

So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. **For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.** - DEUTERONOMY 31:6

Come near to God and He will come near to you. - JAMES 4:8



Prayer GUIDE

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. **Tell God what you need,** and thank Him for all He has done. - PHILIPPIANS 4:6

But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. - MATTHEW 6:33

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. - MATTHEW 11:28-30

Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge. - PSALM 62:8

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake. **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me;** Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely **Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,** and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. - PSALM 23

Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by **Your great power** and outstretched arm. **Nothing is too hard for You.** - JEREMIAH 32:17

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. - HEBREWS 13:5

I look up to the mountains, where does my help come from? **My help comes from the Lord,** who made heaven and earth! - PSALM 121:1-2

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. - JAMES 4:10

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and **know my anxious thoughts.** See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. - PSALM 139:23-24

Dear Bayou Church Family,

God has big things in mind for us 2022. These past two years have brought both ongoing challenges and unforeseen opportunities to each of us individually and to all of us as a church family. I believe 2022 is a critical year for us as a church and will set the stage for how God expands our influence in Acadiana and beyond in the years to come.

This guide is intended to inspire and help you get started in making the most of your prayer journey, including a focus on the principle of fasting. Just imagine what can happen if all of our church family commits to PRAY FIRST ... living out our vision by seeking God's wisdom for every decision we make, every conversation we have, every experience we create, and every mission project we pursue.

As we begin the year together in prayer, expect God to speak to you, to guide you, to strengthen you, and to give you the wisdom you need to follow Jesus into whatever He has in store during 2022.

Praying for you,



Sean Walker

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Philippians 4:6 (NLT)



Prayer

GUIDE

► PICK A TIME AND PLACE

You can pray anytime and anywhere. We should pray spontaneously whenever and wherever we sense a prompting in our hearts—however, our lives are fueled by prayer, so we shouldn't leave it up to spontaneity. Pick a consistent time and place when you can be alone.

► LISTEN BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Prayer is not a recitation, but a conversation—a conscious, personal communication with God. Just as God speaks to us in His Word, He is listening when we pray. It may not feel that way, but He is always on the other side of prayer.

Let God speak first. Sit quietly and wait. Begin by reading something from the Bible. Put His living and active words into your ears, and let them shape and inspire what you say back to Him. Not sure where to start? The front cover of this guide is filled with powerful verses. Start there!

▶ **PRIORITIZE THE SPIRITUAL OVER THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL**

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Physical needs are important, but they pale in comparison to our spiritual, emotional and eternal needs. We should spend as much time praying for our spiritual health, for the salvation of our loved ones, and for the spread of the Gospel as we pray about anything else.

▶ **DON'T BE AFRAID TO STOP AND PRAY NOW**

Prayer should be prioritized and scheduled, but the beauty of our freedom and mercy in Christ is that prayer can happen anywhere. When you feel the impulse to pray, seize it. Take it as the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Pray right there in the moment with the person who asks you to pray for them. It can become an unexpected life-giving moment for both of you.

▶ **ASK HIM ABOUT ANYTHING—NOTHING IS TOO BIG OR TOO SMALL**

Many of us lack courage and imagination in our prayer lives. We have a little box of routine things we're willing to ask God for, and we take on everything else on our own. Do we have enough faith to think God cares about another Monday morning at work or the challenging relationships in our lives? Philippians 4:6, says, “Do not be anxious about anything”—your random conversation with that friend, your sleep tonight, this month's budget—“but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

▶ **BE WILLING TO ASK AGAIN**

If God has given you a burden or desire that has yet to be fulfilled, be willing to ask Him again and again. Jesus knew we would lose heart in prayer, specifically that we would pray for things for long enough that we would start to question if God was even listening. But He wants us to keep asking, keep pleading, keep praying. In Luke 18:4-8, He tells His disciples a story about a widow seeking justice from a judge. She pled and pled with him. Luke writes, “don't you think God will surely give justice to His chosen people who cry out to Him day and night?” The widow was rewarded for her persistence by an unrighteous judge. How much more will God listen to His precious sons and daughters who ask and ask and ask? Don't be afraid to pray and ask Him, again.

▶ **ATTEND NIGHT OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER**

A relaxed, extended time of uncomplicated worship, communion and prayer offers us an opportunity to step out of the flurry of everyday life and think of the world from God's point of view. It is a refreshing experience of Christ-centered community as together we cast our burdens at His feet and are reminded of what is truly important. This kind of collective experience binds us together in a way that nothing else can and provides us the opportunity to pray for each other and our church's vision to transform lives in Acadiana (and beyond) through Christ-centered relationships.

▶ PARTICIPATE IN FASTING WITH US THIS MONTH

If this is a new experience for you, here is some guidance that may be helpful. Fasting is intentionally abstaining from something to focus on and draw closer to God. Jesus modeled it (see Matthew 4:1-4) and expects us to do the same (see Matthew 6:16). It's not "if" we fast, but "when" we fast, we can expect many results, including growing closer to God, receiving wisdom/direction about an important decision, feeling more solidarity with those who suffer and increasing self-control.

HOW DO WE FAST?

Removing what is not as important helps me to focus on what is most important. Determine what you will remove. This may include food, cell phone, computer, Netflix/TV, social media, electronics—anything that distracts you from focusing on God.

1. Create a plan. Start small. Establish a start and end time. You can record your plan to the right.
2. Don't advertise it. Fasting is unbiblical when we do it to show off our spirituality (see Matthew 6:16-18), but we do it with sincerity. Also, make sure to communicate with your family about your fast.
3. Be open and transparent with the Lord. Confess your sins (see 1 Samuel 7:6).
4. Humble yourself before the Lord (see Psalm 35:13).
5. Meditate on God's Word, especially when you feel yourself struggling to maintain the fast (see Matthew 4:2-4).

THE BAYOU FASTING PLAN

Week #1:

Fast for one meal
(or one day from social media, etc.)

Week #2:

Fast for two consecutive meals
(or two days from social media, etc.)

Week #3:

Fast for three consecutive meals
(or three days from social media, etc.)

▶ RECORD YOUR PLAN HERE

There's something powerful about writing down your prayer and fasting plan. It is an opportunity to remind yourself of what you have committed to do and later to celebrate how God has grown you through this experience. This is just between you and God now, but what a life-giving testimony it may become later on.

Over the Next 30 Days I Commit to:

Daily Prayer Time: _____

My Prayer Place: _____

I Am Praying For:

Participating in Fasting? ___ No ___ Yes

If Yes, Describe Your Plan: