

# EMPOWERED



*May 2019 Fast*



southlands  
church

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him whom is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

## **DEAR SOUTHLANDERS,**

Thank you for joining us in our annual time of prayer and fasting. Over the years, these have been monumental times of encouragement and encounter as we've set aside time to declare our dependence on our God.

Fasting is essentially denying ourselves what normally gives us power in order to ask Jesus for His Spirit's power. It is a willing embracing of physical powerlessness in expectation of inner spiritual power. Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit after fasting in the wilderness, and His model encourages us to expect a similar outcome. (Luke 3 :14) We may need power to resist habitual sin, power to love difficult people, power to shake off wrong concepts of God and ourselves, or power to share the gospel with boldness.

God wants to empower His people as we seek Him. We will focus on one area of empowering each day; empowered holiness, empowered mission and empowered family.

As the verse above tells us, God meets us in special ways when we seek Him 'together with all the saints.' While this booklet is curated to help infuse the fast with personal significance for you as you go throughout your day, let's trust that God reveals His loving power to us through one another as we seek Him together with all the saints each night. We will have Nick and Keri Fox join us on Wednesday night to help us with empowering mission, and Mike Pilavachi and team with us for Thursday night to help us with 'empowering family.' A family on their knees asking to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in their inner beings, is an unstoppable family!

Yours in anticipation,

Alan

## WHY DO WE FAST?

Fasting has long been a powerful component in the life of Christian worship. Jesus began his public ministry after 40 days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness. He spoke of fasting in the Gospels (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14-15) and the early church practiced it (Acts 9:9, 13:2, 14:23). Fasting has been a part of the Southlands story too, and many significant moments of direction and vision for the church have come directly out of church-wide fasts. But what is fasting for? Is it just some sort of sanctified diet? In short, we deny ourselves food in order to feast on Jesus.

1. The physical hunger we feel in a fast intensifies our longings for Jesus. In our pain and discomfort we desperately seek God, cry out to him. We recognize more clearly our dependence on God and our hunger and thirst for more of his presence.
2. The combination of prayer and fasting (the two always go together!) helps remove distractions and allows us to focus on Jesus. The time we don't spend eating is more time we can spend in silence, prayer, listening to God. In our busy lives, fasting helps us create space to meditate on God's Word and allow the Holy Spirit to speak.
3. All of this is not just for our own spiritual renewal, but to empower us to bring renewal to our world. It is significant that just prior to beginning his public ministry, Jesus fasted. The 40 days in the wilderness was for Jesus a preparatory time, a season of struggle and temptation and isolation (similar to the 40 day period the Israelites spent in the wilderness prior to entering the Promised Land), and yet one that clearly catalyzed his forward momentum in mission.

## TIPS FOR FASTING

- If this is your first fast, ease into it. Don't feel the pressure to go without food for all three days. Start with fasting a meal a day, then gradually build up to a full day.
- An intermediate fast would be what is known as a "Daniel Fast" this is where you abstain from choice food, meat, and wine and only eat vegetables and drink water.
- If you are fasting from food, we typically encourage a juice fast which would include fruit juice and soup/broth and water.
- We only recommend a full water only fast if you have experience fasting and/or participated in one of the these other versions before.
- The idea behind fasting is to abstain from a routine habit/practice for the sake of spiritual hunger. You may not be able to fast from food due to health reasons, etc. so consider abstaining from social media, television, or any other habitual practice in your day that you can set aside for the sake of focused prayer.
- The fast begins after dinner on Sunday night. Don't eat a massive, greasy meal as your last meal. You'll regret it!
- At some point during each day of the fast, find a 30-minute time slot (at least) to read that day's devotional. Ideally this is in a quiet, distraction-free place where you can have uninterrupted time. Bring your juice and ask Jesus to be your nourishment! Feasting on the word of God will do wonders for a growling stomach.
- On each day there will be a theme and a passage of Scripture to contemplate. The idea is to read and meditate on the Scripture for a good 15 minutes, and then spend 15 (or more) minutes in prayer.

- The meditation part is key. It bridges the gap between hearing from God (in Scripture) and speaking to him in prayer. Puritan Thomas Manton said this: “What we take in by the word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer.” This will be the model for our daily devotionals during the fast.
- If your days are full and you can’t find the time to take a break, consider reading through the booklet on Sunday night, to prepare your heart for what’s to come.
- If you have kids this a great opportunity to introduce them and include them to the concept of fasting. Make sure you clarify the purpose of fasting in an age-appropriate manner. Much of how they will participate will depend on their age so here are some age appropriate suggestions:
  - Age 5-9: Abstaining from candy, soda and dessert.
  - Age 10-13: Abstaining from one meal during the day. This HAS to be done wisely and with faith, if it is an intense sports season consider a protein drink as a meal replacement.
  - 14 and older: Depending on the maturity of your child, they can make the same choices that you, as an adult would make.
- If you do have children that are abstaining from food, this is obviously a great opportunity to be more intentional with family prayer and/or devotions.

# DAY ONE

*Tuesday, May 7 | Marianne Monaghan, Southlands Chino*

## **EMPOWERED HOLINESS**

When we imagine what it means to be holy, we tend to run up a long moral checklist to abide by. However, the word 'holy' means to 'cut or separate'. Fundamentally, biblical holiness is a call to be cut off from what is impure and unclean and to be set apart for what is pure-- namely, to be set apart for the work of God both in and through us. To be sure, holiness has moral implications but these moral implications must be predicated on the truth that biblical holiness is rooted in a relationship that God established and desires with His people. When the bible says that our "lives are hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3) and ".. it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20) -- this means that we can say in Christ, God's holiness is our holiness. Any subsequent notions or behaviors must be predicated on this truth. Make no mistake, the call to be holy is an all-encompassing claim on ALL of who we are- our life, loves, and our identities. But the power to become holy is not hinging on us. Being holy is something that is placed on us as believers. The power to see the fruit of that holiness also rests on the One who began the work in the first place. The more we look to Him (in His word and through prayer), the more pleasant yielding to His ways becomes.

