**What is 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)

**FASTING PRECAUTION**

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.

**HELP – I AM HUNGRY**

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).