

CHURCH OF
THE REDEEMER

40 DAYS
OF PRAYER &
FASTING

2016

UNPLUGGED
making space for God

FEBRUARY 10, 2016 - MARCH 26, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting has been a special time for our church family. It is a time when we seek God's will and transformation in our lives, as well as in our community and city. Our theme for the 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting this year will be Unplugged - Making Space for God.

Our church family has recently concluded a journey through the book of Acts. We saw how the first century believers were strengthened through regular habits of devotion (spiritual disciplines). Through radical generosity, there was not a needy person among the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:34). Through intercession, Peter was miraculously released from prison to continue his ministry (Acts 12:5-17). A fruit of Paul and Silas's observance of the Sabbath was that Lydia and her whole household were baptized (Acts 16:11-15). After hearing the word from Paul, and examining the Scriptures daily, many in Berea believed (Acts 17:10-12). Through practicing gratitude and worship amidst hardship, Paul found strength to set out on his next missionary journey (Acts 18:18-23). We too will find strength as we seek to know God more and follow the teachings of Jesus.

"In worship we live into the reality that the first and best thing in life is nothing less than a transforming relationship with the God who made us, named us and called [us] into being."¹

An important step in growing in relationship with God and learning to trust and obey him is to spend time with him. As our schedules and our world become increasingly busy and chaotic, we need to actively make space for him in our lives.

During Lent this year, we will practice making space for God by fasting from technology, in addition to the traditional fast from food. The weekly reflection journal will follow our sermon series. The questions will help us connect with God as we reflect on from where our strength comes.

As we spend time listening to and talking with God, may we find that we are strengthened and transformed more fully into who he created us to be. Further, may we learn to enjoy and trust him more and more each day.

May "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name...grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in [your] inner [being], so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19, NASB).

1. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, InterVarsity Press: 2005, p. 20

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines are practices that help us grow in our relationship with God. In this season, we will be practicing the three disciplines described below.¹ We will also learn more about them during our sermon series.

UNPLUGGING

Unplugging is an invitation to step away from the impersonal world of technology/media (Facebook, radio, video games, e-mail, cell phones, podcasts, Hulu, etc.) and into the presence of God and others. As personal beings, we need personal contact with others for our overall health.

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| <p>The practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicating face to face rather than virtually not checking e-mail on the weekend limiting the amount of time on technology/media | <p>The fruit of this practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> freedom from addictions to technology giving the gift of being present with God and others enjoying and growing from being with God and others |
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"Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential, a capacity for birth." - Gerald May

FASTING

Fasting is intentionally denying oneself basic necessities or comforts as a reminder that it is God alone who can truly satisfy us.

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| <p>The practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> abstaining from food in order to be with God surrendering addictions, compulsions, whims and cravings to God repenting and waiting on God | <p>The fruit of this practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> having more space to pray turning from addictive or compulsive behaviors identifying with Jesus in finding strength in God to be obedient and to love others |
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"The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things."
- Ole Hallesby

EXAMEN

The examen is a way to pay attention to the voice and activity of God throughout the day.

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| <p>The practice includes coming regularly into the presence of God and reflecting on questions such as these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful? When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love today? | <p>The fruit of this practice includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognizing that God is with you in the highs and in the lows fostering gratitude in your life becoming more aware of who God created you to be and discerning direction for your life |
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"The examen makes us aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant, moments that ultimately can give direction for our lives." - Dennis Linn



If you are interested, there is an audio resource that can guide you through the examen. It is available online or as a free app.
<http://pray-as-you-go.org/prayer-resources/the-examen/>

Guidance for how to practice the examen with children:

Teach your children the practice of finding God in their daily lives. You can teach the examen by playing "I spy God." At the dinner table, invite your children to tell you where they have spied God in their day.

1. Much of the information in this section is taken directly from:
Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, InterVarsity Press: 2005, p. 52-55, 85-87, 218-222

GOING DEEPER

For some of us, these disciplines may be new ideas. For others, they may already be a part of our regular routine. There is flexibility in how to practice these disciplines. Below are some examples of how you might consider introducing or deepening these practices in your life.

For example, if you've never fasted before, you might want to commit to weekly 24-hour fasts (option #1). If short-term fasting is part of your regular practice, you may decide to try an extended fast (option #3).

