



A Guide for Prayer and Fasting

For the Revival and Renewal of Christ's Church



A SOLEMN DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER
September 28, 2026

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>How to use this booklet</i>	6
In the Church	6
In Private Prayer.....	6
In Family Worship.....	7
Beyond This Particular Day	7
<i>Praise and Adoration of the Triune God</i>	8
<i>Humiliation and Repentance</i>	10
<i>The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit</i>	12
<i>The Blessing of Heaven upon the Preached Word</i>	14
<i>The Conversion of the Lost</i>	16
<i>The Revival and Renewal of Christ's Church</i>	18
<i>The Advancement of the Gospel</i>	20
<i>Appendix: A Call to Fasting and Prayer</i>	22
Fasting	22
Fasting and Prayer.....	24
Guidelines	26

Introduction

At its 53rd General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in America considered Overture 50 from Mississippi Valley Presbytery, calling the church to a solemn day of fasting and prayer for the revival and renewal of Christ's church. The overture arose from concern for the urgent need of the unconverted, the divisions and spiritual weakness of the church, and the biblical testimony that God is pleased to hear and answer the humble, repentant prayers of his people.

The General Assembly approved the overture and called upon the presbyteries of the PCA to appoint a suitable day in September 2026 for congregations, campus ministries, officers, and members to humble themselves before the Lord in fasting and prayer. Particular prayer was encouraged for repentance, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the blessing of God upon the preached Word, the conversion of the lost, the planting of faithful churches, and the advance of the gospel in our communities, on college campuses, and throughout the world. At its August stated meeting, Westminster Presbytery established a Convocation Commission and charged it with planning a day of solemn prayer and fasting. The Commission has set Monday, September 28, as the day of prayer and fasting, concluding with a joint worship service at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Johnson City, Tennessee, at 6:00 p.m.

This booklet has been prepared for the use of Westminster Presbytery, whose churches and ministries serve communities throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. It is intended to help individuals, families, officers, and congregations pray together with greater focus on the concerns identified in the overture approved by the General Assembly, while also praying particularly for the ministers, churches, future ministers, campus ministry, and church-planting work within our own presbytery.

Our hope is that this guide will help us seek the Lord together in humility, repentance, faith, and dependence upon his grace, praying that he would revive his church, gather the lost, strengthen his servants, and glorify the name of Jesus Christ among us and to the ends of the earth.

TE Thomas Rickard

Stated Clerk of Westminster Presbytery

How to use this booklet

This booklet has been prepared to help the churches, families, and members of Westminster Presbytery seek the Lord together for the revival and renewal of Christ's church. It is a guide, not a form. The prayers, Scriptures, and suggested petitions are not intended to prescribe exactly what must be prayed or to limit the prayers of God's people. Rather, they are offered to help enlarge our prayers and direct our attention to the concerns for which the Presbyterian Church in America has especially called us to seek the Lord.

In the Church

Sessions and congregations may use this guide in preparation for the appointed day. A midweek Bible study or prayer meeting could devote time to one or more of these subjects. Officers might pray through the names of the ministers and churches of Presbytery, while congregations could regularly remember church planting, campus ministry, future ministers, and missionary work.

In Private Prayer

In the days leading up to the appointed day of fasting and prayer, individuals may work through one section each day. Read the suggested Scriptures slowly, consider the particular requests, and then use them as prompts for your own prayers. On the day of fasting itself, the booklet may help provide a pattern for extended periods of prayer throughout the day.

Do not feel that every petition must be prayed every time, add specific names and circumstances, and allow Scripture to shape your prayers.

In Family Worship

The seven sections are particularly suited to the seven days leading up to the solemn convocation. A family might read one of the Scripture passages, sing the suggested Psalm or hymn, briefly discuss the subject, and then pray together.

The Psalms and hymns listed in this guide are found in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. Families unfamiliar with a tune can use the Trinity Psalter Hymnal app, which includes the text, music, and tune recordings and is specifically designed to assist congregational and family singing. It is available for both iOS and Android.

