Lesson: National Humiliation Day

This is a day for us to swallow our pride and humble ourselves before God in thanks for His saving grace and undying support in times of war and disaster. Even if you are not religious you can benefit from being grateful and humble, especially when things that looked bad turned out to be good. In the summer of 1775, the Continental Congress issued a proclamation declaring a day of “humility, fasting, and prayer” for the United Colonies in deference to King George III; they were hoping for a peaceful reconciliation of differences between England and the colonists after the battles of Lexington and Concord. Though it did not result in the desired effect, this observance periodically continued. In 1779, General Washington declared a cessation of labor for “humility, fasting, and prayer” by the soldiers. In 1798, President Adams resumed this tradition so the nation could take a day off and humble themselves before God. In 1854, Queen Victoria declared a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer in England to stifle the cholera outbreak. In 1861, President Lincoln issued a declaration for a day of “public humiliation, fasting and prayer” and the “offering of fervent supplications to Almighty God for the safety and welfare” of the United States. Lincoln feared the country had been forgetting God and the peace that He offers; he wanted the people to “acknowledge and revere the supreme government of God”. The USA was a privileged nation, despite all of its flaws, and people needed to remember this in the midst of conflict. There was no particular date when this observance was officially recognized. However, in 1923, Chinese-Canadian immigrants declared a day of humiliation in protest of the Canadian Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting further immigration from China and causing the splitting up of their families. These protesters hijacked Canada Day which occurred the first of July in lieu of Humiliation Day. Fortunately, that law was repealed in 1947, and Humiliation Day has been celebrated on the third of January ever since. This holiday is now being observed around the world.

What does the Bible say about humility?

* PRO 11:2–4 ~ With pride comes shame; with humility comes wisdom. The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perseverance of the transgressors will destroy them. Riches are of no use in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers one from death.
* PRO 15:33 ~ The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor comes humility.
* PRO 16:18–19 ~ Arrogance and a proud spirit are followed by destruction. It is better to share a humble spirit with the lowly than to share the wealth of the proud.
* PRO 22:4 ~ Through humility and the fear of God we receive riches, honor, and life.
* PRO 28:25 ~ People with proud hearts serve only to create conflict, but those who trust in God will prosper.
* PRO 29:23 ~ Pride brings a person down, but honor lifts the humble in spirit.
* ISA 57:15 ~ God says, “I will live in the high holy place as will all people having a humble and repentant spirit, because I will revive the spirits of those who are humble.”
* LUK 14:7–11 ~ Jesus told a parable to address those who sought the best seats in the house. When you are invited to a formal affair like a wedding, do not choose the seat with the highest honor, for that seat may be reserved for someone else who is more important than you. It will be embarrassing when you are asked to move to a seat of lesser honor. Instead, sit at the seat with the lowest honor; if a seat of higher honor has been reserved for you, you will be shown respect by being asked to move to a seat of higher honor. The moral of the story is this: Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.
* GAL 6:1–2 ~ Brothers, if someone is overtaken by sin, you who are spiritual need to restore that person in the spirit of humility, considering that you also can be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens to fulfill the law of Christ.
* PHP 2:3–8 ~ Do not do anything through strife or vanity; instead, be humble, and regard others as better than yourselves. Do not focus on yourself, focus on others like Christ did, who although He was equal with God, He took on the form of a man. Instead of exalting Himself He became the servant of all. He humbled Himself before others and was obedient unto death, even death on the cross.
* 1 PE 3:8–9 ~ Live in harmony with one another with love, sympathy, compassion, and humility. Do not repay evil with evil or insult others, but repay with blessings. Be a blessing to others for you were called to inherit a blessing.
* 1 PE 5:5–6 ~ Show respect to your elders. Serve each other. Clothe yourselves in humility. For God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourself before God and He will exalt you in due time.

What does the Bible say about fasting?

* 2 SA 1:12 ~ The people mourned, wept, and fasted until evening, for Saul, his son Jonathan, and the army of Israel who had fallen by the sword.
* 2 CH 7:14 ~ God says, “If my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear them, and I will forgive their sins and heal their land.”
* DAN 9:3–6, 16 ~ I looked up to the Lord in prayer and supplications, with fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to Him and confessed, saying, “Oh Lord, great and powerful God, who keeps the covenant and is merciful to those who love Him and keep His commandments. We have sinned and have done wickedly; we have rebelled by disregarding your laws and judgments. We have not listened to your servants and prophets who spoke your name before kings and princes, and our forefathers, and to all the people of Israel. Oh Lord, in accordance with your righteousness, I beg you, let your anger pass and your fury be turned away from Jerusalem and your holy mountain, because of our sins and those of our fathers; for Jerusalem and your people have become a reproach to all the nations.”
* JOE 2:12–13 ~ The Lord says to turn to Him with all your heart, in fasting and prayer, with weeping and mourning. Rend your heart, not your garments and turn back to God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, with great kindness, and He will forgive those who repent of evil.
* MAT 6:5, 16 ~ Jesus said, “Do not pray or fast like the hypocrites do, who pretend to be pious, praying and fasting in public places and before the congregations so everyone can see them. That display is the only reward they will ever receive for their efforts.”
* MAR 2:19 ~ Should the wedding guests fast while the groom is with them? When the groom goes away, then it will be time to fast.
* LUK 18:9–14 ~ Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Two men went to the temple to pray: a Pharisee and a publican. The Pharisee said, “Thank you Lord that I am not a sinner like other men, such as that tax collector, because I give tithes and I fast twice a week.” The publican bowed low before the altar and beat on his breast saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Only the publican returned home justified by God. Those who exalt themselves will later be humbled, and those who humble themselves will later be exalted.
* ACT 14:23 ~ And they (Saul and Barnabas) ordained elders in every church, praying and fasting as they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed.
* ROM 14:5–8 ~ One person considers a particular day more sacred than other days; another person considers each day alike. Both should be completely confident in their decision. Those who regard one day as special, do so to the Lord. Those who feast, eat to the Lord and give Him thanks. Those who fast, do so to the Lord and give Him thanks. Nobody lives totally to themselves and nobody dies totally to themselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
* 1 CO 7:5 ~ Do not deprive one another, unless it is during a time of fasting and prayer; then come together again so that Satan does not tempt you when you are vulnerable.

