



**FAST FOCUS, SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 2017
FASTING INSTRUCTIONS**

**WE WILL FAST BY ABSTAINING FROM FRIED FOODS AND SWEETS
(CANDY, SODAS, JUICE, CAKES, PIES, ETC.) ALL DAY
ONLY WATER ALLOWED**

**PLEASE DEVOTE THIS TIME TO READING YOUR BIBLE AND
PRAYER AS TIME PERMITS**

Please consult your physician if you are insulin dependent, an expectant or nursing mother or if you have a pre-existing medical condition. While fasting is a spiritually fulfilling exercise, God would not command a physical exercise that would harm His people physically or emotionally.

“...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” ~1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

I saw a social media post recently quoting Pastor Reggie Sharpe that read, “The bible doesn't say FOR all things give thanks, but IN all things give thanks, so even if I can't thank Him for it, I can still thank Him IN it.” When I read this statement, my mind automatically travelled back to a few weeks ago when a group of us had the opportunity to journey to Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa. The living conditions were [in most cases] less than humane, let alone ideal, but somehow the South Africans found a way to give thanks IN their circumstances. This cultural difference really spoke volumes to many of us. We stood in admiration and awe at how the South Africans were a very grateful and high-spirited people despite their living conditions. Many of them danced and sang and gave thanks to God for everything that they had, despite their lack of many of the

basic necessities. The Scriptures instruct us to “rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances”(1 Thess. 5:16-18-NIV). The South Africans have embraced these instructions, intricately weaving them into the fabric of their rich culture.

Meanwhile, in America... We, as a people, are some of the most affluent and advanced people on the face of the planet, and yet somehow we still find a way to complain about what we don't have or not having enough. We take for granted things as simple as clean drinking water or a pair of shoes. The luxury of being able to use the restroom indoors and choose what we would like to eat for meals. We park our cars in the garages and driveways of our fancy homes, where we enter the doors and turn on (and leave on) lights in rooms that we're not occupying and plug up our gadgets and electronics. Even if we don't have everything we want, most of have everything we need. Where we lack, we have access to resources that we sometimes don't even take advantage of. Meanwhile, the people of South Africa have limited to no access to clean drinking water, clothes and shoes, electricity, and other basic needs. With all that we have and have access to, we still sometimes forget to rejoice, pray and thank God.

Most of our parents, grandparents, guardians, teachers, pastors, etc. have taught us over the years: be grateful for what you have because there are people in this world who are not as fortunate. To that lesson, I would add what the South Africans seem to live by and that is learning to give thanks in ALL circumstances. We have on some accounts mastered how to give thanks FOR, but we could stand a few refresher courses on giving thanks IN. To suggest being thankful in all circumstances is not to deny the reality of the situation; it is to choose a position of gratitude despite the situation. When we choose to give thanks in all circumstances, the Bible says this is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus. (1Thess. 18-NIV) What can be more pleasing and acceptable to God than participating in and obeying the instructions that God has willed for our lives?

ACTION

Reflect on a time or times when we didn't give thanks in a situation or circumstance, and we could/should have.

Ask God for forgiveness, and thank God for still being a loving, gracious, and generous God, even in our ingratitude.

Make it a point to be more intentional about giving thanks to God in every circumstance, even when they're less than ideal.

Prayer:

God, we thank you for the inspiration and the spirit of our South African brothers and sisters. Even though they are poor in resources, they are very rich in spirit and community. We thank you for their example of giving thanks in all circumstances, even when they don't meet our expectations. We ask you to forgive us, oh God, for the times that we have "cried with a loaf of bread under our arms". Forgive us, oh Lord, for the times that we have been ungrateful when our basic needs were met, even if we couldn't or didn't have everything we wanted. Help us, Lord, to be more intentional about rejoicing, praying continually, and giving you thanks. Help us to make our lives a celebration to you. Things aren't always the way we think they should be, but they could be a lot worse. And so God we just give you thanks and praise for our very lives. We thank you for all that we have and even for what we lack. We thank you, God, that you've been so kind and generous to us, even in our ingratitude. We pray for our sisters and brothers, near and far, who live in poverty because the Earth and all of its fullness belongs to you. It's up to us to share the resources that you have made available to us. We ask for a spirit of sharing to be released in this world. Help us to be your hands and feet in this world so that people will know a true and living God. Lord, you are good to us; you've been better than good! The least we can do is say thank you.

In Jesus name, we give you thanks...for and IN all things. Amen.

Submitted by Shun Davenport