Parents can also use this week to teach their children what fasting means and why Christians fast. Explain that fasting is not a way of earning God's favor, but an expression of humility and dependence upon the Lord (Ezra 8:21), sorrow and repentance for sin (Joel 2:12–13; Nehemiah 9:1–3), and earnest desire for God's help and blessing (Acts 13:2–3). Jesus assumed that His disciples would fast and taught them to do so sincerely before their Father in heaven, rather than for the praise of men (Matthew 6:16–18).

Children can participate fully in the spiritual purpose of the day by learning about fasting, joining the family in Scripture, prayer, and singing, and seeing their parents deliberately set aside ordinary comforts in order to seek the Lord. The appendix to this booklet provides further practical guidance concerning fasting.

This is also an opportunity to teach children that the church is larger than their own congregation. Christ has one body, and believers are united to him and therefore to one another. Pray with them for pastors and congregations they may never have visited, for students on college campuses, for new churches, missionaries, and Christians throughout the world.

Beyond This Particular Day

Our churches should ordinarily be praying for the purity and peace of the church, faithful preaching, the conversion of sinners, ministers and officers, the raising up of future laborers, church planting, and the spread of the gospel throughout the world.

Families might continue setting aside time during each week to pray for Christ's church. Individuals might regularly include one of these concerns in private prayer. Churches might devote part of their stated prayer meetings or midweek gatherings to these petitions.

The special day of fasting will pass. The need for prayer will not.

PRAYER 1

Praise and Adoration of the Triune God

Beginning with God: his glory, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness

The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." WLC 189–190 teaches us to draw near with reverence and childlike confidence, seeking first the glory of God.

We begin this day not with ourselves but with God. He alone searches the heart, hears prayer, pardons sin, and fulfills the holy desires of his people. We adore the Father who receives us, the Son through whom we have access, and the Spirit who helps our weakness in prayer.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 96; Psalm 115:1; Isaiah 6:1–5; Matthew 6:9–10; Ephesians 2:18; Revelation 5:9–14

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 96 — Sing to the LORD, Sing His Praise

Hymn 230 — Holy, Holy, Holy! | *Trinity Hymnal* #100

PRAY ESPECIALLY THAT

- God would give us a fresh apprehension of his holiness, majesty, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and sovereign power.
- We would praise him for the grace of the Father, the mediation of the Son, and the indwelling help of the Holy Spirit.
- God's name would be honored in the worship, doctrine, life, and witness of every congregation in Westminster Presbytery.
- Our desire for revival would be governed by a greater desire that Christ be exalted and God alone receive the glory.
- The Lord would dispose all things in our churches, communities, and world to the praise of his great name.

A PRAYER

Great, majestic, holy, and infinite God, we come before you. You are seated enthroned in the heavens above, ruling over all things according to your plan and purpose. Help us to shift our gaze from that which is fleeting and fading in this life and to fix our eyes upon you and the glories found in the Triune God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We pray that you would be glorified and exalted above all things, that your creatures would bow down before you and give glory and thanks to you. In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 2

Humiliation and Repentance

Humbly seeking the mercy of God for our sins

In “Forgive us our debts,” we ask the Father, for Christ’s sake, freely to pardon our sins and enable us from the heart to forgive others. — WSC 105; WLC 194

A solemn fast is a fitting occasion for honest self-examination. We do not begin by cataloguing the failures of the culture or the sins of other churches. We confess our own sins and the sins found among us, asking for pardon only through the obedience and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 51:1–12; Daniel 9:4–19; Joel 2:12–13; 1 John 1:8–9; Revelation 2:4–5

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 51C — God, Be Merciful to Me

Hymn 452 — Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me | Trinity Hymnal #499

PRAY ESPECIALLY FOR

- Ministers: repentance for pride, prayerlessness, fear of man, carelessness in doctrine or life, neglect of shepherding, and every hidden sin.
- Ruling elders and deacons: repentance for passivity, harshness, partiality, neglect of duty, or failure to lead by godly example.
- Members and families: repentance for unbelief, worldliness, bitterness, sexual sin, covetousness, neglect of worship, and indifference to the lost.
- Congregations: repentance for division, coldness, complacency, unfaithful worship, failure in discipline, or departure from the priorities of Christ.
- Reconciliation where brothers, families, sessions, or congregations have been wounded or divided.
- The fruits of repentance: renewed faith, holiness, love, humility, obedience, and zeal.

