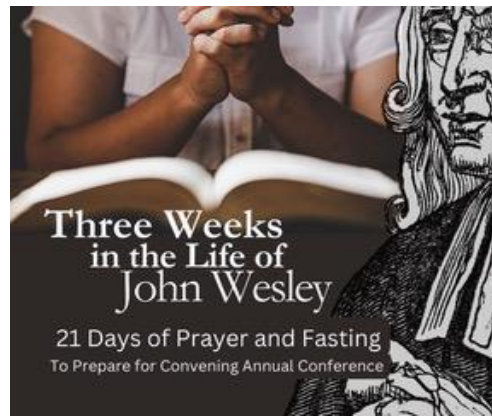


Three Weeks in the
Life of John Wesley:
21 Days of Prayer and
Fasting
to Prepare for the
Convening Annual
Conference



My fear is not that our great movement, known as the Methodists, will eventually cease to exist or one day die from the earth. My fear is that our people will become content to live without the fire, the power, the excitement, the supernatural element that makes us great. ~ John Wesley

From April 11-13 Global Methodists from Maryland to Maine will gather in Camp Hill, PA for our convening Northeast Annual Conference. Together, as one body, we will worship and study and pray and fellowship. It will be a momentous milestone in the rich history of the Methodist movement. *But, we cannot be content to live without the fire.*

That was John Wesley's fear. He was afraid that the Methodist movement would have the form of a religion, but would have no spiritual power. Before we gather in Camp Hill, we are asking all clergy and laity of the Northeast Global Methodist churches to pray and fast for the Holy Spirit to bring the power, to bring the fire of revival to this corner of God's Kingdom.

John Wesley's own spiritual vigor was nourished by his daily discipline of prayer and his weekly discipline of fasting. Each day Wesley would rise at 4:00 a.m. and kneel in prayer for one hour. Each week Wesley would fast from sundown on Thursday until 3:00 Friday afternoon.

We invite you to join us for Three Weeks in the Life of John Wesley: 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. From Monday, March 18 – Sunday April 7, 2024, pray daily and fast weekly for the Holy Spirit to kindle a fresh fire among us. Use this 21-Day Prayer and Fasting Guide as an aid in this spiritual discipline. In these pages you will find helpful suggestions for fasting as well as a Scripture passage, a Prayer Focus and a Suggested Prayer for each day.

For three weeks, at whatever hour of each day, join us by praying with John Wesley's daily intentionality. For three weeks, on whatever day of the week, join us in a fast in order to hunger for God with John Wesley's weekly fervor. Imagine the flame that the Holy Spirit could kindle if dozens, hundreds, thousands of committed Christians set aside three weeks to ask for His power. Join us in this holy labor. *Because we cannot be content to live without the fire.*

~ The Northeast Conference Prayer and Intercession Team

“When you fast ... “

~ Matthew 6:16a

Fasting Guide

Fasting Guide

Welcome to the rich spiritual discipline of fasting. Fasting from food is an ancient practice of the Christian church, and has its roots even deeper in the soil of the Jewish faith. Moses fasted, David fasted, Elijah fasted, Daniel fasted. Jesus fasted. Indeed, Jesus even gave fasting instruction as part of his timeless words from the Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:17-18 - NIV)

Note that Jesus does not say, “If you fast ...” He says, “When you fast ...” Jesus assumed that all who seek God would incorporate fasting into their religious practices, just as he assumed faithful people would pray and give alms.

The early Methodists likewise assumed fasting would occupy an important place in the discipleship journey of those aligned with this renewal movement. Fasting was part of the General Rules John Wesley expected his Methodist societies to observe. “Fasting and abstinence” was included in a list of the Ordinances of God that also mentioned, with equal weight, worship, the Lord’s Supper, prayer and the Scriptures.

As we prepare for the Northeast Convening Annual Conference April 11-13 in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, all Global Methodists in the region are invited to take part in **Three Weeks in the Life of John Wesley: 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**.

