
FASTING FORWARD

ADVANCING
YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE
THROUGH FASTING



Revised and Updated Edition

Dr. Billy Wilson

Foreword by Mart Green

PRAISE FOR *FASTING FORWARD*

“*Fasting Forward* is a timely work for the church as we experience the intersection of both great crisis and great opportunity. The future will belong to those who are wholly and fully committed to the Lord! Dr. Wilson presents clear teaching and powerful examples pointing to the reality that fasting is one of the greatest gifts given to the church to tenderize our hearts, fill us with faith, and activate us into God’s will.”

Andy Byrd

YWAM Kona and The Send

“Fasting is one of the most misunderstood and neglected spiritual disciplines. In *Fasting Forward*, you will discover the biblical reasons for, and benefits of, this practice. This book will help build your faith and intimacy with God.”

Christine Caine

Founder, A21 and Propel Women

“Fasting is a spiritual discipline that can easily be overlooked in today’s overindulgent world, but one that should play an important role in the lives of Christian believers. In his book, *Fasting Forward*, my friend Dr. Billy Wilson shares rich wisdom with practical insight into the discipline of fasting. He eloquently explains how in a fast-paced culture, we can accelerate to new heights by slowing down and taking time to focus our attention on the Lord. This is a transformational must-read for anyone who wants to strengthen their walk with God and engage deeper with the discipline of fasting.”

Rick Warren

Author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

“I love this book, *Fasting Forward* by Dr. Billy Wilson. This latest work about the spiritual discipline of fasting by the president of one of the most prestigious Christian universities in the world proves again that fasting not only works for every Bible believing Christian, but it stands the test of academic rigor in the hallowed halls of our most prestigious universities.”

Jentezen Franklin

Senior Pastor, Free Chapel
New York Times Best-Selling Author

“In his book, *Fasting Forward*, Dr. Billy Wilson skillfully shares insight into the importance of fasting and the role it is to play in the life of every believer. With practical tips and strong biblical teaching, this book will prove useful for those new to fasting or those who have practiced this discipline for years. If you want to learn more about fasting, strengthen your relationship with God, and encounter Him in fresh ways, this book is for you!”

Russell Evans

Global Senior Pastor, Planetshakers Church

“In this invaluable guide, Dr. Billy Wilson draws from decades of ministry experience to provide practical wisdom and inspiration for fasting. Combining biblical principles, personal stories, and global perspectives, this book will motivate you to embrace fasting as a life-changing catalyst for spiritual growth and revival. This is an essential reading for every believer hungry for more of God’s presence and power.”

Dr. Wayne Hilsden

Co-Founder, King of Kings Community, Jerusalem
President, FIRM: Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries

“Fasting is one of the most powerful yet under-practiced disciplines in the church today. About ten years ago, I personally discovered the life-altering effects of fasting on every area of my life. It opened more vistas of spiritual encounters and a deeper relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit than I had ever experienced. Throughout the years I’ve known Dr. Wilson, his dedication to being in tune with what God is speaking into his life has been inspiring. In *Fasting Forward*, he shares principles and personal experiences that will strengthen and inspire you to prioritize the spiritual discipline of fasting in a new way. Dr. Wilson’s knowledge and wisdom on this topic are evident on every page, and his excellent work exploits the principles that are needed for life-altering fasting. *Fasting Forward* will be valuable to anyone seeking greater intimacy with God and those who want to live a Spirit-empowered life.”

Dr. Rob Hoskins

President, OneHope, Inc.

“In the urgency of this hour, the timing of this revised edition of Dr. Billy Wilson’s, *Fasting Forward*, couldn’t be more critical. In a world hungering for spiritual depth, this book provides a guide for Gen Z and those searching for God’s Presence. With insightful chapters on fasting’s principles, priorities, and potential, it equips evangelists to ignite revival and maintain a depth of relationship with the Lord. Dr. Wilson’s wisdom and passion shine through, making this book an indispensable resource for those yearning for the ‘more of God.’ Get ready to ignite the fire of God within you as you accelerate your journey through fasting!”

Nathan Morris

Founder and President, Shake the Nations Ministries

“Dr. Billy Wilson is a skillful writer who knows how to take his readers on an exciting and transformational journey. In *Fasting Forward*, he writes with a father’s wisdom and a practitioner’s insight. He demystifies fasting with rich teaching, real-life stories, and personal insights. It’s a fun read that will provoke and challenge you whether you’re highly experienced or a fasting newbie.”

Daniel Kolenda

President and CEO, Christ for all Nations

“In this book, Dr. Billy Wilson very clearly, systematically, and thoroughly explains the meaning of fasting and all aspects related to it. I agree and believe, as one who has fasted regularly for so many years, both personally and corporately with workers, members of my church, and other denominational churches, this is a very important practice to engage in if we want to be sensitive to hear God’s voice, do His will and experience great things in our lives and ministries. I pray that through this book, there will be many servants of God and churches who experience unreasonable breakthroughs and rise to finish the Great Commission in the era of the Third Pentecost before the second coming of the Lord Jesus.”

Dr. Niko Njotorahardjo

Senior Pastor, Gereja Bethel Indonesia

“Whenever my friend Dr. Billy Wilson speaks, I listen. And whenever he writes, I read. Billy is one of the most influential voices in my life and in the body of Christ today. I have been fasting regularly for over thirty years, but this book challenged, convicted, and inspired me in ways I didn’t expect. *Fasting Forward* will move you to embrace

a deeper life of fasting. I pray you will read it, apply it, and reap the vast blessings of fasting.”

Brian Alarid

President, World Prays
Chairman, Pray For All

“Dr. Billy Wilson has masterfully penned a book on fasting that transcends age and time. His wisdom and practice of the ancient discipline of fasting poured out in *Fasting Forward* guides the readers through the profound practice of fasting to deepen their connection with God. His words resonate with sincerity and a lifetime of experience, offering a practical, question-answering, know-how guide to spiritual growth. This book is a beacon of inspiration, a testament to Dr. Wilson’s unwavering devotion, and a must-read for all seeking a deeper understanding of their faith.”

Glyn Barrett

Senior Pastor, Audacious Church
National Leader, Assemblies of God Great Britain

“Often, the greatest challenges bring the greatest rewards! This is beautifully described in the book, *Fasting Forward* by Dr. Billy Wilson. With honest transparency, he shares not only his personal journey with fasting as a young minister but also clearly describes the steadfastness of this simple truth throughout his ministry today. With insightful detail, Dr. Wilson encourages everyone to benefit from this Biblical principle that develops spiritual strength for those new to the process as well as the seasoned believer.

Personally, during critical times in my ministry as well as for sustained strength for daily living, prayer and fasting have continued

to be a reliable friend. So, it is with great assurance that I sincerely recommend this book for first-time reading as well as for repeated reference through your own spiritual development.”

Dr. Tony D. Stewart

Assistant General Overseer, Church of God, Cleveland, TN

Lead Pastor, City Life Church, Tampa, FL

“Fasting is an essential discipline for every Christians who wants to humble themselves, being hungry for more of God and His Glory. It’s a great way to crucify the flesh to move in the spirit with the Holy Spirit. Fasting is transformative and facilitates our access to the realities of the spiritual world, especially the Kingdom of God, which is not made of words but of a demonstration of power. For years, every week, I have fasted for 1 full day, just as during the year, I include longer periods that are a booster for my spiritual life. Thanks to my friend Dr. Billy Wilson for writing *Fasting Forward*, which is an amazing book that will help everyone practice a powerful lifestyle in a non-legalistic but graceful way to receive divine benefits that can only be acquired this way.”

Jean-Luc Trachsel

President, Jean-Luc Trachsel Ministries, the International Association of Healing Ministries (IAHM)

Founder, Europe Shall Be Saved (ESBS)

“I honor Dr. Wilson and value how he calls the body of Christ to the “main things,” which include prayer, fasting, Spirit empowerment, and the mission of God. *Fasting Forward* reinforces a main thing needed for today’s church.”

Dr. David Wells

General Superintendent, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

“Fasting is a critical element of a devoted Christian life, and Billy Wilson’s presentation on the topic in *Fasting Forward* is exceptional. *Fasting Forward*, revised and updated edition, is an even deeper dive into a spiritual discipline of which I know, from personal observation, comes from the heart of an anointed servant.”

Dr. Tim Hill

Church Presiding Bishop and General Overseer, Cleveland, TN

“I have read many books on fasting, but this is by far one of the very best. Dr. Wilson has the ability to speak right to the heart and make this spiritual exercise one that every believer uses to release great change and breakthrough in their life.”

