

PREPARE YOU HEART AND MIND BY CONNECTING WITH GOD

We are given the gift of connection with God through Jesus Christ. The deeper our connection with God, the more meaningfully we are able to connect with others. As we enter the new year, we will be asking God to help us have a deeper, more meaningful connection with Him and with one another, and we are confident that this opportunity would be greatly beneficial for you too.

As we prepare for a time of prayer and fasting, let us shift our focus to our connection with God and others. First, offer God thanks and praise—for creating us with the need, desire, and ability to connect with Him. When we focus on our connection with Him, we create a more positive, hopeful, and peaceful mindset from which to present our requests. Next, God is worthy of our praise, so let's take some time to thank Him for creating us to be in relationship with others. Through healthy connection with others, we not only learn and grow, but we also create experiences and memories.

Finally, thank God for His faithfulness, good and perfect ways, mercy and forgiveness, unconditional love, and any other praises that you are led to offer. And thank Him for the many ways you personally experience His connection including your anticipation of connecting with Him during this time of prayer and fasting.

Life happens, and we may find ourselves struggling to connect with God and others. Prayerfully walk through these questions and reflect on your personal connection with God and others:

Our daily walk with God means we surrender our life totally to Him. How is your daily walk with God?

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke9:23)

How often are you talking to God? Is prayer a priority in your daily life?

"Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)

Do you have meaningful connection with others that leads to authentic relationships?

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Prayerfully walk through these questions and reflect on your personal connection with God and others. (Continued)

What are ways you love and serve others?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second commandment is: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39)

"Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)

How do you express gratitude daily?

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful." (Colossians 3:15)

"Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." (Psalm 107:8-9)

How often do you share God's love with others?

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

GUIDE TO PRAYER

OUR CONNECTION WITH GOD

As we enter the new year, we desire a deeper connection with God to guide our days, activities, and priorities. Pause and reflect on your connection with God, which we are given through Jesus Christ. Read through the following verses and pray for any forgiveness and restoration, where needed. Our desire today is to fully connect with God, so we are able to fully connect with others in meaningful relationships that lead to transformed lives.

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6)

"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart." (Jeremiah 24:7)

"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all." (Psalm 34:17-19)

"But you, Lord, you are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." (Psalm 86:15)

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6)

OUR CONNECTION WITH GOD (CONTINUED)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7)

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

OUR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Today's world is more virtual than ever. As we enter the new year, we recognize that technology will continue to be a large part of the way we do life. Yet, we also recognize that this virtual living is resulting in less meaningful connection with others. Many are experiencing more depression, loneliness, and anxiety than ever before. As we seek deeper connection with God, let's also ask Him to give us the ability to have a more meaningful connection with others.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:11-13)

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34)

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another —and all the more as you see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

OUR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS (CONTINUED)

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

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

"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)

"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34–35)

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

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.





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 common-sense warnings.

FASTING (CONTINUED)

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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