

# A focus for fasting: The Lord's Prayer

Ash Wednesday 2021



“Fasting is voluntarily going without food — or any other regularly enjoyed, good gift from God — for the sake of some spiritual purpose” (David Mathis). In the Bible this “spiritual purpose” is usually prayer, for example Joel 1:14, Luke 2:37, and Acts 14:23, amongst many others. While fasting we are one-on-one with God, offering him the time and attentiveness we would otherwise be giving to eating, or from whatever we are fasting.

In the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7 of Matthew's gospel), Jesus gives specific teaching about our appearance and attitude in fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). Immediately before this, his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, and in response Jesus introduced the Lord's Prayer. There are all sorts of Bible verses and prayers that could be used to focus our praying when fasting, but you might like to use this foundational and universal prayer of Jesus to help guide your prayers.

The comments, questions and Bible references below are very much a 'starter for ten', and how you use them will depend on when and how you fast. They are meant to stimulate your praying and not be a 'to-do' list, so go for quality over quantity! The version below is from Matthew 6:9-13 in the English Standard Version of the Bible, but you may want to read it in other versions too as this may prompt your praying further.

**Our Father in heaven,**

Think on the nature of God and praise him for who he is: personal, yet powerful; over all things, but with us by the Holy Spirit. Thank God for the truth of 1 John 3:1.

**hallowed be your name.**

God's reputation matters: Do we honour his name in our words? In our actions? Reflect on Exodus 3:13-15.

**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

God's rule and will are paramount. Ask forgiveness for the times when we put our own desires ahead of his. Meditate on Psalm 24.

**Give us this day our daily bread,**

Write a list of things for which you are daily dependent on God. Read Matthew 6:25-34: What are you most seeking?

**and forgive us our debts,**

Do you have a 'God's eye view' of the seriousness of your own sin, the amount you owe to God? Consider Jesus' short parable in Luke 7:41-43 and reflect on your love for God.

**as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

Read Ephesians 4:32. Is there anyone from whom you are withholding forgiveness? Ask the Lord to soften your heart.

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

Think of the times when you are most tempted. Pray for total reliance on God to overcome temptation, not to avoid trials as they can refine us. Meditate on Psalm 119:97-112.