Dr. Cindy Jacobs

Founder, Generals International

“With *Fasting Forward*, my friend and mentor, Dr. Billy Wilson, offers a biblical prescription for unleashing Heaven on Earth. In this book, we discover that via the conduit of this transformative Christ-endorsed discipline, we stand poised to advance God’s Kingdom agenda with clarity and conviction.”

Dr. Samuel Rodriguez

President and CEO, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

“In a world filled with endless distractions and instant gratifications, Dr. Wilson’s book, *Fasting Forward*, offers a compelling invitation to rediscover fasting as a pathway to deeper communion with God. This book doesn’t just inform; it inspires and equips believers to embrace fasting as a vital discipline for spiritual growth and renewal. With

profound insights and practical guidance, *Fasting Forward* demystifies the practice of fasting, making it accessible and relevant for today's believers. Prepare to be challenged and changed as you embark on this journey of faith, surrender, and spiritual breakthrough."

Daniela Freidzon-McCabe

Pastor and speaker, King of Kings Church

"*Fasting Forward* is a thought-provoking book by ORU President Billy Wilson. In this book, Dr. Wilson raises important questions that urge readers to reflect on their faith and the potential miracles they may have missed out on due to a lack of prayer and spiritual discipline. Dr. Wilson's first question prompts us to consider the missed opportunities that arise when we fail to pray and seek God's intervention in our lives. He challenges us to imagine how many miracles, both small and significant, could have unfolded if we had faithfully prayed for God's promises to manifest.

The second question posed by Dr. Wilson focuses on the unfulfilled days of destiny that result from a lack of commitment to spiritual practices such as fasting. He highlights the importance of bending our knees in prayer rather than allowing our bellies to remain full. By emphasizing the significance of prayer and self-denial, he encourages readers to recognize the potential in each moment of ministry that may have been missed due to spiritual complacency. This is a call to action and a must-read!"

Reggie Dabbs

The Youth Alliance

“Exploring the transformative power of fasting, this insightful and practical book by ORU President Billy Wilson delves into the benefits and deep spiritual connection fostered through this biblical practice. It offers a compelling look at how abstaining not only nourishes the soul but also strengthens one’s bond with the Lord, opening doors to profound personal and spiritual growth.”

Dr. Mike Rakes

President, Evangel University



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Other Titles by Billy Wilson

Father Cry: Healing Your Heart and the Hearts of Those You Love

*As the Waters Cover the Sea: The Story of Empowered21 and the
Movement It Serves (co-authored with the late Vinson Synan)*

Generation Z: Born for the Storm

The Power of One: Reaching Every Person on Earth



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Disclaimer

This book offers a spiritual perspective about fasting and prayer. Much of this material is based on the author's personal journey. The author is not a medical doctor, and he has not attempted to address the physical and medical aspects of fasting in any depth. A bibliography at the back of the book assists readers who want to research further. The author recommends that anyone beginning a fast consult with a physician to make sure there are no imminent physical dangers or restrictions.



== ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DEDICATION ==

Fasting *Forward* was birthed in times of intense spiritual warfare and adversity throughout my life. The discipline of fasting has helped me to find God's direction during the most challenging times of ministry. I remain eternally grateful for this discipline and the grace it has allowed me to access.

Every time I teach on fasting to new generations of young people, I find a significant desire to learn about this discipline and to begin participating in more significant ways. New generations are hungry for God — so hungry they are willing to do without natural food to connect with Him more deeply. They are not satisfied to know the God of their grandparents or parents; they want to know Him as their God and the God of their generation. This book is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of young people to whom I have ministered in my lifetime: from my early youth ministry days to pulpits in ninety-eight nations of the world and to the chapel and classroom of Oral Roberts University, where I serve as President. Every single young person was and is loved by a God who wants to know each in a personal way. It is also dedicated to new generations yet to come who will be hungry to know the same God of the Bible. I pray that every time a young person reads this book or a portion of it, a flame of desire will be lit in their heart that cannot be quenched. I pray they discover the power of fasting to accelerate their spiritual life and empower them to change the world.

The production of any book requires a host of individuals who serve to bring the written words to a published form. Many have been those who have assisted with this volume. I want to express

my gratitude to a few of them here: Kay Horner, who served as my associate pastor and lead intercessor for several years, worked tirelessly in the initial editing of every sentence and word. Pathway Press believed in me and this project as they helped release it for the first time. Alyssa Sanders has spent countless hours revising and refining the original manuscript for this new release, Dr. Mark E. Roberts edited this revised text, and Johnie Hampton and his team at Hampton Creative designed a fantastic new cover and layout. The Oral Roberts University Board of Trustees has supported me in carving out the time needed for this revision, and my entire office team has cheered me on to get this book back into print. A special thank you to my friend Mart Green for writing the Foreword. Mart and I have fasted together many times throughout our journey serving at ORU and Empowered21 and have watched God come through.

I also express my deepest gratitude for my children, Ashley and Sara, along with their spouses, Jamie and Shaun, who are cheerleaders and encouragers in my life. And for my seven grandchildren, who are amazing and make life grand: Anna, Aaron, Amelia, Abi, Sammy, James, and Benjamin fuel my heart with an overwhelming desire to finish well, leaving them a testimony of God's power and presence. I pray they each learn the power of fasting in their life.

Finally, I give thanks for my dear wife, Lisa, to whom I have been married for over forty-five years, which means she has been with me through every major and minor time of fasting in my life. She has supported me, helped me take care of my body, and prayed with me for God's blessing as we sought His face together. God's perfect design for me has been to have Lisa by my side through it all. She

is an amazing wife, a fantastic mother, and the best (and prettiest!) grandmother on planet Earth. Thank you, Lisa, for your consistent, daily encouragement. I will always love you.

To my readers, as you journey through these pages, my prayer is that you will be ignited with a desire to know the living God more intimately and that you will engage with the discipline of fasting to encounter Him in deeper ways. Together, may we accelerate our spiritual lives through fasting.



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FOREWORD

The year was 1998, and I was looking for information on fasting for forty days. I remember when I became “desperate enough” to try fasting. It was one of those disciplines that was previously not on my radar. The first thing I wanted to do before embarking on the journey was read up on the subject. Was there someone out there who not only knew the theology of fasting but also had deep experience and practical advice on fasting? The number of books that I could find on the subject was slim. What I needed was a book written in 1998. Had I waited a few years, I could have read *Fasting Forward!*

I first met my friend Billy in the mid-1980s when I was serving as a state youth camp director, and he was serving as an international youth camp director. I watched him transition from that role to pastor, denominational leader, and now university president and chair of the largest Spirit-empowered network. In all his roles, he has had one focus: the next generation. To position himself for the ministry God has given him, Dr. Wilson has regularly engaged with the discipline of fasting. From ministering to Baby Boomers to Generation X to Millennials and now Generation Z, Dr. Wilson has adapted and dedicated himself to understanding the next generation. It can be hard to change old ways of thinking, but it is necessary when ministering to a new group of young people. With each group, Dr. Wilson has gone back and learned about their generation and its uniqueness. As he seeks the Lord, he fasts, and the fruit of this discipline is evident in his life. Fasting is not just a theory to him but a lived experience.



In *Fasting Forward*, Dr. Wilson takes his readers on a journey of understanding the biblical foundations and practical aspects of fasting. In this book, you will dive deep into Scripture as he shares the purposes of fasting, which include repentance, readiness, revelation, release, restoration, and reward. He also shares about “heroes of the faith” from the Bible and throughout Christian history who have embraced this discipline.

With vulnerability, Dr. Wilson shares his first fasting experience, which — like for many of us — did not go so well! But he also shares how he did not give up and how grateful he is for fasting in his life. Some of his fasts were as short as one day and others as long as forty days. Just as he has, you will learn in *Fasting Forward* how fasting helps you develop internal integrity and receive additional grace.

Dr. Wilson also shares practical advice regarding the following: “Why does fasting hurt?” “Should I prepare for a fast?” “What is happening in my body when I fast?” “What should I do during the fast?” and “How should I break a fast?” You can’t get more “nuts and bolts” than that! This book will give you greater confidence as you enter your fasting experience. Of all the great teaching within, my favorite chapter is chapter seven. Here, Dr. Wilson teaches about releasing the potential of fasting. He takes you on a journey through Scripture and how fasting was a key part of the promises and power of our favorite biblical characters.