A PRAYER

Merciful and gracious Father, we come acknowledging our sin and fallen estate as descendants of Adam and as sinners before you. Search us and shine your light into the dark crevices of our hearts, exposing our sins and transgressions.

Forgive us, not according to our merits or anything we have done, but according to your great and abounding mercy, which is new every morning. Forgive us only for the sake of Christ, on account of his perfect obedience and righteousness.

Wash us and renew us. As we continue to follow Christ, conform us more and more to his image through the work of sanctification, and cause us to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work within us. In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 3

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Pleading for the Spirit to renew, sanctify, and make the appointed means effectual

We ask the Spirit who inspired the Word to illuminate it, convict of sin, regenerate sinners, sanctify believers, and bless Christ's appointed means of grace.

The church cannot produce spiritual life by organization, eloquence, or human resolve. Our hope is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, who applies the redemption purchased by Christ and makes the Word effectual for salvation and growth in grace.

SCRIPTURE

Ezekiel 36:25–27; Luke 11:13; John 3:5–8; Acts 4:29–31; Ephesians 3:14–21; Titus 3:4–7

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 143A — Hear Now My Prayer, O LORD

Hymn 392 — Holy Ghost, Dispel Our Sadness | Trinity Hymnal #330

PRAY ESPECIALLY THAT THE SPIRIT WOULD

- Convict us deeply of sin and lead us to Christ rather than merely producing temporary emotion or outward reform.
- Illuminate the Scriptures so that ministers and people understand, love, believe, and obey the truth.
- Strengthen weak believers, restore those who have wandered, comfort the afflicted, and revive those who have grown spiritually cold.
- Regenerate the lost and grant repentance and faith wherever the gospel is proclaimed.
- Produce holiness, love, unity, courage, prayerfulness, generosity, and the fruit of the Spirit throughout our congregations.
- Make the ordinary means of grace — the Word, sacraments, and prayer — fruitful beyond what human strength can accomplish.

A PRAYER

Generous Father, we give you thanks that you sent forth your Son to die for our sins, and that the Father and the Son have sent forth the Holy Spirit to work within your people.

We thank you that, through the ordinary means you have appointed, the Word, sacraments, and prayer, you lavishly pour out your grace upon your people. Through the work of the Spirit, the blind are made to see, we are given understanding, and hearts of stone are made hearts of flesh.

You continue to work in your people to comfort them, sanctify them, and bear fruit in their lives. We pray that you would continue to pour out your Spirit upon your people, that they may grow in grace and that your church may abound in faithfulness and holiness. In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 4

The Blessing of Heaven upon the Preached Word

Praying for the teaching elders of Westminster Presbytery

Christ has especially committed the preaching of the Word to ministers lawfully called. We ask that the Spirit would make the Word effectual in convincing and converting sinners and building believers in holiness and comfort.

Pray for faithful preparation, sound doctrine, courage, humility, pastoral wisdom, and the Spirit's blessing upon the preaching and teaching of these men.

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 55:10–11; Romans 10:14–17; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 4:1–5.