In whatever commitment you make in this season, may your love for God and your knowledge of his love for you increase.

UNPLUGGING

1. Fast from one form of technology/media (e.g., Facebook, browsing, video games, TV, Hulu, radio, etc.)
2. Fast from multiple forms of technology/media and find opportunities to communicate face to face rather than virtually
3. Fast from all forms of non-essential technology/media

EXAMEN

1. Set apart one day a week for reflection and prayer using the weekly reflection journal
2. Set apart time throughout the week for reflection and prayer using questions in this prayer guide. Note your thoughts, experience and any words from God in a journal.
3. Set apart 30 minutes a day for reflection and prayer using the weekly reflection journal

FASTING

1. Commit to a 40-day fast from a certain item (e.g., dessert, bread, meat, caffeine, etc.) or a weekly 24-hour fast
2. Commit to a 40-day fast from a certain item and a weekly 24-hour fast
3. Participate in an extended fast (talk to a home fellowship leader or someone on the pastoral staff team to discuss how to do this safely)

CELEBRATING LENT

Many churches celebrate different “seasons” throughout the year. Most of us at Church of the Redeemer are probably familiar with the idea of celebrating Christmas and Easter. Those days are often set aside to honor Jesus Christ's birth and his coming back to life after dying. Depending on our background, we may be less familiar with the seasons of “Advent” and “Lent.” Or these may be very familiar ideas, if we grew up in more liturgical denominations like the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian or Lutheran Churches.

As a community, we recently observed Advent together as we waited to celebrate Jesus' birth. Together, we lit candles and thought about the story of Christmas and what the hope of Jesus' birth means for us today. Advent means “coming.” Taking time to reflect on how long the world had to wait for Jesus' birth helps us to understand better what it means to wait for Jesus' coming again.

Lent, the 40 days before Easter, is another time of waiting. Christians have been celebrating this season for hundreds of years. Maybe you already observe Lent by choosing to “give up” something starting on Ash Wednesday, in order to focus on what's most important: following God. Maybe celebrating Lent is entirely new to you. Whatever your past experience is, this guide will help us to celebrate Lent together as a church family.

In 2016, as in other years, our church community will spend 40 days fasting and praying together. Most of us will choose one day a week to fast all day. We are all invited to pray daily. Perhaps you are excited about fasting or you might be a bit nervous—or both! This guide will explain more about what fasting looks like.

WHY FAST

In his ministry on earth, Jesus pointed out the need for prayer and fasting through both his words and his actions. So, as we seek God together as a church, we pray and fast because we need both in our life and ministry together. Some of us may be more or less familiar with the practice of fasting. Here are some notes that may help us to think rightly about fasting as we pray together.

Why fast? There is not just one answer. Here are a few that have been helpful to people in our church and to Jesus' followers for many years.

Fasting can intensify the power of our prayers. This is not because fasting is a way of manipulating God or proving to him how holy we are. Rather, fasting can help us to focus and improve our ability to listen to him. And, in a way we do not completely understand, fasting and prayer together are a spiritually powerful combination. Once, Jesus' disciples were confused about why they could not cast out an evil spirit. When they asked Jesus about this, he explained to them that some evil spirits cannot be cast out except by prayer and fasting (see Matthew 17:21 & Mark 9:29, NKJV).

Fasting is an important part of our lives of faith, even when we aren't trying to "cast out an evil spirit," like Jesus' disciples were. Just like eating balanced meals helps our physical health, adding fasting to our prayer lives and our attempts to walk in faith can help our spiritual health. Many of us struggle to maintain physical disciplines like exercise or drinking enough water in our daily lives. In the same way, fasting is a discipline — a discipline for our spiritual health.

Fasting brings spiritual growth. Fasting is a tool to help us grow spiritual roots. Over the years, God has grown our faith lives through our times of fasting. As we have fasted as a church, there have been many breakthroughs in our lives individually and as a community. God provided jobs for many who had been long-term unemployed. He brought emotional healing to several individuals and in several families. He gave some the strength and courage needed to make good decisions to start a new life with him. And he has grown us, as a church, in hope and faith.

