

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading  
Worship Service and Communion 10:30AM 1<sup>st</sup> February 2026  
Jill Bird leading and Simon Bird preaching  
[www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk)  
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## FASTING

Fling wide the gates, open up the ancient doors,  
And the King of glory will come in. Who is this King of glory?  
He is the LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD of angel armies, victorious in battle Psalm 24

Let us remember the pattern we learnt last week of prayer, as we come into the Lord's presence.  
First nearness. Our Father in heaven, our good Father who loves us. Then greatness as we stand  
in awe of his majesty and power – hallowed be your name

I love You, Lord for your mercy never failed me  
All my days, I've been held in Your hands  
From the moment that I wake up until I lay my head  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

All my life You have been faithful, All my life You have been so, so good  
With every breath that I am able Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

I love Your voice You have led me through the fire  
In darkest night You are close like no other  
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend  
Oh, I have lived in the goodness of God,

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me  
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now I give You everything  
'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me

Goodness of God lyrics © So Essential Tunes, Bethel Music Publishing,

**Yours Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour. Yours O Lord is the kingdom and you are exalted as head over all. 1 Chron**

### Song MP 335

In my life, Lord, be glorified; be glorified. In my life, Lord, be glorified today.  
In your church, Lord be glorified; be glorified. In your church, Lord, be glorified today  
In your world Lord be glorified; be glorified. In your world Lord, be glorified today

**FAMILY TIME Good news Bad news**

**Song MP 225    *The offering will be taken during the singing of this song***

*He's got the whole world, in His hands, He's got the whole wide world, in His hands,  
He's got the whole world, in His hands, He's got the whole world in his hands*

He's got you and me brother, in his hands. He's got you and me brother in his hands.  
He's got you and me brother, in his hands. He's got the whole world in his hands

He's got Iran and Gaza in his hands,  
He's got Ukraine and Russia in his hands  
He's got Hong Kong and China in his hands  
He's got the whole world in his hands

He's got everyone everywhere, in His hands, He's got everyone everywhere in His hands,  
He's got everyone everywhere in His hands, He's got the whole world in His hands.

Children and young people leave for their classes

**BIBLE READING 1 Joel 2. 12-17**

**BIBLE READING 2: Matt 6. 16-18**

**HYMN MP 509**

O Lord, the clouds are gathering The fire of judgment burns  
How we have fallen!  
O Lord, you stand appalled to see Your laws of love so scorned  
And lives so broken

Have mercy, Lord, Have mercy, Lord  
Forgive us, Lord Forgive us, Lord  
Restore us, Lord Revive your church again  
Let justice flow Let justice flow Like rivers Like rivers  
And righteousness like a never failing stream

O Lord, over the nations now Where is the dove of peace?  
Her wings are broken  
O Lord, while precious children starve the tools of war increase  
Their bread is stolen

O Lord, dark powers are poised to flood Our streets with hate and fear  
We must awaken!  
O Lord, let love reclaim the lives That sin would sweep away  
And let your kingdom come

Yet, O Lord, your glorious cross shall tower triumphant in this land  
Evil confounding  
Through the fire your suffering church display the glories of her Christ  
Praises resounding!

**SERMON "Holy Habits: Cultivating What God Has Planted" FASTING**

Talking about fasting must seem like BAD NEWS. But fasting really is GOOD NEWS. The clue is in our reading: Jesus told us when we fast, our Father in heaven will **reward** us (Matt 6:18). How can this be? This is a series on holy habits. We are looking at regularly reading the Bible, praying, fasting and reflecting on our actions. We do these to keep our relationship with God and to help it grow; their objective is for us to meet God and enjoy his presence. What better goal in life is there? So, if fasting is part of drawing close to God, then it must be GOOD NEWS.

We see this in Anna, who was led to come and see the infant Jesus presented at the Temple. It says she never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying (Luke 2:36-38). So her Spirit-filled life, as a prophet, of worship, fasting and praying, was rewarded by seeing Jesus. Fasting was part of her spirituality and GOOD NEWS for her.

I have asked around and not many have tried fasting. Fasting should be a normal part of our Christian lives (bad news again!). You remember Jesus said, 'When you fast,' not 'if you fast.' It does not say *must* – there is no compulsion in the Christian life, but God wants us to obey because we love him (1 Jn 5:3 }

So I have a big task this morning: not just to teach about fasting, not just make an interesting sermon, but to persuade all of us to try it. Are you ready to be challenged?

