

Good Friday day of prayer: 10 April 2020

To all at Immanuel Church Brentwood: dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Christian people are adopted children of our heavenly Father. We have a wonderful privilege. We don't need to fear, but can come to our Father in prayer. Right now there are great needs – both physical and spiritual – about which we need to seek the Lord together.

So, we're calling the church family at Immanuel to use this **Good Friday 10th April to pray** – privately at home at **breakfast** and at **lunchtime**, before **gathering together at 7.30pm** for a corporate time of scripture reading and prayer. We trust the words of Psalm 10:17, "O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear."

For those who are able we would encourage you to fast as well. Please find below some information to help you make the best use of the day.¹

This comes with much love in Christ,
Andrew

Prayer and fasting: who, what, why?

Fasting means choosing not to eat and drink, or to eat and drink less than normal, for a short period. Sometimes something else is given up instead of food. It is a way of making repentance personal; of saying with our bodies, as well as our words, that we are returning to the Lord, and putting aside our own desires and needs.

What are we asking the church to do? First, to be clear: we are **not wanting anyone to put their health at risk**. Fasting is never intended to do that. So appropriate forms of fasting are different for different people.

- Those who are at increased risk of Covid-19 should not forego food at all. You might choose instead to abstain from something else non-essential which you might normally enjoy. But on no account should you risk weakening yourself by missing meals.
- Others who should not go hungry include children, pregnant or nursing mothers, or those sick or weaker for any other reason. It might be appropriate instead to eat plain foods instead of sweet ones, or drink water instead of tea. (Some older children might want to fast in some way; in that case parents should guide them on what might be appropriate).
- For healthy adults it is appropriate not to eat food for the whole day, until after the evening prayer meeting. You should not stop drinking, but you may choose to drink water instead of other drinks.

Fasting is intended to be combined with prayer. So at the times when you would normally eat, or do something else from which you are abstaining, spend some or all of the time praying instead. More on that below. One more thing on fasting: Jesus assumed that Christians would fast, and he also gave an important instruction:

"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)

So we won't be comparing notes about what sort of fasting we have been doing; that is between each of us and God.

¹ The prayer guide that follows is drawn from resources provided by The Gospel Coalition and by Matthew Roberts (Trinity Church York). See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/day-fast-pray-april-4/> and <https://tgc-documents.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/A%20Day%20to%20Fast%20and%20Pray%20-%20Prayer%20Booklet.pdf>. For more information on prayer and fasting see https://www.gr-uk.org/vlogs/some-help-on-fasting?fbclid=IwAR3Y7mDps2YKUqi9aiZNI41NWmBIge_USf99C--7t-rtWGpga8uFFh7b69E

1. Breakfast / Morning prayer: a guide

Start your prayer time by reading Psalm 27 and then spend some time praying about the various topics. Perhaps pick one or two of the verses and meditate on those throughout the day.

I. Remember and rejoice in the character of God.

Reflect and meditate on the character of God: he is all powerful, all knowing, never-changing, ever-present, full of loving-kindness, mercy and grace toward all who call on his name.

➔ Psalm 27:1-2

II. Pray about your specific fears.

Express your fears, anxieties, and concerns to the Lord. Pour out your heart to him. Seek his face and ask for him to hide you in his shelter during this time of trouble.

➔ Psalm 27:3-5

III. Sing a song of praise to God.

Sing or listen to a hymn, song, or psalm. As you do, reflect on the Lord's good-ness, and ask him to help you trust him with your fears. E.g. "All people that on earth do dwell" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmGwHdNtpEw>

➔ Psalm 27:6

IV. Pray for your community and world.

Pray for the needs of the world around you: family members, neighbours, medical workers, governing officials, those who are suffering financially, and those who are sick. Ask the Lord to sustain, provide, heal, and guide. Ask him to give his people endurance, wisdom, and hope.

