

## *Training in Guidance*

It is interesting that some foods we call “comfort food.” What is your comfort food? What food do you eat when you feel agitated or nervous, or upset? Is it iced cream; chocolate; some other kind of sweets? Frozen yogurt? We’ve likely heard of people who go on a hunger strike to gain political power; this is not fasting. We’ve heard of radical diets that claim to help you lose that extra weight you gained over Christmas break; fasting is not a form of dieting. One of the ways we could describe fasting is finding comfort not in food, but in seeking the face of the living the God, our Father in heaven. This is a feast, a true feast! Fasting is reaching out for God, instead of reaching into the refrigerator. Fasting demonstrates a desperation for God, instead of a desperation for a bite to eat. Fasting is living into the realization that we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Are we hungry for God, for the living God? John Piper suggest the sort of thing they might have prayed: “We want you and we want your leading, O God! O Holy Spirit, what is your for the mission of this church? We want to see you and follow you more than we want to eat” ([A Hunger for God](#)).

It is told in a straightforward way.

**The Spirit said, “Set aside Saul and Barnabas...”** (Acts 13:2).

It’s as though it’s the most normal thing, something to anticipate, something to expect when you train yourself by fasting, praying, worshipping as the church is engaged in here in Acts 13. When we engage in this we can expect to receive guidance from God. We know that we can go a long time without eating food. We also know that we can’t go many days without water; water is essential for life. So if we wish to try this kind of training, we need to be aware of this.

Please note some important details here. This was not a private encounter with God. It’s not like an individual spent time alone with God, training in solitude, and then came out of it and said, “God told me...” This was a corporate act by the church as a body. In other words, I can imagine that in addition to the fasting, praying, and worshipping, these people were having a discussion among themselves. They were asking each other questions. What kinds of questions?

“What does God want us to do next as a church? What is his heart’s desire?” After a time of deep meditation and prayer, they might ask each other, “What do you hear God saying? What comes to mind? What do you see? What have you heard?”

This in part is what is meant when the Bible says:

**Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19).**

Then someone says, "I think the Spirit is saying something about two people in this place." Someone else asks, "What people?" And the answer: "Saul and Barnabus." Someone else says, "Yeah, I get the same sense. What do you say about that, Saul? Barnabus?" Someone else says, "Let's take a little more time to pray about this. Let's ask God to show us what he wants to say to these two men." So they go back into an extended period of silence and meditation. This is what is meant when the Bible says:

**Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said (1 Cor 14:29).**

In other words, like so much of the training we've been thinking about this month, there is no quick and easy answer here. There is no such thing as instant results. Training takes time. Receiving guidance in this way also takes time. There's no hurry, because we're training ourselves to wait on God.

Do we want to be led by the Spirit, guided by him?

**Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to... (Acts 16:6-7).**

That's when Paul received the vision of the man from Macedonia to come and help them. Why was Paul and the others so able to sense when the Holy Spirit was keeping them from entering a certain place, even discerning that the Spirit wouldn't allow it? He was able because he engaged regularly in training. The Americans boast in their warfare technology, how accurate it is and better than World War Two bombing techniques. The Spirit, in Acts, leads the church with precision, with astonishing results. Do we, the church today, wish to be led by the Spirit in the same way?