

## Directions for Private Fasting

**Fasting:** *Temporary self-denial during a specified season of extraordinary prayer*

### I. PREPARATION

1. **PLAN:** Choose a suitable time and place, ordering your affairs in advance, such that you may seek the Lord's face without distraction. Select a time when you are free from ordinary work. If you plan to fast for an entire day and do not work on the weekends, you may want to fast from Friday evening (6pm, no dinner) until Saturday evening (6pm eat dinner).
2. **PRAY:** Most often, we fast as a means of enhancing the vitality and earnestness of our prayers concerning a specific person or situation. However, it is important to remember that we must always, to the best of our ability, pray for things in accordance with the revealed will of God. It is also important to recall the great danger of quenching the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, who directs our paths by enabling us to understand and apply His word to our lives. For these reasons, it is crucial that we spend some time prayerfully meditating on the reasons for our fast (usually 1-3 pressing petitions) and scrutinizing it in light of God's word. In order to confirm that this fast is of the Lord's choosing, we must ask ourselves the following questions:
  - What chief petitions do I plan to offer up to the Lord during this fast?
  - Are my petitions founded upon what God has already promised to do (e.g. "Give me victory over this sin.") or at least consistent with the Scriptures (e.g. "Grant me physical healing from this disease." or "Draw this sinner to Christ.").
  - What providential factors have awakened me to the importance of fasting and praying for these matters?
  - Are there other, more pressing matters that I ought to give greater priority in my fast?
  - Am I confident that God Himself is calling me by His word, Spirit, and providence to seek His face in fasting in prayer for the specific items on my list?
  - Am I content to know that although God may not grant the specific result for which I am asking, yet my prayers will glorify His name, increase my communion with Him, and receive a rich reward according to His perfect wisdom?
3. **FOCUS:** Leading up to your fast, be careful to avoid anything that might reduce your spiritual focus on the task ahead of you or deaden your spiritual sensitivity. For instance, you might be especially careful to avoid worldly activities, entertainments, and companions, as well as to resist the temptation to eat more than usual for lunch, which is to mock God and cheat yourself.

### II. SELF-EXAMINATION

*Evaluate and record the state of your heart and life in light of God's law, making a list (as you follow the steps below) of **personal**, family, ecclesiastical, and national sins in order to lament and confess them before the Lord.*

1. **Read (or sing) Psalm 19:7-14 and pray** for the Spirit's convicting illumination.
2. **Read about the spiritual perfection of God's law.** *Ex. 20:1-17, Ps. 15; Matt. 22:34-40, Rom. 12—13, 1 Cor. 13:1-7, and Eph. 4:17—6:9.*

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- 3. Read about the vile, destructive nature of sin.** *Ps. 50:16-23; Prov. 6:16-19; Matt. 23:23-33; Rom. 1:29-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; and Rev. 21:8.*
- 4. Read about the concrete moral implications of the Ten Commandments.** *Questions 105, 117, 127, 129, 131, 136, 139, 145, and 148.*
- 5. Identify the specific consequences of your sins,** *whether they be direct (e.g. my sinful anger has hurt my marriage, Prov. 1:31) or indirect, by way of divine chastisement (e.g. God has sent calamity to humble my pride, 1 Cor. 11:27-32; Heb. 12:5-9; Rev. 3:9).*
- 6. Identify any lawful means for killing these sins,** which you have not pursued diligently.
- 7. Consider the merciful fatherly justice of God** in chastising you for these sins (Ezra 9:13; Ps. 51:4), that you might forsake them (Lk. 15:14-18).
- 8. Consider your list of public sins** (Isa. 6:5; Dan. 9:20), as manifested in your family, church, and nation, observing their dreadful consequences in each sphere and the great danger of continuing in them without repentance (Cf. Deut. 28:15-68).
- 9. Pray for a spirit of humility, repentance, and assurance of pardon,** as you await your time of confession the next morning.

### III. EVENING & MORNING

Once you have completed your time of self-examination, conclude the day with a brief prayer and go to bed to get some sleep for the day ahead.

- 1. Go to bed at a decent hour,** so that you will have energy for the day ahead.
- 2. Rise early in the morning,** lest you keep back for yourself a portion of that time which you have devoted fully to God (Acts 5:1-11).
- 3. Avoid all distractions** (especially media), lest the fire of your holy devotion be quenched by common (or even sinful) thoughts. Let the Lord's face be the first one you see in the morning (Ps. 139:18b).
- 4. Complete your ordinary morning devotional exercises** (prayer, Scripture, etc.), since extraordinary duties were never meant to replace ordinary ones.