➔ Psalm 27:7

V. Pray for those who do not know the Lord.

Consider those in your life who do not know the Lord. Pray that they would seek the Lord during this pandemic. Ask the Lord to open their eyes, ears, minds, and hearts to the truth of his Word. Pray that they would turn to the Lord and find salvation, refuge, and help.

➔ Psalm 27:8-10

VI. Ask the Lord to teach you and protect you.

Pray for protection—both physically and spiritually. Ask the Lord to use this time of crisis to draw you closer to him and teach you more about his Word and his ways.

➔ Psalm 27:11-12

VII. Ask the Lord for endurance.

We do not know how long this trial will last. Pray that the Lord will conquer this virus quickly. Also pray for endurance to stand in the midst of the trial, however long you may be called to endure.

➔ Psalm 27:13-14

Spend some time meditating on what you've been learning through this trial. What is God's Word teaching you? What truths about God are comforting your soul? How is this experience changing you to be more like Christ?

2. Lunchtime prayer: a guide

I. Praise God that he welcomes and hears our prayers.

Psalm 10:17, O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear.

Psalm 50:15, Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

II. Share your prayer requests with one another & pray for one another. Consider asking another person to share one struggle & one blessing they've experienced in this trial.

1 Peter 5:7, Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Ephesians 6:18, Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Galatians 6:2, Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

III. Pray for your church, specifically your pastors and ministry leaders. Ask that the Lord would refresh and encourage these leaders as they serve during this crisis. Pray that church members will be patient, understanding, and encouraging.

1 Thessalonians 5:25, Brothers, pray for us.

Proverbs 11:15, Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

IV. Pray that the gospel message would be boldly proclaimed & many people would come to know Jesus.

Ephesians 6:19–20, [Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Colossians 4:3, At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.

Psalm 139:23–24, Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

V. Pray for your local governing officials, as well as governing officials all over the world.

1 Timothy 2:1, First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

VI. Pray for healing for the sick and for an end to this virus.

3 John 2, Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

VII. Thank God that he is our refuge in times of trouble.

Psalm 73:28, But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Psalm 5:11, But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

Psalm 18:2, The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

3. Good Friday evening: gathering together for scripture & prayer

Lord-willing, we will gather together at 7.30pm. We will share in some Good Friday scripture readings and times of prayer. Our focus will be on the Lord Jesus' powerful and loving work upon the Cross. Please join us; make sure you have your own Bible.

I. Introduction (Andrew Grey)

II. Scripture reading – Matthew 26:1-29 (read by Charlotte Smithers)

III. Prayer (led by James Green)

We thank God for the Gospel: for God's plan to send the Lord Jesus, for the shedding of his blood, for the covenant which binds us to Him.

We pray for his mercy for: (i) our church, particularly the most vulnerable; (ii) our families and friends; (iii) for those who are already sick in some way, whether or not coronavirus-related; (iv) the church here and in the rest of the world; (v) our nation, including wisdom for the government

We pray together the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

IV. Scripture reading – Matthew 26:30-75 (read by Hilary Khoo)

V. Prayer (led by Gavin Wright)

We praise God for the faithfulness and the obedience of Jesus, even unto death.

The Cross of Christ and the present crisis in our world remind us of the coming judgment of God. We need to confess how little we think about his final judgment. We ask for his forgiveness for our weakness; pray that he may have mercy on each of us, in health, sickness and death; and pray that we would come to him for refuge now, and safety from the judgment to come.

VI. Scripture reading – Matthew 27:1-31 (read by Lauren Fenn)

VII. Prayer (led by Mark Smithers)

We ask that our powerful and wise God will use this epidemic to do good: to spread the gospel, as people realise their need of Christ; to strengthen Jesus' Church; to teach us to love one another more richly and more deeply, as we wait for Christ's return.

VIII. Scripture reading – Matthew 27:32-66 (read by Will Trump)

IX. Congregational hymn: When I survey the wondrous cross

X. Declaring our only hope: question one from the Heidelberg Catechism

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with His Precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.