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 19B — The Heavens Above Declare

Hymn 271 — Blessed Jesus, at Your Word | Trinity Hymnal #303

TEACHING ELDERS SERVING CONGREGATIONS & APPROVED LABORS

ELDER	ROLE	CONGREGATION / WORK
AJ Babel	Associate Pastor	Christ Community Church
Will Barbour	Campus Minister	RUF ministry- ETSU
Aaron Bartmess	Pastor	Edgemont Presbyterian Church
Trey Caines	Assistant Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)
John Dawson	Pastor	Abingdon Presbyterian Church
Joseph Dunkin	Assistant Pastor	Abingdon Presbyterian Church
James Ensley	Pastor	Coeburn Presbyterian Church
Vincent Hogue	Pastor	Covenant Presbyterian Church
Paul Lawing	Assistant Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)
Bill Leuzinger	Associate Pastor	Christ Community Church
Ross Lindley	Pastor	Midway Presbyterian Church
Michael Moon	Pastor	Sandlick Presbyterian Church
Jeremiah Mooney	Senior Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (Kpt)
Mark Pearson	Assistant Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)
Jim Powell	Senior Pastor	Christ Community Church
Thomas Rickard	Pastor	Seven Springs Presbyterian Church
Bobby Roberts	Church Planter	Christ Church
Richard Steele	Pastor	Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church
Steve Warhurst	Associate Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (Kpt)
Andy Wyatt	Senior Pastor	Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)

Continue on the next page with ministers serving out of bounds, honorably retired ministers, and men preparing for future ministry.

Other Teaching Elders

MINISTER	FIELD OF LABOR
Ryan Biese	Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church (Vanguard)

HONORABLY RETIRED	HONORABLY RETIRED
Steve Baker	Larry Ball
Philip Blevins	Brent Bradley
David Cummings	Carl Howell
Don Pegler	Wayne Rodgers
Byron Snapp	Larry Stallard
Tom Sullivan	Andrew White

PRAY FOR FUTURE MINISTERS

NAME	STATUS	CONGREGATION
Troy Cash	Candidate and Intern	Christ Community Church

PRAY ESPECIALLY FOR

- Honorably retired ministers to be encouraged, useful, spiritually strong, and supported with gratitude for years of service.
- Ministers laboring outside the ordinary bounds or in specialized work to remain faithful to Christ and accountable to Presbytery.
- Candidates, interns, and licentiates to grow in doctrine, character, pastoral wisdom, preaching, and love for Christ's church.
- The Examinations Committee and sessions mentoring men for ministry to exercise wisdom, care, patience, and high biblical standards.
- The Lord of the harvest to raise up a new generation of faithful pastors for our congregations, church plants, and mission fields.

A PRAYER

Powerful God, we thank you for your powerful Word. By the word of your power, you made all things out of nothing, in the space of six days, and all very good. Your Word continues to bring life where there is death.

Through the preached Word, we pray that you would gather your people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Convince and convert sinners, and build up your sheep in holiness and comfort as they hear and listen to the voice of their Shepherd.

We pray for those who ascend the pulpit each Lord's Day. Give them boldness and clarity, passion and zeal. Use them, though weak and unworthy servants, for your great and glorious purposes. Help them to be holy and faithful before you, loving you all the days of their lives, so that at the end of their labors they may hear from their precious Lord and Savior, "Well done, good and faithful servant." In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 5

The Conversion of the Lost

Praying that God would bring sinners from darkness into the kingdom of his Son

The effectual calling of sinners is the work of God's Spirit, who enlightens the mind, renews the will, and persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel. — WSC 31

We cannot reason, pressure, entertain, or organize anyone into the kingdom of God. Yet the gospel is God's power for salvation, and he ordinarily gathers his people through the faithful witness of his church. We therefore pray with confidence for particular people and places.

SCRIPTURE

Ezekiel 36:26–27; John 3:3–8; Acts 16:14; Romans 10:1, 13–17; 2 Corinthians 4:3–6; 1 Timothy 2:1–6

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 67A — O God, to Us Show Mercy

Hymn 425 — How Sweet and Awesome Is the Place | Trinity Hymnal #469

PRAY ESPECIALLY FOR

- Unbelieving family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others whom the Lord has placed personally in our lives.
- Covenant children and young people who have not yet professed faith or who are presently wandering from Christ and his church.
- Those hardened by unbelief, false religion, self-righteousness, bitterness, addiction, materialism, or indifference.
- Visitors and unbelieving hearers in the congregations of Westminster Presbytery.
- Faithful personal evangelism, hospitality, mercy, and gospel conversations throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.
- The Spirit to open hearts, grant repentance and faith, and add to Christ's church those who are being saved.

