. Drinking lots of water and putting some salt under your tongue once or twice can help you avoid headaches.
- **Option 3: A Full-Day Fast** - This option is similar, but you continue your fast for a full calendar day. For example, you would finish eating on Monday night, fast all day Tuesday, and break the fast at some point Wednesday.
- **Option 4: A Multi-Day Fast** - This option is also similar to the above, but extended over multiple days. Common multi-day fasts would include 48 or 72 hour options.

ALL-IN CHALLENGE: GOOD FRIDAY FAST

We challenge all of us to fast on Good Friday (March 29) leading up to our Good Friday services that evening. We are prayerful that every one of us will take this challenge.

As we fast, may our hunger drive us to seek the fullness of God and echo the prayer in Psalm 41 that says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

“What we hunger for most, we worship. Between the dangers of self-denial and self-indulgence there is a path of pleasant pain. It is not the pathological pleasure of a masochist, but the passion of a lover’s quest: ‘I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ’ (Philippians 3:8).”

JOHN PIPER (A HUNGER FOR GOD)

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ONE

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

MARCH 4-10

DAY ONE

MONDAY, MARCH 4

READ: Isaiah 40:6-8

THOUGHT: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWO

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

READ: Isaiah 40:9-11

THOUGHT: "He will tend his flock like a shepherd."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY THREE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

READ: Isaiah 40:12-17

THOUGHT: “Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel?”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY FOUR

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

READ: Isaiah 40:18-24

THOUGHT: “Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY FIVE

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

READ: Isaiah 40:25-31

THOUGHT: "Because he is strong in power, not one is missing."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY SIX

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

READ: Psalm 145

THOUGHT: “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY SEVEN

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

READ: Psalm 19

THOUGHT: "The law of the Lord is perfect."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

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TWO

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

MARCH 11-17

DAY EIGHT

MONDAY, MARCH 11

READ: Ezekiel 36:24-30

THOUGHT: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY NINE

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

READ: Isaiah 53

THOUGHT: "He was crushed for our iniquities."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

READ: John 3:14-21

THOUGHT: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY ELEVEN

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

READ: Ephesians 2:1-10

THOUGHT: “But God...”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWELVE

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

READ: Titus 3:3-8

THOUGHT: "According to his own mercy..."

1. What does it say?

2. What does it mean?

3. What does it reveal about God?

4. What does it reveal about people?

5. How should I pray?

DAY THIRTEEN

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

READ: 1 Peter 1:3-9

THOUGHT: “He has caused us to be born again to a living hope.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY FOURTEEN

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

READ: James 4:4-10

THOUGHT: “But he gives more grace.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

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THREE

THE BROKENNESS OF MAN

MARCH 18-24

DAY FIFTEEN

MONDAY, MARCH 18

READ: Ezekiel 36:31-32

THOUGHT: "It is not for your sake that I will act."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY SIXTEEN

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

READ: Psalm 51:1-12

THOUGHT: "Against you, you only, have I sinned."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY SEVENTEEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

READ: Psalm 51:13-19

THOUGHT: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.”

1. What does it say?

2. What does it mean?

3. What does it reveal about God?

4. What does it reveal about people?

5. How should I pray?

DAY EIGHTEEN

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

READ: Isaiah 1:1-18

THOUGHT: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY NINETEEN

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

READ: Matthew 5:1-12

THOUGHT: "Blessed are the poor in spirit..."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

READ: Isaiah 66:1-2

THOUGHT: “Trembles at my word.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-ONE

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 24

READ: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-11

THOUGHT: “This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

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FOUR

THE HOLY WEEK

MARCH 25-31

DAY TWENTY-TWO

MONDAY, MARCH 25

READ: Matthew 21:12-22

THOUGHT: “When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did... they were indignant.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-THREE

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

READ: John 12:20-38

THOUGHT: "Whoever loves his life loses it."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

READ: Matthew 26:1-16

THOUGHT: "She has done it to prepare me for burial."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

READ: Luke 22:1-62

THOUGHT: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

1. What does it say?

2. What does it mean?

3. What does it reveal about God?

4. What does it reveal about people?

5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-SIX

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29

READ: Psalm 22

THOUGHT: "And for my clothing they cast lots."

1. What does it say?

2. What does it mean?

3. What does it reveal about God?

4. What does it reveal about people?

5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

READ: Mark 15:42-47

THOUGHT: "... and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb."

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 31

READ: Psalm 117

THOUGHT: “For great is his steadfast love toward us.”

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What does it reveal about God?
4. What does it reveal about people?
5. How should I pray?

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