**1. Fast for the right reasons.** In the reading Jesus called them hypocrites who fasted to show how religious they were (v16). Zechariah, the prophet in the Old Testament, asked the people, 'is your fasting for God?' (7:5). Our fasting is all about seeking God - not showing off to others, or to think it makes us right with God, we don't earn God's favour.

**2. Make sure the rest of our life is right.** Fasting is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Isaiah told the people they fasted to seek God (58:3); but God was not interested because there was injustice. However, when they put this right, God promised to hear and answer (9-10).

**3. It increases our sense of dependence on God.** When Jesus fasted in the wilderness at the start of his ministry, he resisted Satan's temptations with the words 'It is written, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."' (Matt 4:4. One reason God took the Israelites into the wilderness was to humble and test them, to feed them on manna, so they would learn to depend on God's words (Dt 8:3).

**4. It brings self-discipline and restraint.** Paul does not think the Christian life is meant to be comfortable. He goes into strict training like an athlete, and speaks of us as soldiers (1 Cor 9:24-27, 2 Tim 2:3-4). Fasting is part of our training regime.

In our western lifestyle, food and so much else have huge importance. Many of us love eating out. I think going without food is telling ourselves and our bodies that our real source of nourishment is from God. Fasting helps break the grip of the world and the flesh in us. Jesus said, 'my food is to do the will of the Father' (Jn 4:34) and he promises hidden manna to the victorious one (Rev 2:17). So by fasting we find our life becomes focused on heavenly, rather than earthly, things.

**5. It is a sign of humbling and mourning** (Ps 35:13, Joel 2:12) When we approach a holy God, the only attitude we can come with is humility, grieving for our own sin and those around us. It expresses the intensity of our relationship with God: when we fast, we mean business with God.

**6. Fasting intensifies prayer.**

A key moment in the growth of the early church was sending Barnabus and Paul on their first mission. We read that the church in Antioch were guided to do this following worshipping, fasting and praying (Acts 13:2-3).

Fasting is mentioned many times in the Old Testament at moments of crisis. 2 Chronicles 7:14 is a verse that has inspired much intercession for our nation. It was God's promise to Solomon after he dedicated the Temple; it was to use in desperate times of famine or plague. Humbling here would mean fasting.

A famous victory was won under king Jehoshaphat. A vast army was coming to invade, but he enquired of the Lord and proclaimed a fast (2 Chr 20:2-3). They did not need to fight, but were led to sing and praise, and God defeated the enemies (22).

**7. Fasting brings spiritual power.** It seems that it was necessary for Jesus to start his ministry with fasting and prayer. This empowered him and gave him the victory over the devil and his temptations. Luke records that Jesus went out *full* of the Holy Spirit, but he returned in the *power* of the Spirit **So let's do it!**

Biblical fasting is primarily abstaining from food, and I would encourage us to try that. However, partial fasts, e.g. eating vegetables, or abstaining from things like chocolate, tea and coffee, or even taking a break from our phones, can serve a spiritual purpose.

Nowadays, many fast for health reasons, which is good. However, we Christians should see fasting as a means of seeking God and taking time for prayer, rather than an end in itself.

If you have never fasted before, try missing one meal, then build up to longer fasts. Those with a medical condition, e.g. diabetes or pregnancy, should take advice before fasting; but most people should be able to skip a meal or two without harm.

Actually, our bodies are amazingly designed to cope with famine. They store any surplus carbohydrate as fat, planning for a famine ahead. The problem in the West is there is so much food we keep on eating and get fat. But when we fast, we use the fat, and really, we can survive for several weeks. Being a scientist, I find it fascinating to think about my body switching from using food to using stored fat.

We may feel very hungry in the first day or so, but this will pass. One way of coping is to drink some water to 'fool' the stomach. By the way, during fasting we should drink plenty to compensate for the water we would get via food. During this time, especially if you have not fasted before, toxins get burnt up and we may get headaches, especially if we are withdrawing from caffeine; but this too will pass.

When preparing for fasting, it might be a good idea to: drop caffeine a few days ahead, so you get over withdrawal; not eat heavily before; and take a last meal of fruit. When breaking the fast, eat lightly. Depending how long you have fasted, start again with fruit juice, then fruit and soups. Many Christians have a tradition of a 24-hour fast one day per week. This is a very helpful habit, and it means we get used to fasting.

