

GIVE THANKS FOR OUR IDENTITY IN HIM

We were made for passion, purpose, and significance. We each have a calling, and it starts with our unique identity, gifting, passions, and talents. Each of us has been chosen by God, redeemed by Jesus, and secured by the Holy Spirit all for the purpose of living a life for Him.

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Ephesians 1:22-23)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:5)

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

"And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:24)

"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:7)

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2: 20)

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3:1)

- How is your life different now that you know your identity in Christ?
- How is God working through you to impact others?

FROM MORE EFFORT TO MORE JESUS

We are the physical representation of Jesus on this earth. When we are filled with more Jesus, we fill everything and everywhere with the presence of Jesus. The church is not a building; it's the body of Christ and each of us living out our divine calling by God every day to transform the world with the presence of God.

"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Ephesians 1: 22-23)

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

We are all Chosen by God.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Ephesians 1:3-4)

"But now, this is what the Lord says – he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel; Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

Each of us are Redeemed by Jesus.

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7)

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

We are all secured by the Holy Spirit.

"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation- have also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

- Wherever you are right now, God's spirit is dwelling in you. The Holy Spirit never separates from us and guarantees his presence with us always.
- If we were all rooted in more Jesus and less effort on our behalf, what do you imagine the impact in our culture would be?

FROM MORE VOLUNTEERS TO MORE MASTERPIECES

Every disciple is a unique, handcrafted-by-God vessel for expressing the fullness of Jesus. As believers, we have a responsibility to help others become disciples for Christ by investigating the personal calling that mobilizes them for a one-of-a-kind mission for more.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:16-19)

"...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love". (Ephesians 3:17)

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had." (Acts 4:32)

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." (John 13:35)

"Do everything in love." (1 Corinthians 16:14)

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

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

"May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ perseverance." (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

"Greater love has no one that this; to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)

- The life each of us long for, filled with joy and purpose, is the life God has planned for us.
- What plans does God have for you as His masterpiece? What mission has he called you to?
- How are you living out your masterpiece mission from God with other believers?

FROM MORE GUILT TO MORE LOVE

As we live out our masterpiece mission, God wants us to be motivated by love, not guilt. Being deeply connected to God — being "rooted and established in love" — gives us the inner strength and foundation we need to live out our unique mission. And this leads to immeasurably more both in and from our life than we can ask or imagine.

God's love is our inner strength.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Ephesians 3:16-17)

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:2)

God's love is our foundation and source to live out our more.

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:16

God's love leads to immeasurable more.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

"See great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1)

- Are you motivated by guilt or love?
- Tend to do things by yourself (outer strength) or with God's help (inner strength)?
- Why do you need God's inner strength to live out your more?
- Spend some time reflecting on God's great love for you.
- How would your life look if your love had deep roots and a firm foundation in Christ?
- Thank God for a time where he did "immeasurably more" for you.

FROM MORE HIERARCHY TO MORE MISSIONARIES

We each have a unique personal calling from God, through the grace apportioned by Christ to us. We have specific God-given gifts and talents meant to be used to mobilize the church to fulfill its mission through each person. Do you know why God created you? Imagine how different the world might look if every believer was actively both growing in and living out their mission and faith.

"So 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." (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Out of God's grace we have all been given a masterpiece mission.

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1)

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Ephesians 4:7)

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3)

"When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:12-14)

God has given gifted people to equip and unleash us to accomplish his global mission.

"So, 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." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1)

- What is something you can do this week to grow spiritually?
- What are some of the unique areas you live, work, and play where you can be a missionary?
- Ask God to give you grace, strength, wisdom, and perseverance to fulfill your masterpiece mission.

FROM MORE PROGRAMS TO MORE MISSION FIELDS

You have been chosen and created to do something uniquely prepared for you by our Creator. Each of us were created as a work of special craftsmanship to serve an incredible purpose. And we were made to both live and carry out our mission in life in unity with others, not in isolation, with an eye toward changing the world.

Hill Country Bible Church Mission

Each of us, together...saturating greater Austin with the love of Jesus.

Hill Country Bible Church Vision

Together our vision is to be a movement of changed lives that impacts Greater Austin and beyond for Christ.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, Live as children of light... This is why it is said; "Wake up sleeper, rise from the dear, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Ephesians 5:8, 14-17)

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

"For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)

"For you have been called for the purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

"A new commandment. I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34)

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (Colossians 3:12)

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2:3-4)

- Reflect on Christ's great sacrifice for you.
- Are you intentionally serving Christ through your mission to bring others to Him?
- How do you resemble Christ in your daily life?
- As a dearly loved child of God, what are some ways you can follow Christ's example of sacrificial love as you live out your masterpiece mission?
- What are your special talents, gifts, passions, or experiences that can be used to change lives?
- God placed you on His team to change the world together are you part of His team? Are you living out His mission with other believers?

FROM MORE STRATEGY TO MORE SURRENDER

The enemy will do everything possible to thwart God's plan for His church. Together we are called to win this battle. To win, we must dedicate ourselves to the mission Jesus has laid out for us and be intentional in living out His. It's not about what we can do, but it's about surrendering to Christ and what he can do.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:10-12)

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." (Ephesians 6:10)

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:28-31)

"When I called, you answered me; you greatly emboldened me." (Psalm 138:3)

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

"Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (Ephesians 6:13)

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17)

"...being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience..." (Colossians 1:11)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." (Romans 1:16)

- Do you see church as a building, an event, or a program? How does Ephesians describe the church?
- Do you try to accomplish your masterpiece mission under your own power, or do you seek God's strength?
- What do you do to establish God's word and truth in your heart and mind?
- How can you use God's word as a "sword" in spiritual battles?

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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