FOREWORD

My hunch is that you did not just stumble upon this book. If you are reading it, you are serious about having an intimate relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And you came to the right spot! This is the book that I wished I could have read twenty-five years ago. Fortunately, it first came out in 2005, and it was a help to me as I have gone on an extended fast each year since 1998. I am excited that Dr. Wilson chose to update this resource with new insight from his many years of fasting for new generations to learn from. This book has helped me better understand what the Lord has accomplished in my life during my seasons of fasting.

May your adventure of fasting take you places in your relationship with the Lord that you never imagined! Truly, you can advance your spiritual life through fasting, and *Fasting Forward* will help you on your journey.

Mart Green

Ministry Investment Officer, Hobby Lobby



INTRODUCTION

As President of Oral Roberts University, I am honored to teach a class each semester. In the fall, the class is called Spirit-empowered Living, and it is usually populated by our incoming class of freshmen and transfer students. It is always an exciting and large group of eager-to-learn students swelling to over 900 in some years. The class is designed to help the students at ORU have a shared vocabulary regarding the Spirit-empowered life and to challenge them personally in their walk with Christ. Without fail each year, the two most engaging lectures I do are on prayer language, or speaking in tongues, and on fasting. When I teach on fasting, I am amazed at the student response. They sit on the edge of their seat (or at least most do), and they line up after class with a host of questions on how to better engage this discipline. I have been surprised by the continued interest in fasting among Generation Z students. They are hungry for God, and they know that fasting is one of God's keys to greater intimacy with Him.

Because of this continued interest from new generations in fasting, and due to the widespread spiritual hunger in the world, my team and I decided we should revisit and revise this book, *Fasting Forward*, which was first printed almost twenty years ago.

The days surrounding my first writing of this book were filled with spiritual warfare and significant ministry intensity. God was positioning my heart and life for a new phase in my journey, and the Lord used fasting to shape and mold me. Now, after twenty years,



I feel my need for God's grace is greater than it has ever been, and fasting continues to help me position my heart to hear His voice. Out of all the spiritual disciplines, fasting has probably changed my life the most. It has also been the most difficult to practice. The lessons in this book have been updated with several new insights that I've gained over the years. I pray these principles and my life journey will bless and strengthen you as you advance spiritually by *Fasting Forward*.





I was led into a state of great dissatisfaction with my own want of stability in faith and love . . . I often felt myself weak in the presence of temptation and needed frequently to hold days of fasting and prayer and spend much time in overhauling my own religious life in order to retain that communion with God and that hold upon the Divine truth that would enable me efficiently to labor for the promotion of revivals of religion.¹

Evangelist Charles F. Finney

And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.”

Luke 5:34–35

Do What? Sharing Reflections of Fasting

*D*o what? I remember the words reverberating in my mind while listening to an experienced and successful minister speak. My wife, Lisa, and I were sitting in a church retreat. It was our first year of full-time ministry, and we were in full-time evangelistic work. The retreat was specially designed for evangelists who ministered regularly. We were excited, young, impressionable, and hungry to see God work in our lives. As the minister finished speaking, I wondered if what he was suggesting could be possible. After teaching on fasting for over an hour, the minister concluded by challenging each of us to fast for at least ten days. Then we heard testimonies from others about what a ten-day fast meant to them in their walk with Christ.

For someone who had rarely gone a day without eating at least three times, it sounded preposterous that I would go ten days without food. I thought, *Surely, God does not expect this kind of suffering or commitment from me.*

A Call to Fast

As we headed home, I couldn't get away from the testimonies I had heard. My heart continued to remind me that if I wanted new blessings in my ministry, I would have to seek God in new ways. God was calling me to fast.

As I reflect on my first attempts at expressing my hunger for God by experiencing human hunger, I realize that starting this discipline



is never easy. Seemingly, every time I prepared to fast, something would interfere. My schedule would change. Family demands would increase. A crisis would happen, or some interruption would convince me that this was not the time to stop eating for a while. When I finally did settle on a time, the pain I experienced in my body caused me to recoil.

In my initial attempts at fasting, I also discovered that not only did I have the potential to cheat, but also raisins, candy, peanuts, bread, and anything else my brain identified as food became objects of obsession for my cheating heart. I remember thinking on one of those early fasts: *Didn't I already have enough temptation in my life without creating more?* Restaurants, refrigerators, grocery stores, candy-bar machines, and kitchen cupboards all called to my flesh like the sirens of ancient Greek mythology. Although my heart had settled the question, “Do what?” my flesh did not want to hear the answer.

During those early years of wrestling to seek God in this way, I discovered several things:

1. *Fasting would be all about internal integrity.* It was a momentary covenant between the Lord and my heart. If I broke a fast early or cheated, God was not going to smite me dead, but my self-discovery of weakness had to be conquered in order for me to live with integrity. The struggle between flesh and spirit would never be stronger than when trying to begin and immediately after ending a fast.

2. *Fasting would position my heart to receive additional grace from the Lord, so a failure in fasting could rob me of the grace I needed.* Over time, I discovered (and am still discovering) that when the Holy Spirit pressed me to fast, He was trying to prepare me for what was ahead. If I won the victory of obedience to Him during the fast, I would witness the victory He desired for me later. This concept is illustrated when the Holy Spirit led or pressed Jesus into the wilderness for a forty-day period of fasting. Jesus was already anointed, He was prepared for ministry, but the victory over His flesh and Satan obtained in the wilderness would move Jesus into a new dimension of public ministry. Triumph in the private battle would mean blessing in the public arena. The same is true for us.

3. *Fasting is a spiritual exercise, and I would become stronger with each attempt.* Each fast would bring new difficulties, unexpected challenges, and new opportunities to learn from the Holy Spirit. Learning this discipline was part of my discipleship journey. More important than learning about the discipline of fasting was learning more about the object of my spiritual hunger and His relationship with me.

4. *Thousands of other Christians had walked this path before me.* Many powerful, anointed men of God paid the price by consistently participating in the discipline of fasting.

- Savonarola, a Florentine monk and preacher in the fifteenth century, fasted regularly, and people filled cathedrals to hear him denounce the sins of his day.²



- Martin Luther, the great reformer of the sixteenth century, fasted for days at a time while translating the Bible.³
- John Wesley, the father of Methodism, fasted two days each week—Wednesday and Friday.⁴
- Jonathan Edwards, a powerful leader of the First Great Awakening in America, fasted. He did not eat or sleep three days before his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” It was so powerful that people clung to the backs of the pews for fear of falling into hell. During this time, he cried out many times, “God, give me New England.”⁵
- The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once announced, “Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven’s gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory.”⁶

In more recent times, famous ministers such as Bill Bright, Reinhard Bonnke, and Billy Graham have participated in the discipline of fasting.

Spirit-Empowerment and Fasting

Leaders of early Pentecostalism were given to this discipline. Fasting was one of the catalysts for the Azusa Street revival and outpouring of Pentecostal power, which took place in Los Angeles in 1906. Azusa became one the greatest revivals in Christian history and is ranked by some as the most significant religious event in the world since the Reformation.⁷ People from around the world visited the

revival, which was held in a former livery stable in Los Angeles. Services took place throughout the day with hundreds of people experiencing supernatural power and Holy Spirit baptism.

Some historians believe that William Seymour and Edward Lee were about three days into a ten-day fast when Lee received the baptism of the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. When Lee gave his testimony at a prayer meeting the very night of his experience, seven other people began speaking in a “heavenly language,” and the revival fire was ignited. Seymour himself received the gift of the Holy Ghost during those same ten days.

Glen Cook, one of the original attendees at the Azusa Street revival, knew Seymour personally. Cook would say of the black revival leader: “I had a room adjoining Brother Seymour. I know that Brother Seymour, who was the leader of the Azusa folk, fasted for weeks at a time and only ate occasionally. There was much fasting and prayer in those days, and I believe that another Azusa could be here today if God’s people would get to travailing in much prayer and fasting.”⁸

Another participant and eyewitness of the Azusa Street revival said, “They just waited on the Lord in fastings, prayer and the unity of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit spoke and moved, they moved. The Holy Spirit was their leader, and when the Spirit anointed, then that person spoke. The Holy Spirit was there in operation, and this was brought about through intense closeness and communion with God

by everyone forgetting about food and their cares. We just drank at the Fountain of the Spirit.”⁹

Noted Pentecostal pioneers such as A.J. Tomlinson, Aimee Semple McPherson, F.J. Lee, Kathryn Kuhlman, Smith Wigglesworth, Oral Roberts, and many others were given to fasting. Oral taught it was important to fast regularly and wrote, “Although God told me that I was a chosen vessel . . . I had to fast and pray in a special way before His power came into my life. I have regular fasting days now. There is no other way.”¹⁰

During the last almost 120 years since the Azusa Street outpouring, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have experienced surges of emphasis on the discipline of fasting. The twenty-first century has especially been marked by an increased emphasis on the discipline of fasting. Churches across the globe have participated in and initiated corporate fasts for seven, ten, twenty-one, and even forty days. Every year, thousands of congregations start the new year with a season of seeking God that includes fasting. Large stadium events have focused not only on prayer but also on fasting as a way to change history. I remember years ago lying on my face on the Mall in Washington, DC, in fasting and prayer during a Call event led by Lou Engle. Thousands of young people gathered in prayer and fasting for revival and to shift the nation spiritually. One of our focus points for the fast was to see the Roe vs. Wade decision legalizing abortion reversed in our nation. Although it took many years, God heard the cry of thousands of fasting and praying people in our

generation, and the Supreme Court overturned *Roe vs. Wade* on June 24, 2022, in a 6–3 decision.¹¹

Dozens of other large-scale calls to fasting continue to happen every year around the world. I believe this increase in fasting correlates with the new revival we are seeing globally. Spiritual hunger is being met with spiritual manifestation in our day as it has been in the past.