A PRAYER

Sovereign God, we give you thanks and praise that you are the one who is able and willing to change the heart of a sinner, to renew and regenerate those who are dead in sin. You have compassion upon those who are like sheep without a shepherd, lost and wandering far from you.

You gather your people from every tribe, nation, and tongue, causing light to shine in this dark world through the proclamation of the gospel. As we speak of the hope that we have in Christ, we pray that you would bless your work. Bless the gospel as it is proclaimed through your humble servants and as the members of your church bear witness to the hope that is within them among those whom you have placed in their path.

Open blind eyes and hardened hearts and graciously grant the gifts of repentance and faith to your elect, gathering them to Jesus Christ. In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 6

The Revival and Renewal of Christ's Church

Praying for the spiritual vitality, purity, peace, and faithfulness of our congregations

We seek renewal not as an end, but that Christ's visible church would be more faithful in doctrine, worship, government, discipline, love, holiness, and witness.

Let us pray congregation by congregation. Each church has particular blessings, burdens, weaknesses, opportunities, officers, families, and neighbors known perfectly to the Chief Shepherd.

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 85:4–7; Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 4:11–16; Revelation 2:4–5; Revelation 3:1–3

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 122A — I Was Filled with Joy and Gladness

Hymn 413 — Revive Thy Work, O Lord | Trinity Hymnal #370

PRAY FOR OUR CONGREGATIONS

CONGREGATION / WORK	Located
Abingdon Presbyterian Church	Abingdon, VA
Arcadia Presbyterian Church	Kingsport, TN
Bartlick Presbyterian Church	Clintwood, VA
Christ Church	Jonesborough, TN
Christ Community Church	Johnson City, TN
Coeburn Presbyterian Church	Coeburn, VA
Covenant Presbyterian Church	Cedar Bluff, VA
Edgemont Presbyterian Church	Bristol, TN
Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church	Greenville, TN
Midway Presbyterian Church	Jonesborough, TN
Sandlick Presbyterian Church	Birchleaf, VA
Seven Springs Presbyterian Church	Glade Spring, VA
Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)	Johnson City, TN
Westminster Presbyterian Church (Kpt)	Kingsport, TN

Pray also for sessions, deacons, the Shepherd's Committee, weaker congregations, strained relationships, and churches passing through seasons of transition.

A PRAYER

Faithful Father, we thank you that Jesus Christ our Lord is the King and Head of his church, and that he has promised to build his church so that even amid spiritual warfare, the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

We pray that in your mercy you would revive and renew your people. Preserve your church according to your covenant promises, and cause her to shine brightly in this dark and despairing world. Give us a zeal for true doctrine and a fervent heart for worship. Heal the sinful divisions that arise from our fallen flesh, and unite us more and more to the great and glorious Head and King of the church, Jesus Christ.

Strengthen congregations as they pass through difficult times and seasons. Give wisdom to elders as they shepherd the souls entrusted to their care, and strengthen deacons as they faithfully serve the church in ministries of mercy. Cause your church to grow as you add those who are being saved, and, more importantly, cause your people to grow in maturity. Make your church fruitful in love, witness, and holiness. In Jesus name, Amen.

PRAYER 7

The Advancement of the Gospel

From our communities to college campuses, to church planting, and to the nations

In “Thy kingdom come” we pray that Satan’s kingdom would be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the church furnished with officers and ordinances, and the kingdom of grace advanced. — WSC 102; WLC 191

Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth and is gathering a people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. We pray outward in widening circles and ask him also to guide Westminster Presbytery as it plans for the future planting and receiving of churches.