Fasting helps us experience God's power in our weakness. As our bodies become weak from hunger, we are able to feel the spiritual reality that we are weak people, unable to do anything without God's strength. It is in that place of weakness that we can live in the truth of scripture, which says, "My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak" (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

Fasting moves us from focusing on our own needs to hearing God's voice and considering the needs of others. Through fasting, we learn that God's words and scriptures are life giving — that it is not food alone that gives life, but also the words that come from the mouth of God (see Matthew 4:4). We learn that just like Jesus, we too have food to eat even when we are fasting. This food is God's word, which gives us strength and helps us to live for him.

Fasting requires repentance. When the Israelites fasted without truly repenting, God refused to accept or be moved by their fast (see Isaiah 58:1-4). So, when you fast and pray, also repent from sin! Ask God to show you if there is anything you need to confess or repent from. When you pray, ask God for forgiveness. You can confess straight to God or you can share with another person of the same gender and ask them to pray for you. When we confess our sins, God forgives us and makes us new again so we can turn from our sinful ways.

HOW TO FAST

Jesus says that when we fast, we should not do it to impress others or to look and act like we are suffering (see Matthew 6:16-18). We fast only for God, not for people. Many people fast as individuals today, but in Bible times and throughout the history of the Church, groups of people have believed it was important to fast together.

We should take care not to use fasting as a tool to try to control God. Just as prayer is not a magical device to make God do something for us, fasting isn't either.

Each of us will choose a day of the week (for example, Tuesday) to fast. Typically, fasting involves denying yourself food and sometimes drink in order to devote yourself to prayer. How long and how often to fast are between those fasting and the Lord. The common Jewish fast was from sundown to sundown the following day. You should consider whether you are physically able to fast or whether you should not because of health conditions or other circumstances. If you are not sure if you should fast, talk to your home fellowship leader or a pastor. If you have a health condition, you should talk to your doctor before fasting. Finally, if you have other questions about fasting, you may find it helpful to talk with a leader, pastor or prayer team member.

Some of us are very new to fasting. Others of us may have questions about how the fasting we are doing here is similar to or different from the ways other religious communities practice fasting. Our church's desire is to be a place where we can learn together what it means to seek God through prayer and fasting. We are not perfect people. We are people who are hungry to learn more about who God is and how God's presence makes a difference in our everyday lives.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FASTING

There are many ways to fast. Each person has to figure out the best fast for his or her situation. If you can, try to stick with the same fast each week. Fasting may feel different even if we are doing it the same way each time. That's okay—it's part of what fasting looks like.

Are there things I should or should not eat?

One way for healthy adults to fast for a day is to not eat any food and to drink only water. You might choose to drink clear beverages like juice or herbal tea. Drinking dairy or caffeinated drinks like soda or coffee might make you feel sick. Remember that the aim of the fast is to give up things we normally rely on for strength (without endangering our health).

Who shouldn't fast?

If you are pregnant, nursing a baby, or might be pregnant, you should not fast. Also, children and people with certain health conditions should not fast. If you have any questions, please consult a doctor or church leader. Those who are not able to fast in the traditional way can consider fasting from things like television, Facebook, dessert, etc. Whether or not you fast, you can still participate in our season of prayer.

When do I pray?

Set aside some time every day to pray. Some people choose to use their lunch break to take some quiet time to pray. This is a good time to teach our kids about prayer and spend time praying with our families or households.

How do I break or end my fast?

It's helpful to eat a small, simple meal or snack at the end of your fast and then wait a little bit before eating more. Break your fast with foods like: bread, crackers, or fruit. Anything high in fat or sugar may make you feel bad if it's the first thing you eat. Don't eat: fried food, pizza, burgers, nachos, ice cream, or something else heavy right off.

If you've never fasted before, you might find it helpful to talk with someone beforehand and as you are fasting about how it's going. If you have a prayer or accountability partner, try to fast together: it's better in community. In the same way, it can be encouraging for households to fast together, if you live with other church members. If you don't have a prayer partner, perhaps now is a time to begin praying regularly with a friend!

JANUARY 31ST - FEBRUARY 6TH: PRE-FASTING REFLECTION

The questions in this guide are to help you reflect during this season. It is not necessary to answer all of them. You may choose to reflect on them all at once, or over the course of the week. As you begin, find a place where you will not be distracted. Invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and to guide your reflection. Write down any thoughts, Bible verses, prayers, etc. that you would like to remember.

As you prepare to “unplug,” take some time this week to note where and how much time you spend on different types of technology/media. Take some time to note where and how much time you spend with God and with other people. Invite the Holy Spirit to highlight where you can “unplug” and where you can connect with God and with others.