*Spiritual hunger
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been in the past.*

A Season of Fasting

One season of fasting emphasis took place around forty years after the Azusa Street revival. In his book, *The Fasting Prayer*, Franklin Hall shares the account of Sister Sommerville who participated in extended fasting, one fast lasting sixty-two consecutive days, during which she drank only water. Sommerville related several things concerning her fast in her memoirs:

I went to North Hollywood, to the big tent almost within sight of the Universal Pictures Studio. I had been on the platform shouting and dancing in the Spirit; the next thing I knew I was off the big platform with my hands on a sick person who was in a wheelchair, and the Lord healed her. This was on my 52nd day of the fast. How I got there I do not know. I was told that I had more energy and was more active than any one that was eating



It was so wonderful I never wanted to eat again. The experience was heavenly. If heaven is any more wonderful, I could not stand it. It would be impossible for words to express it. It is an experience that one should undergo for himself. At times, I did not want to see or be with anyone, but Jesus. Fasting is a hidden truth we can all discover, thank God.

The short fasts of two or three days that I have previously taken are not fasts at all compared to a long one. You cannot possibly understand what a long fast can bring until you pray through those powers of darkness and fast a long time. Day after day, the ecstasy of heaven, the joy of Jesus Christ, was so real. The strange thing about the fast was I grew stronger and stronger.¹²

Again, this was written after sixty-two days of fasting on water alone. Sister Sommerville's experience has been replicated thousands of times around the world as people experience the supernatural communion that is only possible through extended fasts.

I have been honored to have a front-row seat to witness this spiritual hunger and the results in the global church. For many years early in my ministry, when I went to Latin America or Africa and witnessed God's power being poured out dramatically, I believed this was simply the sovereign moving of God's Spirit on the people groups of the world. This belief is true in part, for God is pouring His Spirit out on all flesh. However, I began to discover that not only is God sovereignly pouring out His Spirit, but He is doing so in answer to the desperation of His people. Numerous times I have witnessed "skinny" preachers attend my meetings in support of our efforts.



Upon some questioning, I would discover that some of them fasted twenty-one days straight, just for the series of meetings I would preach. They weren't preaching, they weren't on stage, they weren't featured during the meetings, but they were hungry for God's presence and power. No wonder we saw significant conversions, miracles, and great deliverances! Yes, God is sovereign in pouring out His Spirit, but God also answers the expressed desperation of His people.

What If . . . ?

What would happen in your church if the desperation of fruitless ministry was turned into radical seeking of the Lord? What would happen in your life if you fasted and prayed like you always dreamed you should? What would happen among today's Spirit-empowered believers if we were to return to the same deep passion for God's Spirit that gripped our forefathers? What could happen if you and I joined together in biblical fasting? I want to. I want to seek His face more than ever, even in this season of my life.

Ever since that first full year of ministry, I have been challenged to pursue the Lord by fasting. Over forty years after that retreat, I can personally testify that fasting is one of the most powerful,

*God is sovereign in
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life-changing things I have ever attempted. During these years, I have fasted in a variety of ways—one-day, three-day, seven-day, ten-day, fourteen-day, twenty-one-day fasts, and several different forty-day fasts. This discipline has brought me beauty and brokenness, pain and power, cleansing and closeness, deliverance and distress, hurt and hope. Most of all, the answer to my “Do what?” question has drawn me nearer to Jesus, and that has made it all worthwhile.



Chapter 1 Reflection Questions

1. Have you found it difficult to practice the discipline of fasting?
What excuses have prevented you from fasting?
2. Have you ever started a fast but failed to complete it? What forces led to your breaking your fast before the committed time?
3. What future plans does God have for you that might require you to fast in preparation?
4. Have you ever experienced a situation in which God worked because of your fasting?
5. Have you ever considered how your life, walk with God, and ministry could be transformed by dedicating more time to this discipline?



*If you say, I will fast when God lays it
on me, you never will. You are too cold
and indifferent. Take the yoke upon you.¹*

D.L. Moody

*Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;
Gather the elders
And all the inhabitants of the land
Into the house of the Lord your God,
And cry out to the Lord.
Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord is at hand;
It shall come as destruction from the Almighty.*

Joel 1:14-15

CHAPTER 2

Give Me One Good Reason to Fast (How About Six?)

Perhaps you are looking for one good reason why you should participate in this discipline. In this chapter, I will give six different purposes for fasting as revealed in Scripture. This list will not be exhaustive. There are many purposes for fasting beyond the ones we will study. I have chosen these six points because they will lead us into studying some of the biblical examples, which have brought purpose to my fasting over the years. So, get your Bible and get ready to pursue fasting with purpose.

To help you discover the purpose of fasting, here are some probing questions:

1. Why is fasting important to the Christian?
2. What purpose does it have in my life?
3. What do I hope happens when I fast?

Purpose 1: Repentance (Jonah 3)

“This city stinks!” I almost said the words aloud as I stood in the small, Latin American bullring, preparing to preach to the large crowd of young people gathered for the rally. While trying to focus on the message, I was almost overcome by the horrific smell, to the point that my olfactory glands were consuming my brainpower, and I couldn’t think.

Chimbote, Peru must be one of the worst-smelling cities in the world (apologies to all my friends in Chimbote). Located in northern Peru on the Pan-American Highway, Chimbote runs along the coast of South America. Chimbote's over 400,000² inhabitants wake up each morning to a putrid mixture of polluted air from Peru's largest fish-packing industry and steel mills.³ You can almost smell this city before you see it on the horizon, because nothing reeks like old fish.

"This prophet stinks!" The people of Nineveh probably wanted to say the same thing about Jonah. Even though Jonah was a walking miracle, his three-day whale-belly baptism left his wrinkled, bleached skin exuding pungency. No doubt the people had difficulty listening to Jonah's message while holding their noses. But his message of impending doom and call to repentance was so powerful, the large city-state of Nineveh heeded it. Maybe it was the sight of someone coming back from the dead. Possibly, it was his broken and sincere spirit. Perhaps it was his odd smell. More than likely, it was the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit moving through him that touched the city.

Whatever the reason. . . it worked. The entire city of Nineveh responded and averted the prophet's predicted doom. The king of the great city-state proclaimed a national, citywide fast for the people to repent of their sins. He even made the animals fast, hoping that God would not carry out His judgment. It was a moment of desperation that required desperate measures.

The fasting of the people affirmed their sincerity. This season of repentance was more than lip service or just teary-eyed emotion. Their hearts and flesh were completely engaged in seeking God for mercy. God saw their works and was moved by their acts of desperation.

One of the scriptural purposes for fasting is to express our repentance for personal or corporate failure and sin. Fasting becomes an outward sign of the inward brokenness and desperate hope for forgiveness of the seeker.

Under Old Testament Mosaic Law, the Day of Atonement was a national day of fasting for Israel.⁴ God directed the people to fast as part of their corporate repentance for sin. Their sacrifice for national transgression at the Temple was to be accompanied by nationwide mourning and grieving. This mourning was symbolized and accentuated through a day of fasting. Jewish mothers closed their cupboards and extinguished their cooking fires, depriving their children of nourishment. Everyone felt the pain of sorrow for their sins.

Throughout the Old Testament, fasting was seen as an outward sign of inward dissatisfaction and grief. At times, people mourned the passing of loved ones, na-

Fasting becomes an outward sign of the inward brokenness and desperate hope for forgiveness of the seeker.

tional disasters, and so forth, by refusing to eat (or by fasting). Even so, on this one day each year, the entire nation expressed regret for sins committed, by fasting.