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 67; Matthew 9:37–38; Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; Acts 13:1–3; Colossians 4:2–4

PSALMS AND HYMNS

Psalm 72A — O God, Your Judgments Give the King

Hymn 417 — Jesus Shall Reign Where’er the Sun | Trinity Hymnal #441

SPECIFIC WORKS WITHIN OUR BOUNDS

WORK	FIELD	PRAY FOR
Christ Church	Church planting	This church plant, now just over a year old, is recently passing through a difficult season, particularly for Pastor Bobby and his family. Pray that the Lord would uphold and strengthen them, preserve the peace and purity of His church, and cause the ordinary means of grace to bear lasting fruit among His people. Pray also for TE David Wilson, who is presently serving the congregation as stated supply during this interim season, that Christ would grant him wisdom, faithfulness, and pastoral care as he ministers the Word to the flock.
RUF ministry	College campus	New students beginning their school year, and the others on the team who help serve RUF at ETSU.

Continue on the next page with future of church planting in Westminster Presbytery.

AD INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CHURCH PLANTING

Presbytery has charged this committee to develop strategies for planting new churches and receiving existing congregations committed to Scripture and the Westminster Standards, including the exploration of locations, funding, training, and partnerships.

MEMBER	ROLE	CONGREGATION
TE Bobby Roberts	Chairman	Christ Church
TE Thomas Rickard	Secretary	Seven Springs Presbyterian Church
RE Kelly Chandler	Member	Westminster Presbyterian Church (JC)
TE Jim Powell	Member	Christ Community Church
RE David Saulsbury	Member	Westminster Presbyterian Church (Kpt)

PRAY FOR THE FUTURE OF CHURCH PLANTING

- Wisdom to identify communities and regions where faithful Presbyterian churches are especially needed.
- Church planters and future pastors with biblical conviction, missionary zeal, humility, endurance, and love for people.
- Faithful assessment, training, funding, and partnerships to support new works without sacrificing doctrine or polity.
- Opportunities to receive existing congregations that sincerely embrace Scripture and the Westminster Standards.
- RUF, home missions, and worldwide missions; that the Lord would open doors for the Word and send laborers into his harvest.

A PRAYER

Creator and Sovereign God, you hold the whole world and universe beneath your sovereign power, and you have purposed to gather for your Son a people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. You have sent forth your church to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations. We pray that you would continue to use and bless your church as the gospel is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

Strengthen those who labor in places where there is little or no faithful gospel witness. Bless the work of the gospel on college campuses. Provide for the future of your church as congregations are planted, established, and strengthened. Bless the worldwide mission of your church among all nations. Continue to send forth laborers into your harvest. Raise up faithful ministers, missionaries, church planters, and other gospel workers, and cause your people in every calling to bear faithful witness to the hope and love revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Build your church throughout the world until the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth. In Jesus name, Amen.

Appendix: A Call to Fasting and Prayer

by TE Rhett P. Dodson

in collaboration with RE Olin R. McNeely

Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, the fifty-third General Assembly overwhelmingly approved Overture 50, calling for a solemn day of fasting and prayer throughout the Presbyterian Church in America for the revival and renewal of the church. This summons from the church's highest court—to humble ourselves and seek the blessing of heaven's highest throne—should stir our hearts with hope for the future. As we call upon the Lord for a powerful movement of his grace, let us urge one another to seize this opportunity, confident that God will hear our prayers. We have his promise: those who wait on the Lord will never be put to shame (Psa. 25:3). To help us prepare for this day, we need to understand what fasting is, its Scriptural background and importance, its purpose and integration with prayer, and some guidelines for observing the day to the greatest spiritual benefit.

Fasting

Fasting is a spiritual discipline in which a believer abstains from food and drink (with the exception of water) for a period of time in order to devote himself or herself to the pursuit of God in prayer and devotion. “Solemn fastings... upon special occasions” are acts of religious worship (WCF 21.5; Lk. 2:37). Intermittent fasting has lately become a popular diet and health trend with various physical benefits. As a spiritual discipline, however, the focus and goal of Christian fasting is the benefit of the soul not the body.