## **SCRIPTURE**

*1 Peter 1:15-16*

"... as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct, since it is written, " you shall be holy, for I am holy"  
Peter 1:15-16

## **MEDITATION**

1. Do I recognize that, as a Christian, I am by nature 'set apart' from what is unholy and set apart FOR God?
2. How well is holiness being seen in my day-to-day living? Does my life reflect an "otherness" that points people to God?
3. What are areas in my life I haven't surrendered to His all-encompassing call to Holiness?

## **PRAYER**

- Begin by thanking God for the work He has done on our behalf. Thank Him that holiness is something He does in us.
- Repent for ways in which you have pursued self-gratification rather than yielding to obedience to Him.
- Ask Him to help you when temptations come to remind you that you are holy in Christ. To choose sin would not be in line with the way God has made you.



## DAY TWO

*Wednesday, May 8 | Sara Worthington, Southlands Whittier*

### **EMPOWERED MISSION**

My daughter was given a book called, *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss, about a little boy who planted a carrot seed. His mother, father, and older brother told the little boy they doubted the seed would produce any carrots. Yet, everyday the little boy pulled up the weeds around the seed and watered the soil. Day after day nothing seems to happen - no seedlings, no carrots. Everyone continues to tell the little boy that the carrot will not grow. And still, the little boy pulled up the weeds around it each day and watered the ground. Then, one day, a carrot appeared, just as the little boy had known it would.

This story can be a metaphor of what our lives can look like as we engage in empowered mission. Jesus makes our mission clear in Matthew 28 when He commands His disciples to make more disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded. Yet, Jesus doesn't leave us to our own devices to make this happen. He tells us that He is with us even to the end of the age and that the Holy Spirit will be with us to teach us and to give us the words to say. We are like the little boy entrusted with a carrot seed (the Gospel). As we sow this seed (doing life with non-believers, telling others of God's salvation and his great works, praying for others), the world and Satan will cause us to doubt our efforts. Still, we live out our faith by continuing to pull up weeds and watering the ground (caring for others). And, underneath the soil, the Holy Spirit is doing a great work. Our objective is to know that God is with us and the Holy Spirit is working to reconcile the world to Himself, just as the little boy knew a carrot would grow one day.

## **SCRIPTURE**

*Luke 12:11-12*

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

*Matthew 14:25-26*

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

## **MEDITATION**

1. Recall how you came to know the Lord and how the Lord reconciled you to Himself.
2. Examine how you have been on mission lately. What have been areas of strength?
3. Examine your areas of growth by asking the Holy Spirit to help reveal these things to you: “Lord, what are you doing and what is it that you want me to become and do if I am to do your will?” (Prayer of Intention by Dr. John Coe)

## **PRAYER**

- Thank the Lord for his marvelous works, remembering Psalm 96: “Sing to the Lord, bless his name! Tell of his salvation from day to day, declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, he is to be feared above all gods.”
- Ask the Lord for more faith, courage, and opportunity to share the Gospel
- Ask for the Lord’s help to live as ambassadors of Christ so that our lives will be an encouragement to others.



# DAY THREE

*Thursday, May 9 | Travis Cory, Southlands Fullerton*

## **EMPOWERED FAMILY**

For the Christian, family is more than those that share legal relation. The Christian shares one body with the Church, the body of Christ! As there is diversity of personality and passions in a family, so family in the church is also diverse. The family the believer has in the body of Christ has a common goal of partnering with the Spirit to help each other become more like Jesus, and invite others to know Jesus. Family for the Christian starts with the church community, and doesn't exclude based on having a biological family, for there is neither married nor single, "Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

Family is a core pillar of almost every society. Many decades of study and research have been spent looking at the effects of family as it pertains to overall health of a civilization. Within scripture one does not need to look far to see mentions of the importance of family. God's promise to Abraham involves family and children (Genesis 12). Jesus' atoning work on the cross paves the way to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and to invite all who accept Jesus as Lord and savior into the family of God. This broadening of family within Christ challenges our conceptions of family, and the ministry of reconciliation asks us to see the church as our family.

How does the Spirit empower the believer to love the body of Christ as family, and their own biological families as well? The Spirit empowered life begins with a dependence upon the Spirit. The early church recognized their dependence upon God first in familial terms, as a infant is dependent on nourishment to come from its parents, so the follower of Christ is to be dependent on God.

One exercise to try is beginning each day with prayer, specifically Psalm 23 or the Lord's Prayer. Meditate on the words and images of this passages and the invite the Spirit into your day. As the early church in Acts 4 prayed, so we too pray for boldness to follow the Spirit as he leads.

Another way the Spirit empowers family is through helping each other become more Christlike. For followers of Christ our primary identity is in Christ. Our primary identity is the one through which we see the world, ourselves, our relationships, and our reality. For many people in our culture and in the church, marriage and family have become the primary identity lens through which we see ourselves. If you are married has family become an idol? If you are not married has the prospect of marriage to another become an idol? Has your independence become an idol? The Spirit can show us what our idols are and as a family of the body of Christ, we can confess to one another and encourage one another towards Christlikeness.

## **SCRIPTURE**

*Matthew 12:46-50*

“While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

## **MEDITATION**

1. What comes to mind when you think of family? Does family to you include the body of Christ?
2. Have you made an idol of family, marriage, or independence?
3. How do you plan on practicing being Spirit empowered in regards to family in the next month? Tell someone else so they can pray with you.





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