Fasting also accompanied repentance when the prophet Samuel called Israel back to God in repentance. The turning of the people from their sins was accompanied by personal sacrifice in fasting.

“So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah” (1 Samuel 7:6).

God heard their cry of repentance, witnessed their sincerity, and answered the prayer of Samuel by smiting the Philistines.

Along with signaling repentance, fasting can also express humility—a conscious weakening of the flesh to state emphatically before God, and to our own heart, that we are incapable of doing His work on

our own. Through fasting, we confess our need for God amid a world that says by their actions that they do not need Him.

Corporate repentance is needed in today’s church

Through fasting, we confess our need for God amid a world that says by their actions that they do not need Him.

more than at any other time in history. The following conditions signal our need for transformation, restoration, and repentance:

- Our present ineffectiveness
- The quagmire of denominational bureaucracy
- The apathy of church members
- The ascendant attitudes of many leaders
- The rising tide of darkness
- The continued failures of prominent leaders
- The unfulfilled spiritual hunger yet biblical illiteracy of new generations
- The moral and theological drift of church membership

Corporate repentance calls for both an inward and outward breaking, which means fasting should be the order of the day. “If My people . . . will humble themselves, and pray” is still the leading statement to God’s promise of restoration in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Answering God’s call to fast expresses such humility. “I humbled myself with fasting” (Psalm 35:13).

When the Ninevite king pushed back his plate, cleaned out the corn cribs, and led his people to humility, God met with him in a special way, averting disaster, turning away judgment. It was a wonderful day, despite the smell.

A similar thing happened as I stepped to the pulpit in stench-filled Chimbote: God met with us in a special way. He changed lives, and the Holy Spirit fell on those present. It was a wonderful crusade, despite the smell.

Purpose 2: Readiness – Luke 2; Mark 2

Her face was well worn by her widowhood. The years of loneliness had taken their toll. Her peers, for the most part, were gone. She had outlived them. Now, at eighty-four years of age, she was one of Jerusalem's oldest citizens. Her seven years of marital joy had faded into fleeting memories. Like distanced commercials woven into the drama of her everyday existence, she would periodically remember a moment of laughter or a warm embrace. But these memories were not enough. Something within drove her to seek an intimacy beyond the human. She longed for a greater connection with eternity—an audience with God.

Anna was a prophetess of the tribe of Asher. Though limited by circumstances and age, she was not limited in spirit. Her entire life was focused on God's house. Anna was old, but she was still a woman of God and lived like it. According to Luke 2:37, she was a faithful prayer warrior who fasted regularly: "And this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day."

Anna's disciplined devotion positioned her for the greatest moment of her life. When Jesus made His first earthly visit to the temple, Anna was prepared. She would not miss her day of visitation. She recognized Jesus instantly and proclaimed Him to others who were waiting to see Him. "And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (v. 38). While most of the people did not seem to notice

Christ's presence, Anna was elated by Jesus' visit and gave thanks to the Lord. Because of her diligence in fasting and prayer, Anna was ready to welcome the Son of God to His house.

Fasting and prayer position our hearts such that we can readily recognize the Lord's visitation and actively prepare for Christ's next arrival—His second coming.

Fasting and prayer position our hearts such that we can readily recognize the Lord's visitation and actively prepare for Christ's next arrival—His second coming. This readiness is one of the purposes of fasting, and it includes a lovesick longing for Him.

“The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, ‘Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days’” (Mark 2:18–20).

My wife, Lisa, and I have been married for over forty-five years, after a courtship of more than three years as teenagers. We were high school sweethearts. Over the years of our courtship, we “broke up” a few times as we endured the tenuous ups and downs of young

love. During our times apart, I can remember the deep uneasiness in my stomach, or wherever your emotional heart is. At times, I was physically sick because of our broken relationship. Lisa experienced the same feelings. During one time away, she could not eat because of her feelings for me. Over the years, people have called this phenomenon “lovesickness.” Though at times an object of humor and disdain, lovesickness is real.

In many ways, Jesus predicted to His followers that after His departure, His church would be “lovesick” for Him. When the followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees questioned Him about why His disciples did not fast, Jesus explained that they did not need to fast while He was with them. They were fulfilled and in close communion with God through Christ, but when He left, then they also would fast.

His disciples would long for His presence to such a degree that they would not eat. They would fast because they were hungry for Him and wanted to be with Him. The worship explosion of the last few decades among new generations, especially Generation Z, has revealed a deep hunger to be in God’s presence. At Oral Roberts University, where I serve as President, we see this hunger repeatedly. We have chapel each week on Wednesdays and Fridays. These one-hour worship services focus on God’s word and living the Spirit-empowered life.

Over the last few years, a new phenomenon that we call “after-chapel worship” has emerged. When we say “Amen!” at noon at the end of each chapel, on most days, a large majority of students linger in worship, sometimes for as long as two hours, singing, bowing, repenting, and committing. It is an amazing sight and something I love to experience personally, and of course as their President. They are hungry for His presence. They are “lovesick” for Him.

This longing for Jesus is not only producing in them a readiness for His return, but also a sensitivity to His presence among them now. I believe one of the reasons we are called to fast as Anna did is so we can recognize the Bridegroom’s visitation and prepare to proclaim Him to a waiting world. Generation Z is going to lead the way in this as they turn their spiritual hunger heavenward and prepare their hearts through fasting.

Are you lovesick enough for the Bridegroom that you would do without eating rather than miss His visitation? Anna was.

Purpose 3: Revelation – Acts 9, 13

Total darkness can be disorienting. I remember a few years ago standing several hundred feet underground on a cave tour. The guide encouraged everyone to remain still while the lights were turned off. It was amazing. We went from seeing the creative wonders of cavedom to nothing—I mean nothing. Everything was black. One second I could see, and the next second all was dark. I lifted my hand

in front of my face and hit my nose without ever seeing anything. I was afraid to step forward or backward because I could not detect where my feet were. Consequently, I remained still, caught in the confusion of temporary blindness.

“Caught in the confusion of temporary blindness” is exactly where Saul of Tarsus was the very minute his Damascus-road encounter with Jesus ended. Saul’s highway introduction to Jesus Christ was life-changing. He saw a light that was brighter than the noonday sun, heard a voice that could pierce the hardest heart, and encountered the living Jesus who dramatically changed His life, including changing his name from Saul to Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. In a miraculous instant, Saul was lifted to a new road, changed from being

- a Christian-killer to a Christian convert;
- a persecutor to a propagator;
- a litigator to a liberator;
- a Jewish zealot to a missionary to Gentiles.

The brightness of the resurrected Jesus left Saul blind and disoriented. During his encounter, Saul acknowledged Jesus as Lord and asked what this Lord of light wanted him to do. Jesus replied that Saul was to go into the city, and he would be told what to do. When Saul opened his eyes, he found himself in a cavern of uncertainty. The lights of his past were extinguished, and the light of the future had yet to flicker. Saul knew he could not do as he had always done, but he did not know what he should do next. His darkness was disorienting. He needed direction.

The men with Saul led him by the hand into the city where he would go to the street called Straight. I have always mused at the name of this street because, from this time forward, Saul would walk the straight and narrow path of Christianity. Actually, the street called Straight was a major thoroughfare running from east to west through Damascus. It was a prominent address that could be easily located.⁵

Saul resided at the house of Judas for three days, during which he remained blind and did not eat. Not only was Saul fasting during this time, but he was also praying. He wanted God's direction. Saul needed to hear from the Jesus he had just met. He needed revelation.

Millions of Christians are, in essence, where Saul of Tarsus was that day at 101 Straight Street. *We need direction.* Yesterday's light has faded, and the gleam of tomorrow's promise is not yet in sight. We are disoriented by our darkness and desperate for direction. Many times, we are tempted to keep walking and do something, even though we have no revelation. Would we not be wiser to do as Saul and seek God for new light? The discipline of fasting and prayer prepares our hearts to receive the grace of God's direction. When we fast, our spiritual eyes see clearer than usual. Because we have denied our flesh, our spiritual sensitivity escalates, and we are more receptive to God's directives.

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Anticipation for answered prayer also crescendos during seasons of fasting, making us ready to receive revelation.

While the Damascus encounter surprised Saul, his three days of prayer and fasting would make him ready to receive what the Lord was going to say next. With his stomach growling and his blinded eyes moistened from the tears of desperate prayer, Saul had a spiritual vision of a man named Ananias coming and laying his hands on him. Ananias also received revelation and, in obedience, visited the former Pharisee on Straight Street. There he would declare to Saul his destiny, and God would answer Saul's cry for revelation.