Fasting is a means to humble us before the Lord. The first mention of fasting in the Bible, and the only reference to the practice in the Pentateuch, occurs in connection with the Day of Atonement when the Lord instructed the Israelites to afflict themselves (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:26-33). This affliction took the form of refraining from food. It involved a physical hardship designed to bring the people of Israel to a realization of and sorrow for their sins as well as to focus their attention on the hope of forgiveness offered through sacrificial

blood (cf. Lev. 16:19, 30, 34). David stands out as an Old Testament example who afflicted himself with fasting (Psa. 35:13), and we should follow his example to assume a posture of lowliness before the Lord, our great king.

By humbling us with hunger, fasting reminds us of just how dependent we are upon the Lord. Without his provision of daily bread, our bodies soon become weak, and that weakness strips away every false notion of self-reliance. Fasting also reminds us that, while we need daily bread, we do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). When we fast, the Lord intends for our physical appetite to stimulate our spiritual appetite. Like Job, we must learn to treasure the words of his mouth more than our necessary food (Job 23:12). We should use our natural desire for food and drink to prompt our souls to hunger and thirst for all the gifts and graces that accompany the kingdom of God. Physical hunger should lead us to a deeper understanding, appreciation, and experience of what it means to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psa. 34:8). Fasting is the opposite of feasting but when properly understood and practiced it offers an unparalleled opportunity for our souls to discover delights far greater than any earthly banquet. Writing to his friend Marion M'Naught after she had recovered from a serious illness,

Samuel Rutherford reminded her, "The Bridegroom is with you yet; so fast as that also you may feast and rejoice in Him."

When the Bible discusses the topic of fasting, abstinence from food is always the subject. Our Reformed forefathers, however, saw a broader principle at work in the Scripture's teaching on this subject. In the original 1645 *Westminster Directory for Public Worship*, the chapter devoted to "Public Solemn Fasting" encouraged believers to abstain from "all worldly labour, discourses, and thoughts, and from all bodily delights, and such like..." While it may not be possible for us to take a day off work or refrain from other conversations during the day, we should ask ourselves if there are other areas, in addition to food, where abstinence would be a spiritual benefit to us. Perhaps the overuse of our phones and social media would be a good place to start.

Fasting and Prayer

Holy Scripture often links the practice of fasting with prayer, and where the connection is not explicit one could argue that it is implicit. One of the purposes of fasting is to reclaim the time you would otherwise use for a meal and devote it to praise, intercession, and supplication. Prayer and fasting are twin graces in the pursuit of God and his blessings.

When we survey the practice of prayer and fasting in the Bible, we can see the various ways in which God's people have engaged in these disciplines for specific purposes. Scripture most often associates fasting and prayer as a response to some great sorrow. For example, when Nehemiah received the news of Jerusalem's desolation, he "wept and mourned for days, and... continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). He was brokenhearted over the condition of Zion. Overture 50 reminds us of "the persistent divisions

and relative spiritual poverty of the church" as "a source of great grief to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ." Our day of fasting and prayer should be an occasion of mourning over the state of the church. We should weep for the PCA but also for every Bible-believing denomination and congregation for our widespread lack of power and effectiveness.

One of the great sorrows over which the men and women of the Bible fasted and prayed was the tragedy of sin and its consequences. Israel fasted at Mizpah and confessed their sins (1 Sam. 7:6). Daniel anchored his moving prayer of repentance for the sins of Israel in the steadfast love and covenant faithfulness of God, but he poured out his prayer with "pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3). The people of Nineveh also clothed themselves with sackcloth and called for a fast when they heard and believed the message that God was going to judge their sin (Jon. 3:5-7). The General Assembly has called upon us to humble ourselves "before the LORD, fast and pray, and seek his mercy in heartfelt repentance over ministerial sins, the sins of officers, members, and whole congregations." Like Daniel, we must pour out our sorrow for our transgressions. The Lord intends for the ache in our stomachs to aid the ache of our hearts for his mercy.

