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## Tools for Discipleship – Fasting

Joel 2:12-18; Matthew 4:1-2, 6:16-18, 9:14-15  
By Kirk Gambrell

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### Using This Study

#### ❶ EXAMINE His Word

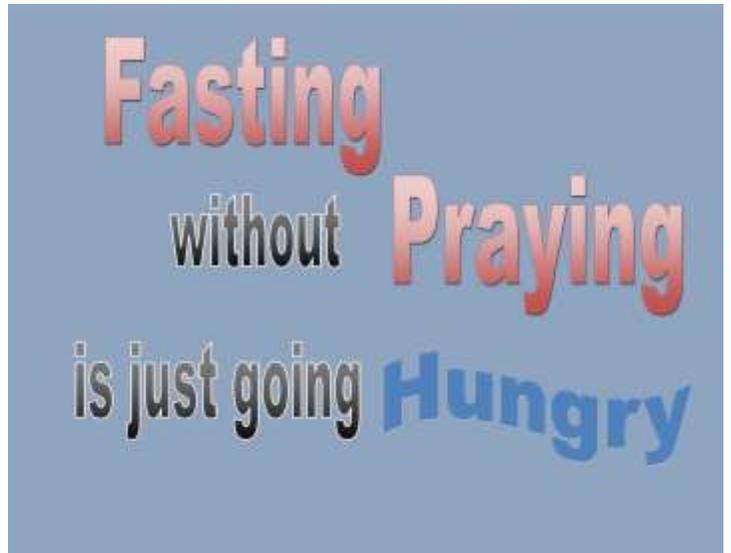
What does God SAY? Open your time with prayer. The words God uses to communicate matters, so go back and pay close attention to the details that are emphasized or repeated in the passage.

#### ❷ EXPLORE His Word

What does God MEAN? Asking questions of the text helps surface how the details relate to the message God wants to communicate.

#### ❸ EMBRACE His Word

Why does it MATTER to me? Embrace God by responding to what you discover in His word in faith and obedience.



This week's tool for discipleship is fasting. Fasting is some-thing that is not talked about in all Christian circles. There are many Christians today that do fast, but there are also many that do not. This week we will explore the discipline of fasting. What is a fast? How do we do it in order to honor God? There are only a few passages that give instruction on fasting but there is a great deal to be gained by studying them. There is also great benefit in learning to practice fasting as a spiritual discipline, and using it as a tool for discipleship in order to help others grow in their relationship with God.



## **EXAMINE His Word (Observation)**

What does God SAY? Prayerfully note significant details and terms emphasized in these passages.

### **Read Joel 2:12-18 (NET)**

<sup>12</sup> “Yet even now,” the Lord says,  
“return to me with all your heart—  
with fasting, weeping, and mourning.  
Tear your hearts, not just your garments!”

<sup>13</sup> Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is merciful and compassionate,  
slow to anger and boundless in loyal love—  
often relenting from calamitous punishment.

<sup>14</sup> Who knows? Perhaps he will be  
compassionate and grant a reprieve,  
and leave blessing in his wake—  
a meal offering and a drink offering  
for you to offer to the Lord your God!

<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion.

Announce a holy fast;  
proclaim a sacred assembly!

<sup>16</sup> Gather the people; sanctify an assembly!  
Gather the elders; gather the children  
and the nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom come out from his bedroom  
and the bride from her private quarters.

<sup>17</sup> Let the priests, those who serve the Lord,  
weep from the vestibule  
all the way back to the altar.

Let them say, “Have pity, O Lord,  
on your people; please do not turn over your  
inheritance to be mocked,  
to become a proverb among the nations.  
Why should it be said among the peoples,  
‘Where is their God?’”

### **The Lord’s Response**

<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord became zealous for his land;  
he had compassion on his people.

### **Read Matthew 4:1-2 (NET)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished.

### **Read Matthew 6:16-18 (NET)**

<sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look sullen like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unattractive so that people will see them fasting. I tell you the truth, they have their reward. <sup>17</sup> When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others when you are fasting, but only to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.”

### **Read Matthew 9:14-15 (NET)**

<sup>14</sup> Then John’s disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don’t fast?” <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.”

1. Who is involved in the text? Author, audience, main characters.

2. Where and when is this taking place? Geography and timeline.
3. What actions are carried out or commanded? Look for the verbs.
4. Is there anything repeated?
5. What is emphasized?
6. Is there anything in these passages that is related to other areas of scripture?
7. Are there things to be noted that are alike or unlike such as similes and metaphors?

## **🕒 EXPLORE His Word (Interpretation)**

What does God MEAN?

8. In Joel 2, the prophet is making an appeal to the people to turn back to God. How are the people instructed to turn to God?

9. What do we know about the circumstances of the fast mentioned in Joel 2?

10. In Matthew 9, why don't Jesus' disciples fast?

11. What is the heart of the instruction about fasting in Matthew 6?

12. Why do you think the fast in Matthew 6 is considered more valuable if it is done in secret?

13. In Matthew 4, what is the purpose of Jesus' fast? How is it different than the other fasts?

**③ EMBRACE His Word (Application)**

**Why does this MATTER to me?**

14. Should we fast regularly? How regular?

15. Is it OK to let someone know you are fasting? What about group fasting?

16. What does it look like for us to fast in today's world? What do we give up? For how long?

**Summarize your thoughts on the passage:**

Write about what God wants you to KNOW, to FEEL, and to DO...

**SERMON NOTES**