The need for revelation in today's church is perhaps greater than ever before. The revelation we need is not some momentary flash of inspiration that brings attention to any individual as God's man for the hour, but we need a true revelation of God's heart and direction for His work. So much of ministry and Christian living is done void of clear direction and revelation. When we walk in our own light, our own understanding, and our own will, we experience a Christianity void of the Spirit's immediate witness. We live religiously but not revelationally. We miss our destiny while fulfilling our own desire. We march to the beat of our own drum to fight battles of our own design . . . absent from the real war.

Due to our lack of revelation and connection with heaven, people are out of position throughout the church. I wonder if we have traded the fruitfulness of God's perfect will for the barrenness of

bureaucratic expediency simply because no one has made the effort to seek God. Finding God's heart requires spending time in prayer and fasting. Sometimes we communicate the idea that prayer and fasting are not needed as much for those who are spiritually mature. In other words, anyone who reaches a certain level of Christian service may ascend above the simple power of pleading intercession. This idea could not be further from biblical truth. The greater the responsibility of service, the greater is the need for revelation and direction.

The church at Antioch was filled with strong, mature, anointed leaders. These were men who had jeopardized their lives for Christ. These prophets and teachers were ministering in an advanced gospel outpost, yet they gave themselves to prayer and fasting. Acts 13 relates that as they worshiped and fasted, they received a revelation that would alter the course of Christian history. During their fast, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (v. 2).

This revelation placed Saul and Barnabas in the very ministry God desired for them and thrust them into the fruitfulness of Christ's immediate presence. After further fasting, the church laid hands on them and sent them into the missionary field. In retrospect, this looked like a stroke of genius on the part of the Antioch church.

Obedying the Spirit always makes us look smarter than we really are. This revelation would propel the most fruitful missionary of all time

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into leading the early church to turn the world upside down. If Paul had not entered his missionary destiny, much of the New Testament as we know it would not have been written. The penetration of the gospel into the Western world then

can be directly linked with the willingness of these mature men to admit their need for supernatural help by fasting and prayer.

What could be the result if today's leaders and followers all admitted that the light in our cave has gone out? Yesterday's fire is extinguished; tomorrow's light cannot be seen. Our cavern of uncertainty desperately needs revelation. What would happen if we decided to stop simply marching on and waited on the Lord, giving ourselves to a season of intense intercession for illumination?

Years ago, during a season of fasting and prayer, I received a revelation from the Lord that drastically changed the course of my life and ministry. The church I was pastoring at the time was in a forty-day fast during which I fully participated by drinking only juice. During the last week of the fast, the church established a twenty-four-hour, seven-day prayer chain with someone praying in the prayer chapel every hour of the day throughout the week.



One morning during this time of seeking the Lord through focused intercession and fasting, I had an intense spiritual encounter. The Holy Spirit visited me, and I found myself facedown, crying out to God for a fresh revival in our generation. With my face against the ground in that small prayer room, I heard the Lord say, “I am going to send a second flood—a new flood—like the flood of Noah’s day. Only this second flood will be spiritual and not physical. This new flood will not be a flood of retribution and justice but of mercy and love. My Spirit is going to flood the earth!”

God spoke to me about a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would reach the whole earth until there were no spiritually dry places left. He further showed me what the sources of the flood would be and revealed that He was about to pour out His spirit in a new and fresh way.

I staggered from the prayer room that morning, knowing God had spoken to me but in no way comprehending what the words I heard would mean to my life and leadership journey. Within months of the encounter, things began shifting in my life. Through a series of providential and supernatural occurrences, I began to transition from being a pastor and denominational leader to a broader kingdom role of servant and convener.

The Lord would require me to devote myself to living the vision He had given that morning and would change my ministry trajectory

forever. Fasting positioned me to receive this revelation from the Lord and prepared me for what He was calling me to next.⁶

I believe the greatest, world-changing, Kingdom-propelling marching orders of all time would be handed to those mature people who will admit their need. I want to be one of them . . . don't you?

Purpose 4: Release – Mark 9; Isaiah 58; Daniel 9

The valley scene was all too recognizable: a desperate world, an impotent church, both needing a powerful Savior. Sound familiar?

A bound young man, a searching father, and a church with a reputation all collided on the field of spiritual warfare. The young man was demon-possessed. He needed deliverance from his torment. The father was searching for an answer for his son. He needed faith. The church was living on its reputation. They were not prepared; they needed power.

The searching father brought the demon-possessed young man to what he thought was a demon-defeating church. Disappointment followed. Despite the disciples' best efforts, the boy was still in bondage. Evil remained ascendant, and satanic manipulation continued. Prayers were prayed—loud prayers, calm prayers, biblical prayers, and silent prayers—all to no avail. Scripture was quoted. Emotion was exerted. Formulas were given. The best the church could offer was brought to the situation, yet nothing changed. Their reputation was a facade; their devil-defeating status a hoax.

Today, the church would be criticized for spiritual malpractice or at least false advertising—unable to come through in the really big cases. The church's impotence was pitiful, but even worse was the fact that the young man who needed to be set free remained possessed.

Then Jesus came. He observed those who had gathered to witness the church's embarrassment. He questioned the crowd, rebuked the faithless, and approached the young man. Jesus challenged the boy's father to believe. Then He charged the evil spirit to depart the lad forever. The tormented boy was instantly delivered. Jesus did what the powerless church could not do. He brought release.

Later, in the private embarrassment of their spiritual impotence, the disciples asked Jesus why they were unable to cast the evil spirit out of the young man. Why were they powerless? Why were they ineffective? Why were they unable to do what Jesus had done? Why did this spiritual bondage seem so impossible to break? Why were they defeated?

The questions continue: Why does today's church seem so powerless? Why does darkness dominate so many? Why do our prayers seem so ineffective? Why are not more sick people healed? Why do the demon-possessed walk in and out of our churches unchanged? Why do we not see those who are bound released? Why can we not do what Jesus did?

Jesus' answer to His disciples provides clues for us today: "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). The key to spiritual power is found on our knees. Much of the spiritual impotency in today's Western church can be attributed to our lack of prayer and fasting.

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Many scholars believe that the word *fasting* in this text was added later and not in the original document.⁷ Even if this is true, the message remains the same: To have power against darkness and experience effectiveness against the demonic, you must have a strong connection with the supernatural power of God. You must position your heart in a way that God's victory over Satan can flow through you freely. If you want to bring freedom and release, you must be spiritually free.

One of the critical purposes of fasting is to bring spiritual release to those who are bound.

The prophet Isaiah states emphatically that the fast God has chosen includes these benefits:

- loosening the bands of wickedness;
- undoing heavy burdens;
- letting the oppressed go free;
- breaking every yoke (58:5,6).

Our innermost cry must be for the Lord to bring about complete spiritual freedom through our abstinence from physical nourishment.

How many people could be set free and have the bands of their wickedness loosed if the church would pursue the Lord in fasting? I am personally convinced that many times we are positioned for promise, but we fail to see fulfillment because of our lack of spiritual intensity. The church missed an opportunity when the desperate father sought deliverance for his demoniac son. God was ready to defeat Satan's power. The public was watching, but the church was not ready. A moment of ministry was missed because of a lack of prayer and fasting.

Hundreds of years prior to this moment of missed ministry by the early church, the prophet Daniel seized a season of spiritual opportunity. Scriptural promise, earthly circumstance, and Daniel's destiny came together while he was living in Babylonian Captivity. Daniel did not miss his ministry moment. Daniel's study of Jeremiah led him to believe that the time of Judah's bondage was concluding. Jeremiah had predicted the Babylonian Captivity would last seventy years, and then the people would experience a new freedom. Near the conclusion of those seventy years, Daniel's burden turned to spiritual birth pangs: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3, KJV).

Setting his face and his faith, Daniel moved in spiritual determination with prayer and fasting for the fulfillment of the promise. Daniel did not take God's prophecy of freedom for granted. He believed and sacrificed to see it become a reality. Daniel began his fast in the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, which most theologians believe was 538 B.C. Daniel began his captivity in the first deportation from Judah around 605 B.C. Thus, Daniel began seeking God in the sixty-seventh or sixty-eighth year of the Captivity.⁸ God's promise stood on the precipice of fulfillment, and Daniel's intercession would open the door to usher in the earthly reality.

Within two years (perhaps sooner) of Daniel's season of repentance and fasting, King Cyrus would set free those who wanted to return to Jerusalem. The seventy years of bondage was broken. An entire nation was released when God's prophet fasted and prayed.

