

PREPARE YOUR HEART AND MIND BY GIVING THANKS

Let's prepare for this time of prayer and fasting by shifting our focus to God's goodness and blessing in our lives. By offering Him thanks and praise — in any and all circumstances — we create a more positive, hopeful, and peaceful mindset from which to present our requests. God is worthy of our praise, so let's take some time to thank Him for his faithfulness, good and perfect ways, mercy and forgiveness, and unconditional love. And thank Him for the many ways you personally feel His presence in your life.

"Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods." (Psalm 95:1-3)

"I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with Thanksgiving." (Psalm 69:30)

"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds." (Psalm 9:1)

"The Lord is my strength and my shield in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him." (Psalm 28:7)

"I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving." (Psalm 69:30)

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (1 Chronicles 16:34)

"Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things." (Psalm 107:8-9)

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

"Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:20)

GUIDE TO PRAYER

UNITY WITH GOD

Pause and take time to examine your personal relationship with God. Read through the following verses and pray for any forgiveness and restoration, where needed. Our desire today is to fully unite ourselves with God's will for our life and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to unite as one church, one community, and one nation.

"Whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in Spirit." (1 Corinthians 6:16)

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." (Philippians 1:27)

"Jesus said, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:22-23)

UNITY IN OUR FAMILIES

Our families can be messy and challenging at times. And relationships with family members can range from healthy and life-giving to broken and hurtful. Take a few minutes to ask God to bring healing and restoration to your family and your relationships. Pray for God to replace anger with peace, hurt with forgiveness, grief with comfort, and sadness with joy. Today our prayer is that we would experience deep connection and unity with each of our family members.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:14)

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matthew 18:15)

"Honor your father and your mother, that your day may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12)

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

UNITY IN OUR CHURCH

We come together as a community of believers that seeks to boldly live out the gospel, being like-minded and one in both spirit and purpose. Our prayer today is that the Church will stand on the truths of God's Word, celebrating our one God and the power of the Holy Spirit. And we ask God for unity among those who follow Him.

"That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:25)

"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind." (Philippians 2:2)

"So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." (Romans 12:5)

"Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:11-16)

UNITY IN OUR NATION

God, we acknowledge the division in our country, and we ask for your forgiveness in our part on causing any division or strife. We ask that you make us acutely aware of our own weaknesses, and help us to guard against the dark forces that are at work to divide us and gain ground. Please fill us with your Spirit of love and unity, helping us to set aside our differences and to look to the greater cause—the cause of Christ. We seek to spread love, and we acknowledge that this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, so we ask that you move mightily across our nation. We pray that those far from you will hear the good news of the gospel and enter into a relationship with you or renew a relationship that has become distant. Use us to share this good news across our nation, bringing people to align with you and each other.

"Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourself." (Romans 12:10)

"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 11:19)

"I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23)

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:3-6)

"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Corinthians 13:11)

"The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory." (Psalm 102:15)

GUIDE TO FASTING

A right approach to fasting requires an appreciation for the biblical record of fasting, a clear definition of fasting, and a correct distinction between "religious" and biblical fasting.

DEFENDING FASTING

The biblical record on fasting reads like a "Who's Who" of Scripture. Moses, David, Jehosophat, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Jesus, Paul, and many other men and women of Scripture fasted. Though Jesus never commanded His followers to fast, He Himself fasted and assumed His followers would fast. (Matthew 6:16, Mark 2:18-22)

DEFINING FASTING

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence from food for a limited time for the purpose of expressing to God one's desires, dependence, and/or dedication. The normal fast was the total abstinence of food (but not water), and it could last anywhere from one to forty days. Abstaining from food and caloric drink is an accurate picture of fasting and represents the approach taken by the leadership of Hill Country Bible Church.

DISTINGUISHING FASTING

Many world religions practice fasting as one of many "good works" done in the hope of earning God's acceptance and forgiveness. Biblical Christianity, however, recognizes that man cannot earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Instead of man working his way up to God, Biblical Christianity teaches that God has reached down to man by graciously offering the free gift of eternal life to anyone who places their faith in Jesus Christ. Biblical fasting, then, is not something done in pursuit of a relationship with God, but is in response to a relationship with God (Isaiah 58).

In addition to requiring a good definition, a right approach to biblical fasting also necessitates a clear understanding of purpose.



FASTING

In God's Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis wrote, "The man who prays with fasting is giving heaven notice that he is truly in earnest."

A study of each of the passages in Scripture on fasting reveals two primary reasons for fasting and one significant result of fasting.

Two of the primary reasons for fasting:

To petition God intensely
To pursue God intimately

One of the primary results of fasting:

Dependence

What we know to be true in theory becomes crystal clear in experience. Without food, we begin to waste away physically, and apart from a growing relationship with Christ, we wither spiritually. When David compared his hungering and thirsting for God to physical hunger and thirst in the wilderness, he concluded that worship was the only thing that satisfied him (Psalm 63). Fasting moves us to humble worship of our Provider and promotes a craving for deeper fellowship with our Savior. Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4) Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread." (Job 23:12b)

With a clear understanding of definition and purpose, all that remains are some helpful suggestions on what to do while fasting. A suggested agenda follows some commonsense warnings.

AWARENESS

Before fasting, it is good to consult your physician where there may be implications for any existing health conditions. For example, those on prescription medicines or with chronic illnesses like diabetes should definitely seek the advice of their doctor. However, everyone should expect some physical discomfort while fasting. Common sense and wisdom should also be exercised regarding how to break a fast, especially extended fasts.

AN AGENDA

During fasting, hunger pains can serve as a reminder to pray and worship. If at all possible, commit the time that is normally spent in the preparation and eating of three meals to prayer and worship. Following is a suggested guide to spending an hour in prayer and worship.

Begin with worship by singing favorite praise choruses and hymns.

(10 minutes)

Continue by responding to God in prayer, acknowledging dependence upon Him.

(15 minutes)

Move to a time of personal reflection and confession of sin.

(5 minutes)

Allow time for Scripture reading.

(10 minutes)

Express your desires, longings, and concerns to God in prayer.

(15 minutes)

Close with a time of thanksgiving for God's goodness and provision.

(5 minutes)

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