### IV. FRESH AIR

- 1. Get out of the house for some fresh air** for roughly an hour by taking a walk in the local neighborhood (or in a nearby park) to get your juices flowing and clear your mind.
- 2. Listen to a convicting sermon on mp3** (while you walk) or meditate on your experiences during self-examination the previous night.

### V. CONFESSION

After reading over your list of sins from the previous night – making any necessary additions or subtractions – approach God in open confession of each sin on your list (personal, family, church, and nation).

- 1. Be as specific and thorough as possible** in your confession (Josh. 7:20-21), laying all your spiritual wounds before the Lord, to the best of your knowledge.

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2. With each confession, reaffirm the holiness, justice, and goodness of God the Lawgiver and His perfect law, both in its precepts and in its penalty of eternal death.
3. In a spirit of humility, recognize that whatever evils or hardships have befallen you, it is far less than the everlasting torment which your many sins deserve.
4. Take a believing, soul-satisfying look at Christ and Him crucified for all your sins.
  - Cry out with the publican: “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13).
  - Plead with Jeremiah: “Turn thou me and I shall be turned!” (Jer. 31:18).
  - Lay all of your grievous sins at the foot of the cross, trusting in Christ’s precious blood for remission of sin, sanctification, and complete salvation (1 Cor. 1:30).

## VI. COVENANT RENEWAL

Apply yourself to the duty of personal covenanting, entering into and renewing your covenant with God by taking hold of His covenant of grace in Christ (Jer. 50:4; Neh. 9:38).

1. **Read of its gracious promises and blessings in Christ.** *Ps. 32:1-2; Isa. 53; Rom. 5, 8, 12; Eph. 1; and 1 Cor. 15.*
2. **Answer the following questions.**
  - Do I disown any notion of coming to God and finding acceptance with Him according to the broken covenant of works in Adam?
  - Do I sincerely believe the good news of God’s covenant of grace and salvation in and through Jesus Christ alone?
  - Am I pleased, contented, and fully satisfied to have Jesus Christ alone as my Prophet, Priest, and King; my sole righteousness in God’s sight; my only hope of eternal life; and my Elder Brother who reconciles and unites me to God as Father and to the children of God as my brothers and sisters in His church?
3. **Approach the Lord in prayer**, solemnly renewing your personal covenant with Him, using your *Covenant of Communicant Membership* as a helpful model.
  - Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life?
  - Do you believe in the one living and true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Scriptures?
  - Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God; profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service: Do you promise that you will endeavor to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?
  - Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?

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- To the end that you may grow in the Christian life, do you promise that you will diligently read the Bible, engage in private prayer, keep the Lord's Day, regularly attend the worship services, observe the appointed sacraments, and give to the Lord's work as He shall prosper you?
- Do you purpose to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all the relationships of life, faithfully to perform your whole duty as a true servant of Jesus Christ, and seek to win others to Him?
- Do you make this profession of faith and purpose in the presence of God in humble reliance upon His grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?

### **VII. FRESH AIR**

Take another leisurely walk in the local neighborhood (or in a nearby park) for about an hour to meditate on the results of your self-examination, or to listen to a comforting sermon.

### **VIII. SUPPLICATION**

Approach the throne of grace boldly with your list of the petition(s) that moved you to fast.

1. Have your specific petition(s) written down the night before, so that there is no question as to what they are.
2. Wrestle in prayer with your covenanted God, bringing your petitions before Him with humility, boldness, and fervency, through the intercession of Christ.
3. Periodically pause in your prayers to read Scripture passages or to sing Psalms that will refresh your soul and prepare you to return to prayer.

### **IX. REFLECTION**

Before completing your fast, take time to review what you have confessed, embraced, resolved, and offered up by way of petition to God.

1. Recall that, having been purchased by Christ and made willing by His Spirit, you are covenanted to be the Lord's and must now make it your chief delight to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, according to His holy commandments.
2. Confess the sinful weaknesses and failures that have hampered your fasting and prayer, asking God to sprinkle all of your labors clean with the blood of Christ.
3. Take heed to your spiritual condition and pray for the grace to persevere in the ways of the Lord, patiently and confidently waiting for His will to be done.
  - Beware of spiritual pride (Isa. 58:3; Lk. 17:10).
  - Beware of carnal security or presumption (Song 5:1-2; Lk. 18:9-12).
  - Beware of forgetting the cause(s) of your fast in ordinary prayer.
  - Beware of neglecting to earnestly look for an answer to your prayers.
  - Beware of neglecting to thank God when he grants your petition.