- How many miracles have we missed because we failed to pray for God's promise to be actualized?
- How many days of destiny have gone unfulfilled because our bellies remained full, and our knees remained unbent?
- How many moments of ministry have we missed?

A full discourse of God's sovereignty and man's free will in responding to or resisting grace must wait for another time. However, I believe that in many churches we have allowed our theological pendulum to swing too far toward a laissez-faire attitude regarding the necessity of man's desire rising to meet God's destined purpose.

If John Wesley was even partially correct (and I believe he was) when he stated, “God does nothing but in answer to prayer,”⁹ the church has a huge responsibility to seek God’s face diligently until God’s end-time promises are actualized. In other words, we need to pray and fast until people are released.

We are presently in a great moment of spiritual opportunity. In 2033, the church will celebrate the 2,000-year anniversary of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus: Two thousand years since the giving of the Great Commission and two thousand years since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Numerous Great Commission efforts are being formed to press forward and make this the most significant season of effort in fulfilling the Great

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Commission in history. Multiple organizations are working together to bring the good news of Jesus to every person on Earth by 2033.¹⁰ This moment in human history is more latent with spiritual potential than ever. Millions of lives can experience supernatural release during this time if we will prepare ourselves through prayer and fasting. Some forces of evil can only be moved in this way.

Don’t miss your moment of ministry!



Purpose 5: Restoration – Joel 1; 2

Lisa and I really liked the small plum tree in our front yard. Its beautifully colored leaves were a pleasure, and though small, the tree consistently produced a good harvest of plums. We thought this was pretty good for a front-yard tree in Cleveland, Tennessee. We were proud. One summer we noticed that the leaves had some holes in them and a few bugs were “hanging out” in our plum tree. However, we were so busy attending a convention in town that we simply did not have time to take care of our tree or pay it much attention. While I focused on the convention, the tree became bug bait.

By the time the week was over, our beautiful plum tree was decimated. The purple leaves had turned into brown lace. The swarm of Japanese beetles filled their bellies, and our one-tree orchard was now barren. There would be no more plums. We were ashamed.

As heart-wrenching and tree-destroying as the Japanese beetles were, they really cannot compare to the locusts mentioned in the Bible. Locusts were all-consuming. These grasshopper-looking insects attacked plant life en masse—eating leaf, stalk, and roots. Locust plagues still occur on nearly every continent of the world, with some of the largest swarms recorded in history taking place in places like East Africa and Afghanistan.¹¹ Locusts travel in sky-blackening swarms and settle on crops like a blanket. One documented swarm by the Red Sea covered approximately 2,000 square miles.¹² Locusts are also prolific travelers covering and decimating entire nations in

one mighty journey of devastation. Swarms of locusts have been known to travel from Canada to Texas.¹³

The prophet Joel spoke of a moment in Israel's history when locusts and their larvae would form a literal army of destruction, bringing the judgment of God on the ancient land. Many scholars believe that Joel's description of insect invasion was also representative of a physical invasion by human armies on God's people. Joel describes this insect invasion, which would turn fruitfulness into barrenness, as an attack of God's design. The great bug army, or perhaps human army, was God's physical judgment against those whose hearts had wandered from Him. Their loss of physical fruitfulness resulted directly from their spiritual decline. Drought, fire, starving herds, fruitless orchards, and joyless servants came because they had drifted spiritually. The circumstances described in the early part of Joel's prophecy brought great despair:

What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten. . . . The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. Be ashamed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—all the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men. Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to



my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord (1:4, 10–14).

Joel issued a wake-up call—“Blow the trumpet, sound the alarm.” His prophetic admonition was, “Get up, get together, and get things right with God.” Amid drought and despair, hope could be found.

*“Now, therefore,” says the Lord,
“Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”
So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the Lord your God,
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm. . . .
Blow the trumpet in Zion,
Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly.
(2:12, 13, 15)*

Joel continues his message of restoration and hope:

*Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in the Lord your God;
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,*



CHAPTER 2: GIVE ME ONE GOOD REASON TO FAST (HOW ABOUT SIX?)

*And He will cause the rain to come down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first month.
The threshing floors shall be full of wheat,
And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.
“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust,
My great army which I sent among you.
(vv. 23-25)*

God promised the people that if they would seek Him with all their hearts and with true brokenness, they would experience supernatural restoration. The trees would bloom again; the flocks would eat well; the rains would fall; and revival would come to the land. Then Joel declared the promise of Pentecost, the promise of great spiritual outpouring:

*“And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;—
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,—
Your old men shall dream dreams,—
Your young men shall see visions.
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days”
(vv. 28, 29).*



Humbling themselves, seeking God fervently, and fasting would restore their spiritual power. They would experience revival!

At the beginning of the twentieth century, people around the world began to experience Pentecostal power and revival. Restoration was obviously occurring. Every church movement affected by this fresh outpouring of the Spirit exhibited restoration. New Testament Christianity was being reclaimed; deep spiritual revival was being experienced.

In addition, through these movements of God, people were experiencing the spiritual disciplines in a new way. Countless stories have been told of how the pioneers of the Pentecostal Movement prayed and fasted. Fasting was a part of the fabric of their faith. What started as a handful of people who experienced Pentecostal power has multiplied to almost 650 million Spirit-filled believers around the world in the twenty-first century.¹⁴

We express an inner longing for God to restore us supernaturally when we abstain from food.

One of the purposes of fasting is restoration. We express an inner longing for God to restore us supernaturally when we abstain from food. Just as He did for Joel, God will hear our cry and renew our spirits.



Today's church desperately needs restoration, especially in the Western world. Recent studies reveal that the maladies of the world have infiltrated the church. Divorce rates, individuals dealing with depression, and other struggles, are just as prevalent (or maybe more so) in the American church as they are among the unchurched. Overwhelmed by a spiritual invasion comparable to the locust plague Joel envisioned, the church's effect on secular America has weakened, even as it has shrunk. Today, around 63 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians; however, five decades ago, this figure was significantly higher at 90 percent.¹⁵

As the LGBTQIA+ agenda advances, pluralism displaces truth, filth fills the airwaves, and confusion controls both classroom and courtroom, the church's voice is preoccupied with internal struggles. At the same time, armies of invisible locusts devour our fruitfulness, including the integrity of our pulpits and the spiritual vitality of our pew-dwellers. Could these hordes of difficulties turn us back to God? Is it not time to blow the trumpet, sound an alarm, and sanctify a fast to undo the damage of today's invisible locusts?

Purpose 6: Reward – Hebrews 11; Genesis 15; Philippians 3

Joanna Hayes trained her sunglass-hidden eyes on the finish line. Her years of training had brought her to this once-in-a-lifetime moment at the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. On her right hand was the Olympic gold-medal favorite, Perdita Felician of Canada.

In addition to great timing, exceptional coordination, speed, and strength, the one-hundred-meter hurdles require focus. And Hayes was focused as she placed her feet in the starting blocks. The starting gun sounded, and they were off. With her eyes fixed on the finish line, Hayes never broke stride as she crossed the first hurdle. However, the Canadian runner beside her was not so fortunate. Felician lost focus, stepped on the first hurdle, stumbled, and ran into the runner on her right. During the chaotic moments, Hayes never bobbed, never wavered, or even seemed to notice that the race favorite had fallen. In record Olympic time, Hayes crossed the finish line to reap the reward of her years of training and focusing on her goal—a gold medal.¹⁶

In many ways, fasting helps us focus on our primary goal. It trains our hearts to turn away from the distractions of the world and press toward the reward before us. The distractions around us are at all-time highs. On average,

*Fasting helps
us focus on our
primary goal.*

84.4 percent of people are distracted at work. The most common distractions are email (26 percent), phone calls or texts (55 percent), co-workers (27 percent), and the Internet (41 percent).¹⁷ People check their smartphones on average every twelve minutes during their waking hours, with 71 percent saying they never turn their phone off and 40 percent saying they check it within five minutes of waking.¹⁸ Beyond reducing our effectiveness at work, lack of focus

actually kills: Each year, approximately 3,000 people lose their lives to car accidents from distracted drivers.¹⁹

While Joanna Hayes' focus won her an Olympic gold medal, there was another athlete whose misdirected focus, cost him his. That same summer, United States air-rifle shooter, Matt Emmons dominated the three-position event. He was far ahead of his competitors and well within reach of the gold medal. Emmons did not need to hit the bullseye to win; he only needed to hit the target. With his eyes carefully looking through the barrel, he pulled the trigger. After lowering his rifle, Emmons looked up at the monitor that should have immediately registered his score, but there was nothing. Confused, he spoke with the judges, confident he'd hit the target thus winning the competition. However, he soon realized he had aimed at, and hit, his opponent's target. This "cross shot" cost him the gold medal.²⁰

In the same way, when we are focused on the wrong things, it will cost us. Fasting helps us refocus our attention firmly on God. It helps us maintain our spiritual focus for the goal or reward ahead of us.

