

*Series: Developing the Spirit Within*  
**Developing by Fasting**

**November 20, 2011 - Pastor Kevin Melin**

Acts 13:1-3; Luke 5:33-35; 11:9-10; Joel 2:12-13a

Fasting in the Bible is basically abstaining from food voluntarily for a spiritual purpose.

Fasting is mentioned in the Bible more often than baptism and yet it is a practice that is virtually ignored by most Christians.

List of people who fasted:

Jesus talked about fasting as though he assumed it was something his followers would do. **Luke 5:33-35** - <sup>33</sup>*They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."* <sup>34</sup>*Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"* <sup>35</sup>*But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; **in those days they will fast.*** & **Matthew 6:16a** - *"When you fast..."*

A fast is "rebellious." To fast is to rebel against our own physical appetites & desires for a greater desire.

Two aspects of fasting...

### **I) The Power of Fasting.**

#### **What is the purpose of this practice?**

A) Fasting enables us to seek God more earnestly!! So fasting ultimately is about HIM!!

"Do we seek God's hand or His face?"

B) Fasting deals with our desires.

We are allowing our desire for food to be redirected into a desire for God.

Matthew 4:3-4... Jesus is saying that all desire for God is just as critical as our desire for food.

Jesus' reference to himself as the bread of life and the bridegroom both deal with desire.

C) Fasting rips the heart open to God and seeks Him wholeheartedly.  
Joel 2:12-13a

D) Imagine taking this tool of fasting and then pointing it, with laser like focus, on a particular situation or need.

Biblical examples of this...

Nehemiah 1:4

Daniel 10:1-3a

David in 2 Samuel 12:16

Apostles in Acts 13:1-3 & 14:23

Anna in Luke 2:37-38

In this last example, fasting seems to be a part of her REGULAR practice and experience with God.

I do recommend a regular fast...once a week or once a month fast (or both).

Make it a regular rhythm and spiritual practice we PRACTICE.

## II) The Actual Practice of Fasting.

Matthew 6:16-18...Jesus is stressing the importance of fasting being in secret as much as possible.

Whenever we fast we have to start with our heart having the right motives.

Start Slow:

A 40 day fast or a weeklong fast or a three day fast? No!

Start with a 24 hour fast or a meal fast.

Practical Advice: Drink water...lots of it! It helps with the headaches that can accompany fasting. You might also try some fruit juice. Check with your doctor if you have any health issues.

A Daniel fast...or a partial fast of meat & choice foods.

You can fast from other desires and things you value for the purpose of seeking Him...Music, Sexual activity, Television or Internet or Facebook.

Just so we know, there are several options when fasting. This is not a "one size fits all" kind of thing.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### **REFLECTION:**

Begin by re-reading the passages and reviewing your notes from this week's message. Circle words, points and phrases that stand out to you. Contemplate "why" the Holy Spirit might be drawing you to them? Share with each other.

What meal is your favorite? How does it differ from members of your family? What would it be like for you if you developed an allergy to your favorite food and you could never eat it anymore?

### **DISCUSSION:**

This week Pastor Kevin talked about the spiritual practice of fasting, which is a practice Jesus seems to desire for his followers to follow (Luke 5:33-35). Why might it be the exception rather than the rule for Christ followers to practice fasting today?

Was there anything the Holy Spirit used to catch your attention, convict or encourage you on this topic? Or did you find yourself resistant to what was presented?

Pastor Kevin talked about the "rebellious" nature of fasting as it deals with our desires. He described it as purposely saying "no" to something we love to do... eat. Pastor Kevin went on to paint the picture and role "eating" plays in our culture. What is your response to this statement and what do you feel about it?

How much have you experienced fasting as a spiritual practice? What has it been like for you? If you haven't fasted, why?

What might be the difference between one who fasts as a means to achieve spiritual success or to be noticed versus one who fasts to seek God more earnestly?

Why is this "motive" thing so important when we fast? How do we adjust motives? How does this impact what we learn from Jesus' and his dialogue with Satan following his 40 day fast? (Mt. 4:1-10).

Which of these would motivate you to fast & seek God more earnestly? Why?

- Being spiritually dry or apathetic
- A burdened spirit or broken heart (Nehemiah)
- A longing that is unfulfilled (David)
- Entering a challenging situation or circumstances (Jesus)
- The need for direction or in a time of decision (Acts church)
- To grow in passion for Him (Anna)

### **GETTING REAL & PERSONAL:**

How does being asked to fast for corporate reasons (like helping the church seek discernment about selling Carol Court facility) motivate you or not in this matter of fasting?

At the end of this week's message we looked at practical ideas for fasting. Which of these were helpful? What appeals to you in fasting? What makes you apprehensive?

What might the barriers be that keep you from experiencing the Lord in this way?

This ends this series on "Developing the Spirit Within." What was your biggest take-away to help you create an atmosphere and set the sails for the Spirit to breathe into? Where have you felt the Spirit moving most within you?

Close in prayer and ask God to continue His work of the Holy Spirit awakening and quickening our spirits so as to draw us into vital communion with Him.

### **FURTHER STUDY:**

Books on the topic:

***Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*** by Marjorie J. Thompson, Chapter 1, 2 & 5

***Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*** by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Part 7

### **SERVING SNAPSHOT:**

This December our church is joining with Alaska Christian College to help promote funds for student scholarships.

Many of the ACC students are unable to support their educational and spiritual goals at ACC due to lack of resources, broken homes, poor life choices, and families that are unable or unwilling to support them. ACC helps bring healing, hope and the support and encouragement needed to pursue academic goals.

You can make a difference in Western Alaska this year by stopping by the Scholarship Christmas Tree and choosing one of the student cards. The tree will be put up in the Lobby area this Christmas season. We ask that you pray for that student throughout the year. If possible, cut off the bottom portion of the card and send it with your gift to the address listed on the card.