What does the Bible say about prayer?

* PSA 19:14 ~ David prayed, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”
* PSA 50:15 ~ The Lord says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”
* PSA 119:18, 27, 33, 35–39, 41 ~ Open my eyes so that I can see wondrous things from your Law. Make me understand your rules of conduct and I will meditate upon your wondrous works. Teach me your statutes and I will keep them until the end. Lead me in the paths of righteousness. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to personal gain. Turn my eyes from vanity and give me life in your ways. Let your steadfast love and salvation come to me.
* ISA 65:24 ~ God says, “I will answer you before you even call; I will hear you before you even speak.”
* JER 33:3 ~ The Lord says, “Call on me and I will answer you, and show you great and wonderful things that you have never known.”
* MAT 6:6–7 ~ Jesus taught: When you pray, do so in private. Pray to the Father in your mind and He will know what you are thinking. Pray to Him secretly, and He will reward you openly. Do not use vain repetitions like the unbelievers do, for they think they will be heard for their many words.
* MAT 7:7 ~ Jesus taught: Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.
* MAR 11:23–24 ~ Jesus taught: Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it and you will. If you pray without doubting, you can make the mountain fall into the sea.
* MAR 14:38 ~ Jesus said, “Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation.”
* JOH 14:13 ~ Jesus said, “Whatever you pray for in my name, the Father will do it, so He may be glorified in the Son.”
* ROM 8:26 ~ The Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we pray. We do not know what we should pray for all the time. But through the act of prayer, God analyzes our needs and answers our prayers in a way that benefits us.
* EPH 6:18–19 ~ Pray all the time in the Spirit. Keep alert and persevere. Pray for Christians, prophets, and priests, that their words will proclaim the mystery of the Gospel.
* PHP 4:6–7 ~ Do not have anxiety about anything, but pray for everything. With thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your heart and mind in Jesus Christ.
* COL 4:2 ~ Continue to pray and wait for the answer, giving thanks for the result.
* 1 TH 5:17–18 ~ Pray constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances.
* 2 TH 3:1 ~ Pray for Christian teachers and ministers, and pray for the freedom to openly speak God’s Word.
* 1 TI 2:1–2, 8 ~ I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made to God for all people, for leaders, and for all who are in authority, so that we can lead an honest and peaceful life of godliness and truth. People should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without being doubtful or angry.
* JAM 1:6 ~ Ask in faith without doubting.
* JAM 5:16 ~ Confess your faults to each other and pray for each other so you can be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person yields high returns.
* 1 JO 5:14–15 ~ If we ask Him anything according to His will, He will give it to us. If we believe that He hears us, He will hear us and He will fulfill our desires.

As you can see, humility, fasting, and prayer go together, in that they are performed simultaneously as a response to catastrophic events, during times of war and conflict, and when sinning and depravity have caused a departure from God and His will for our lives. This is a demonstration of personal reliance on God and sincere godly sorrow for sins. While it is not necessary to always pray in this manner, the practice was common during Biblical times, and the reference to this practice by former presidents and leaders was a call to corporate prayer, in which the whole of society would join together with a contrite heart to make a humble appeal to the Lord for peace and mercy.

It is required when we go before the throne of Grace in prayer to petition the Lord God, that it be done with a humble heart; ashes, sackcloth, and fasting are optional. Further, fasting doesn’t always require the rejection of food and sustenance. It can be a personal sacrifice whereby the individual gives up something, using that time to meditate with God. For example, spouses may choose to refrain from sex during Holy Week, or an individual may give up alcohol during Lent or Advent. Or, a person may refrain from interacting with others during times when they feel compelled to remain in prayer and meditation without interruption. The duration of the fast is up to the person, but a food fast should not include water. It is unadvisable fasting for forty days and nights like the Lord Jesus did in the wilderness; most men and women would be risking serious illness if not death. God does not request that we push ourselves to the brink of death to demonstrate how serious we are, because He can tell by reading our hearts.

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts to you and we give our lives to you. Help us to be ready to make personal sacrifices for you and for the body of Christ, even as your Son made a personal sacrifice for us when He took our place in death. We bring our petitions to you this day, pleading for your mercy upon our land, and praying for peace among your people. There is considerable conflict and division in this country, as well as between ours and other countries. With humility we kneel before you and pray that you would bring us back to you in unity of spirit, and help us gather the sheep who have strayed into dangerous places. Restore to us and the nations of the world a sense of brotherhood, where we communicate honestly, we employ integrity, and we show genuine love and respect. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

By Andrew V. Barber (posted 11/02/2023)