Is there something you are waiting on God for? Talk to God about it and surrender it to him. Ask God to prepare your heart to receive what he has for you in this season.

Take a look at the “Going Deeper” section of this prayer guide. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you decide how to practice unplugging, the examen and fasting in this season.

Take some time to think about whether you will start your fast on Ash Wednesday (February 10th) or on Sunday, February 14th. Write your commitment here.

FEbruary 7-13TH:
STRENGTHENING OUR INNER BEING
(EPHESIANS 3:14-19)

Where do you need more of God's strength in your life? What would it look like for you to be open to receive God's strength for your inner being?

How have you decided to practice unplugging, the examen and fasting in this season? It is helpful to share your decision with a friend to help you stick to your commitment. Write your commitment(s) and with whom you plan to share here.

How do you feel about entering into this season of prayer and fasting? How do you feel about the commitments you have made? What do you hope for or need from God? Take some time to share your feelings and thoughts with God.

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions this week? How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

FEBRUARY 14-20TH:
UNPLUGGING
(ECCLESIASTES 2:22-23)

How has “unplugging” been for you? What has been challenging?
What has been good? How has connecting with others been?

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions today/this week? How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where were you aware of God being with you today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and to thank God for helping you to be aware of his presence.

Today/In the last week, when have you felt alone, like God wasn't with you? Take some time to remember those moments and to bring them before God. Ask God to speak to you about those situations.

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

FEbruary 21-27th:
God's View of Us - As the Pinnacle
of All He Created
(Genesis 1)

How does the truth that human beings were the pinnacle of all creation change how you see yourself and other people? If you really believed that you were this valuable, how would it change how you lived and loved?

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions today/this week? How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where were you aware of God being with you today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and to thank God for helping you to be aware of his presence.

Today/In the last week, when have you felt alone, like God wasn't with you? Take some time to remember those moments and to bring them before God. Ask God to speak to you about those situations.

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

FEBRUARY 28TH - MARCH 5TH: THE EXAMEN (PHILIPPIANS 1:9-10)

What have you learned so far during this season of prayer and fasting? What has been challenging? What has been good? A number of the questions in this prayer guide are from the examen. The fruit of practicing the examen is gratitude and being able to see God's presence with you throughout your day. Have you seen any of this type of fruit in your life over the past few weeks? If not, don't be discouraged, but keep trying. Sometimes it takes awhile for a new practice to bear fruit.

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions today/this week? How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where were you aware of God being with you today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and to thank God for helping you to be aware of his presence.

Today/In the last week, when have you felt alone, like God wasn't with you? Take some time to remember those moments and to bring them before God. Ask God to speak to you about those situations.

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

MARCH 6-12TH:
BEING THE BELOVED
(LUKE 3:21-22)

Do you see yourself as God's beloved child? How would you live life differently if your inner being were more rooted in God's love?

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions today/this week?
How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where were you aware of God being with you today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and to thank God for helping you to be aware of his presence.

Today/In the last week, when have you felt alone, like God wasn't with you? Take some time to remember those moments and to bring them before God. Ask God to speak to you about those situations.

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

MARCH 13-19TH:
FASTING
(MATTHEW 17:20-21)

How has fasting been for you? What has been challenging? What has been good?
How has God strengthened you while you fasted?

What has been happening to your body and to your emotions today/this week?
How have you been sleeping? What have you been feeling?

Where were you aware of God being with you today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and to thank God for helping you to be aware of his presence.

Today/In the last week, when have you felt alone, like God wasn't with you?
Take some time to remember those moments and to bring them before God.
Ask God to speak to you about those situations.

Where/How did you give and receive love today/this week? Where/How did you withhold love today/this week? Take some time to remember those moments and ask God to speak to you about those times.

MARCH 20-26TH:
JESUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER
- WHERE HIS STRENGTH CAME FROM
(MARK 14:32-36)

What has God been doing in your life during this season of prayer and fasting?
What has he been saying to you? What has been good about making space?

Jesus trusted his father and knew his father loved him. How is your relationship with God? Are you closer to God? Whether you feel closer or not, why do you think that is?

What are the challenges that lie ahead for you? How will you get your strength from God? How will you continue to make space for God in your life?

Has God been bringing to mind certain people or work he may be calling you to? How will you make space to respond to this calling?