Participants are asked to pray using the daily Scripture reading, the Prayer Focus, and the Suggested Prayer found in this guide for each day.

Participants are also asked to fast at least once each week for these 21 days, for a total of three times.

As you fast in solidarity with God’s people through the ages, below are some guidelines to shape your understanding of this spiritual practice.

- **Fasting is not done for its own sake.** Fasting as a spiritual discipline is, as John Wesley says, “... chiefly an aid to prayer.” The physical hunger one feels during a fast from food is intended to cultivate a desire for God with like intensity. The purpose of fasting is never to draw attention to oneself (see the Sermon on the Mount), nor is it to lose weight. If you are fasting for this purpose it is not a spiritual fast. The

purpose of fasting is to abstain from food for the purpose of intensifying prayer. Prayer and fasting work together to draw us closer to God.

- **Most people in reasonably good health are able to implement the spiritual discipline of fasting.** However, if at all in doubt about whether you should fast, consult with your doctor before adopting fasting as a practice.
- **Determine in advance the nature of your fast.** Some abstain from all food and drink (except for water; always drink water) during the fast. Others abstain from solid food, but drink beverages such as coffee or milk. Others abstain from meat or sweets. One type of fast is not better than another, although any spiritual fast should naturally result in some level of hunger or craving. The point of a fast is to feel physical hunger and to shape that into a spiritual hunger for God. If you are just starting out with fasting, pick a fast you feel you can realistically achieve. It is better to start small and build from there rather than aim too high and become discouraged.
- **Determine in advance the day and duration of your fast.** The Wesley Fast is modeled after John Wesley's weekly practice of fasting from sundown on Thursday until 3:00 Friday afternoon. Others choose to fast from sundown to sundown, or other parts of the day. If just starting out, perhaps a shorter period of time and missing only one meal (breakfast, for example) would be best. Most Christians, including Wesley, fasted on Friday because that is the day Jesus was crucified, but any day of the week is fine for your fast day. Because Sunday is a feast day and a Little Easter in the life of the church, do try to avoid the Lord's Day as your fast day.
- **When you break your fast, don't gorge on food.** Not only is this an unhealthy expression of gluttony, it defeats the meaningfulness of a good fast. Fasting from food demonstrates the spiritual strength the Holy Spirit gives you to resist hunger's temptation. To immediately succumb to hunger's demands when the fast is over is to cast aside the power God has graciously given you. Wesley broke his fast with a light meal. If you can, break your fast at an hour other than a regular meal time. A piece of fruit or a small snack will be enough to mark the end of your fast and hold your hunger in check until the next regular meal.

On your fast day you may wish to use these prayers when you begin your fast, during your fast, and at the end of your fast. Praying at key moments of your fast reinforces the connection between the two spiritual disciplines and invites the Spirit to come alongside you in this labor of faith.

When Beginning a Fast

O Lord God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, I begin this fast to draw closer to you, to be spiritually stronger in you. When I hunger in the time ahead, remind me that I do not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. When I am weakened by the absence of food, assure me that in seeking you I gain what cannot be lost. In the name of Jesus, the Bread of Life, I dedicate this fast to you, Lord. Amen.

During a Fast

God of the land flowing with milk and honey, and God of the wilderness; by day and by night, in all places, your people followed you. Though they complained of their hunger in the barren places, you fed them with manna from heaven. When I hunger on this journey of fasting, use my discomfort not as a catalyst for complaint, but as a goad to trust in your leading. When I am tempted to quit, keep my eyes focused forward and my hand to the plow so that I be fit for the rich harvest you intend. This I ask in the name of Jesus, the Lord of the Harvest. Amen.

When Ending a Fast

O Lord God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, this time of fasting is now at an end. Thank you for giving me the strength to come this far, and for growing in me the fruits of patience and self-control. As I return to the regular rhythms of food and nourishment, keep me now from succumbing to gluttonous desires and from forgetting the lessons of self-denial you have taught me. This I ask in the name of Jesus, the True Bread of Heaven. Amen.