

Sermon Meditation for
March 3, 2013
“Fasting: Less
Consumption, More Compassion”

During this season of Lent, we are focusing on “spiritual disciplines” which allow us to look inwardly at who we really are, and then surrender more of ourselves to Christ and his transforming love. It is good to take time to reflect and grow. It is good to identify with Christ and practice what we believe.

We have talked about confession and solitude. Maybe this past week you practiced having some solitude time with God. Or maybe you increased the amount of time you spent with God each day! Hopefully you were blessed and encouraged to keep the two disciplines we have learned about. We are now on our third discipline this week: fasting.

Why would fasting bring us closer to God? How many of you think that fasting is a hunger strike? How many think of fasting as a way to diet? How many of you have ever tried fasting for spiritual purposes? I have, but not often enough! I can say it was a positive spiritual experience when I did it.

Scripture has so much to say about fasting that we would do well to look again at this ancient discipline. Many people in the Bible fasted such as: Moses, the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Paul the apostle, and Jesus the son of God. Many of the great Christians throughout church history fasted and witnessed to its value such as Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. Throughout scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It is a call to obedience and devotion to focus one’s heart and mind on God rather than our physical needs. It is an opportunity to seek God more and depend on him. We know the story of how Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days after his baptism and then was tempted by the devil. He must have known the importance of fasting and surrender to grow in obedience for the journey ahead of him and to be able to resist evil and

temptations. Prayer and fasting go together as an individual or group center on God. The purpose is not to gain an outcome of personal desire, but to call out to God and wait on him to work as he pleases. Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that could never be had in any other way. It is a means of God's grace and blessing that should not be neglected any longer.

Let's look at a situation in the Old Testament where the prophet Joel spoke to the people of Judah where pagan idol worship had flourished. Joel 2: 12-16 reads...

¹²That is why the LORD says,
"Turn to me now, while there is time.
Give me your hearts.
Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning."
¹³Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead."
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
He is eager to relent and not punish.
¹⁴Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a reprieve,
sending you a blessing instead of this curse.
Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and wine
to the LORD your God as before.
¹⁵Blow the ram's horn in Jerusalem!
Announce a time of fasting;
call the people together for a solemn meeting.
¹⁶Gather all the people—
the elders, the children, and even the babies.
Call the bridegroom from his quarters
and the bride from her private room.

So we see that fasting leads to repentance because the people of God can consciously be aware of what is standing in their way of trusting God and turn back to his mercy and love. In our contemporary lives, fasting from food or other things in our lives could help us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow non-essentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church these words: "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by

anything.” (I Cor. 6:12) Richard Foster says “ our human cravings and desires are like a river that tends to flow out of its banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channel.”

Come to the Lord’s Table as we repent and celebrate that all we need is God himself, Jesus Christ. He is more than enough for each of us.

Notes from Pastor Deb: if you have not used fasting as a discipline in the past, here is a guide:

- Choose a day that would work best for you.
- Eat a good breakfast then fast (go without food) until the next day's breakfast. **YOU MAY ALSO JUST SKIP ONE MEAL AND PRAY UNTIL THE NEXT MEAL.**
- Water and juices can be used to keep hydrated.
- During the day, pay attention to your body. When hunger pangs come, ask yourself, "What would I normally do to satisfy these hunger pangs?" "What patterns of my life do I create around eating?" "Are they healthy?"
- Expand your thoughts to others. Ask yourself "What must it be like for so many people to feel like this every day?"
- Focus your thoughts on God. Be grateful for the daily bread you receive. Offer thanks to God for providing in ways that you often take for granted.

Hope you try this just once! May you experience God in a deeper way. Pastor Deb