God's people fasted and prayed during times of famine as well. Judah mourned and languished during a time of drought (Jer. 14:1-12). Joel summoned God's people to lament, wail, and consecrate a fast for the desolation caused by an invasion of locusts (Joel 1:13-14). Amos reminds us, however, that the greatest famine is the lack of hearing God's word (Amos 8:11-12). As we repent of ministerial sins, we should lament the widespread lack of true, biblical preaching across the land. Furthermore, we should seek the Lord to bless our own pulpits so that the preaching of the PCA will be faithful to the Scriptures and nourishing to the saints. As Overture 50 urges, "earnest prayer should be made for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the blessing of heaven on the preached word, the conversion of the lost, the planting of faithful churches at home, and the success of the gospel in our communities, on college campuses, and on the mission field around the world."

Though sorrow and repentance play dominant roles in the practice of fasting and prayer, the Bible offers several other reasons that God's people should engage in these disciplines. When his enemies came against him in battle, Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast throughout Judah to seek help from the Lord (2 Chron. 20:3). When we face spiritual assaults from the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12), we can call upon the help of heaven. Like Ezra who fasted on his journey to Jerusalem, we should bring our needs to the Lord assured that "the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him" (see Ezra 8:21-23).

The greatest example we have of fasting is our Lord Jesus Christ. After his baptism, the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights (Matt. 4:1ff.). That period of intense spiritual devotion as well as fierce temptation prepared him for his public ministry. Emerging from his fast he began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (v. 17). While Christ's ministry was unique, his example demonstrates the role of fasting and prayer as means of preparation for the faithful and powerful preaching of the gospel.

The church in Antioch, after fasting and praying, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them out on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). The practice of fasting and prayer led to kingdom expansion. When those men retraced their steps at the end of that journey, they appointed elders in every church and "with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23). The

practice of the early church demonstrates the importance of these disciplines for our evangelistic outreach as well as for the health of local congregations.

When the disciples of John questioned the Lord Jesus about fasting, they wondered why they and the Pharisees observed this practice, but the disciples of Jesus did not. The Savior replied, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matt. 9:15). Our Bridegroom has been taken away. The Father has received him into glory as the ascended and reigning Lord of the church. Now is the time for us to fast and express our longing for his return.

Guidelines

When you fast, you should observe some guidelines, both spiritual and physical. Spiritually, your fast should be for the Lord (Zech. 7:5). It should be a sincere expression of your heart’s desire for him and his blessing. So, dedicate the fast to him with the intention that he receive all the honor for it and every answer to prayer that flows from it. Whether we eat, or drink, or refrain from both, we must do all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Next, do not draw attention to the fact that you are fasting. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us not to be hypocritical when we engage in this discipline (Matt. 6:16-18). A two-faced approach to fasting looks sad and disheveled without but proud and boastful within. The self-righteous fast says, “Look at me and see how spiritual I am.” A godly fast leads you instead to comb your hair, wash your face, and guard your heart. We must mortify the flesh by the power of the cross, lest a Pharisaical attitude rise within us to boast of its

achievements (Lk. 18:12). In fasting, what matters most is not what others see but what the Lord observes when he looks at your heart. On a church-wide day of fasting and prayer, others may assume you are fasting, but you should not draw attention to it. Let your devotion be the sincere, inward dedication of your heart, even when you gather with others to pray.

Along with guarding your soul, it is also important to care for your body during a fast. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and avoid or at least limit caffeine. When you break the fast, eat a little light or soft food, something like fruit or soup, before having a normal meal. If you have diabetes or a chronic illness such as heart, kidney, liver, or lung disease, consult your physician before fasting, as should women who are pregnant or nursing. And, if you have any history of an eating disorder, you should also consult a healthcare professional as well, since fasting may trigger harmful behaviors such as anorexia or bulimia.

In Psalm 65, David lifted his voice to the Lord: “O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come” (v. 2). We have been called to come to this great God and call upon him—to come with fasting, approaching him in humility with our supplications and pleas. Let us lift our hearts before him. Let us seek his face. Let us cry out, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation” (Psa. 85:6-7).