**Do you now think fasting is GOOD NEWS?** Do you see how helpful a Christian habit it is? It helps us draw close to God and enjoy His presence. It helps us deal with the world and flesh in us and be self-disciplined. It focusses our attention on heavenly things. It intensifies our prayer and brings spiritual power. Will you try fasting? You will be rewarded!

### **Time of response and preparation for Communion**

Soften my heart, Lord. Soften my heart From all indifference Set me apart  
To feel your compassion To weep with your tears  
Come soften my heart, O Lord Soften my heart MP 606  
All I once held dear, built my life upon  
All this world reveres, and wars to own  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss  
Spent and worthless now, compared to this  
*Knowing you, Jesus Knowing you, there is no greater thing*  
*You're my all, you're the best You're my joy, my righteousness and I love you, Lord*  
Now my heart's desire is to know you more  
To be found in you and known as yours  
To possess by faith what I could not earn  
All-surpassing gift of righteousness  
Oh, to know the power of your risen life  
And to know You in Your sufferings

To become like you in your death, my Lord  
So with you to live and never die MP 709

**Lord we come to the meal you asked us to eat regularly. We come to say thank you for laying down your life for us, so that we can know life here in all its fullness and the sure hope of eternal life. We come to give you our lives as we say again we love you and trust you for all that's ahead.**

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour AMEN**

**PRAYER OF INTERCESSION Benna and Ernest**

**Heavenly Father, We come before You with humble and trusting hearts, knowing that You are Lord of all nations and Shepherd of all people. We thank You that in Your Kingdom there are no strangers, only brothers and sisters loved by You.**

**We pray for the world, and especially for places marked by suffering and unrest. We lift up Iran and all who are affected by violence, protest, fear, and loss. We remember our Iranian brothers and sisters, their families and friends. May you comfort those who grieve, strengthen those who feel anxious, and surround all with peace and safety. May justice, truth, and compassion prevail, and may Your mercy be known even in the darkest places.**

**We pray, Lord, for all our brothers and sisters who are away from home and now living in the U.K. Be with them in their journey, and grant them strength, peace and joy as they serve and live far from their loved ones.**

**Lord, we lift up to You all who are vulnerable during this cold winter – especially the elderly, the homeless, and those struggling to stay warm. May your grace and mercy provide warm shelter and care, and move our hearts to compassion and action. May no one be forgotten in this season, and may Your love be made known through the kindness of others.**

**Lord, we lift up the United Kingdom to you. May the people of this land find fresh hope in the Gospel and strength in the person of Jesus Christ. May the UK continue to be a place where the values of faith, hope, and love are upheld for generations to come.**

**Compassionate Lord, we lift up Gwen to you, please surround her with Your healing presence. May Your grace be felt each moment.**

**Lord, we pray for Abbey Baptist Church. Help us to grow together in faith, love, and unity, and teach us to welcome newcomers with open hearts. May our Church be a place where we encounter Your presence, hear the gospel clearly, and find hope, belonging and new life in Christ.**

**We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen**

HYMN MP 859

I want to serve the purpose of God In my generation  
I want to serve the purpose of God while I am alive  
I want to give my life for something that will last forever  
Oh I delight I delight to do Your will

What is on Your heart, Tell me what to do  
Let me know Your will and I will follow You

I want to build with silver and gold In my generation  
I want to build with silver and gold while I am alive  
I want to give my life for something that will last forever  
Oh I delight I delight to do Your will

I want to see the kingdom of God In my generation  
I want to see the kingdom of God while I am alive  
I want to give my life For something that will last forever  
Oh I delight I delight to do Your will

I want to see the Lord come again in my generation  
I want to see the Lord come again while I am alive  
I want to give my life for something that will last forever  
Oh I delight I delight to do Your will

**BLESSING** May the God of all hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him.  
May we overflow with God's love so our lives bring glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit AMEN

**THE GRACE**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.

**Events to highlight Today after the service Newcomers lunch plus Connect group activities**

Wednesday	4th	10.30	Renew Café	12.00	Bible study and First Steps course
		2pm	ICaf		English lesson
Thursday	5th	10.30	Toddlers	10.30	Bible study
Friday	6th	10.00	Abbey team at Katesgrove school		Year 3
		10.30	Prayer meeting	5pm	Table tennis
		6.30 – 9.30	Worship 24/7		at Southcote Family church
Sunday	8th	10.30	Worship service followed by Church lunch		
		2pm	B1 exam practice		