His word promises that He will reward those who diligently seek Him: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

What is the reward? Certainly, answered prayer is part of the reward. Such diligent seeking also rewards us with supernatural peace,

Scripture assures us that the greatest reward is the Lord Himself.

divine love, and earthly blessings in a variety of forms. Besides the heavenly crowns, streets of gold, angelic choirs, and eternal life, Scripture assures us that the greatest reward is the Lord Himself. Jesus is our gold medal at the end of the race. He is our reward, our portion in the land of the living.

During and following extended fasts, I have witnessed God do miraculous things. Multitudes have been saved, hundreds baptized in the Spirit, blinded eyes have been opened, deaf ears unstopped, lame people made to walk, church problems solved, financial miracles released, and physical health restored. God has rewarded me when I have diligently sought Him, yet the greatest reward has been experiencing His presence, His glory, and His person.

Explaining this nearness to Jesus during times of extended fasting and immediately after breaking a fast is difficult:

- His voice becomes clear.
- His Word comes alive.
- His heart is revealed.
- His people become more precious.
- His presence becomes everything.

At times of great physical weakness, I have identified with the psalmist when he stated: “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:26).

During my first forty-day water and juice fast, I kept a journal. In preparing to write this book, I went back and read through that first forty-day journey. Several things stood out to me, including all that our ministry accomplished and all the Lord did during that time. I was surprised by my strength, amazed at God’s closeness, and aware of my needs more than at any other time in my life. Perhaps the last day’s reflection says it well. Here is an excerpt:

It is hard to believe it. Forty days without any solid food. Obviously, this has been in God’s plan. I never thought I could do it. I felt after one week that I would never make it, but somehow the Lord has helped me. In fact, during the last three weeks I have rarely been hungry. As always, the greatest thing about fasting is what it does in me. Jesus is changing my life. More and more I have a pastor’s heart. I am less and less concerned about church things and more and more concerned about God in my life.

During that fast, several supernatural things happened—including a vision of angels that gave me the courage I needed for the year ahead. Yet with all the great things the Lord has done when I have fasted, the most memorable thing for me continues to be the miracle of His presence and closeness. God’s promise to Abram can be claimed as our own. He becomes our great reward: “After these things the

word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward’” (Genesis 15:1).

The apostle Paul consistently focused on his relationship with Jesus Christ throughout his journey and as the goal of his spiritual race. Near the end of his life, when the missionary journeys had ended, the moments of public oratory had ceased, the exciting days of groundbreaking ministry were behind him, Paul was isolated in relative obscurity in a Roman prison. Many of his spiritual peers who were favored to finish ahead of him had stumbled and fallen, but Paul was still in the race. His eyes focused, he pressed forward—not toward his next preaching moment, but toward Jesus Christ. Paul knew the real prize, the real gold medal at the end of life’s race, was to know Jesus:

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:10-14).

King David also lived remarkably focused, as great men of God always do. Throughout his psalms, David reiterated that his pursuit



was not just greater buildings or expanded territory for his kingdom—David’s pursuit was the Lord. He was a man after God’s own heart. He was not taken from Bethlehem’s shepherd field to become Israel’s king because he was pursuing position, power, or popularity.

This singular desire of knowing God and beholding His beauty will help us cross the finish line without stumbling.

God made him king because he was pursuing the pure gold of an eternal relationship with the Lord. Several of the Psalms reveal David’s heart of pursuit and his singular focus on the Lord: “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (27:4).

This singular desire of knowing God and beholding His beauty will help us cross the finish line without stumbling. Our gold medal is not merely our heavenly crown, our mansion, our new body, or the eternal community of the redeemed—it is He. Jesus is what will make heaven wonderful, and His presence is what makes fasting worth the diligent effort required.

So like Joanna Hayes, keep your focus and don’t lose your balance. The finish line is ahead. Fasting will help you train your heart on the *real* gold medal. He is our reward!



Chapter 2 Reflection Questions

1. How have you changed as a result of practicing the discipline of fasting? If you have never fasted before, how might it change you?
2. Have you ever had a period of fasting during which God revealed something to you? In what areas of your life do you currently need the grace of God's direction?
3. Consider a Christian in your life who bears good fruit. Do they regularly practice the discipline of fasting?
4. What could be the potential impact on the church if its members and leaders fasted more often? What might be the impact on our world?
5. Have other things held your attention more than God? If yes, how might fasting help reposition the affections of your heart and help you regain appropriate focus?



As a boomer, I have been conditioned to enjoy the best the world has to offer. Fasting speaks boldly to consumerism, one of my generational core values. To set aside what I want to encourage personal Spiritual growth, is what it means to deny myself and take up my cross daily. I suspect it would be difficult for me to rise to the challenge of discipleship and live a consistently Christian lifestyle without practicing the discipline of fasting¹

Douglas Porter

*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit Said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’
Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them they sent them away.*

Acts 13:2—3

CHAPTER 3

Going Vertical: Reclaiming the Priority of Fasting

The television sitcom *Friends* has been acclaimed as the most successful sitcom of all time. With over 230 episodes aired over ten seasons, this show that focused on six friends and their stories, became a media phenomenon. But the reaction of the critics to the pilot episode of *Friends* in 1994 was not favorable. The show was seen as “not very entertaining, clever or original.” However, the final episode drew over fifty-two million American viewers,² and by the end of the series in 2004, all six main cast members were paid \$1 million per episode.³

The critics underestimated *Friends* and the social climate in which this popular show would air. The rising cry for relationships and friendships among teenagers and “twenty-somethings” at the turn of the new millennium was almost deafening. In a society experiencing the postmodern collapse of certainty, the longing for connection with others among millennials was at an all-time high. Acceptance, inclusion, self-definition, and relativism were in, while values like discernment, exclusivity, moral absolutes, and conformity were out. From the first lesbian kiss on television to the reality show explosion, these trends would change media forever.

The Horizontal Search

The Western church was affected by this environment. *Relational evangelism*, *relational leadership*, and *relational churches* all became

Kingdom “catchphrases” emphasizing the need to connect with a generation that was desperately searching for friends. Some of these trends continue, as approximately 60 percent of people in the U.S. report feeling lonely regularly.⁴

This longing for relationships produced many positive results by pressing churches to become more of a New Testament community who expressed the love of Jesus in tangible ways. This trend forced leaders to move from their ivory towers of positional authority to a posture of service. It encouraged believers to evangelize others through friendship, and churches to leave their judgmentalism and welcome the broken masses. This trend was great because it helped churches become open to hurting, broken people, ready to receive today’s harvest.

Nevertheless, I believe that as positive as these trends were, great dangers and difficulties accompanied them. In trying to adjust to reach the millennial generation, many churches overcompensated and became excessively horizontal. People found themselves attending church to connect with their friends more than to connect with God, and many congregations developed the environment of a Christian social club more than that of a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17).

As a result, the ordinary believer tended to see the old ship of Zion as a cruise ship offering enjoyable rides, rather than a battleship attacking the forces of darkness. Under the pressure of that trend,

many ministers subtly sacrificed the cross unto the crowd. They valued raising the statistics, filling the pews, keeping the Christian country-club crowd comfortable, and preventing the cruise-liners from jumping ship more than conversion, purity, spiritual growth, and true transformation.

When a church overemphasizes horizontal relationships, God's people tend to drift toward the lowest common denominator. We compare ourselves with one another, and because our affection is focused on others, we become like them. The Apostle Paul warns against this tendency: "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

The overly horizontal American church developed new trends that were frightening and disastrous. Divorce rates climbed, dependence on prescription drugs increased, and failure among leaders escalated. They neutralized the church's ability to affect culture, and the once-slower drift to immorality in society became a race to the cliffs of moral insanity. To understand the decline of the last few decades, consider the following:

- As recent as the early 1990s, approximately 90 percent of U.S. adults identified as Christians.⁵
- In 2020, The Pew Center for Research estimated only 64 percent of Americans were Christian.⁶
- From 2007 to 2022, the percentage of adults who said they



were atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” grew from 16 percent to 29 percent. At the same time, the share of U.S. adults who identified as Christian fell from 78 percent to 63 percent.⁷

This move to populist, horizontally-oriented churches, which many called seeker-friendly, left millions of believers unprepared for the cultural storms of the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Without deep roots, biblical understanding, or a vibrant, radical relationship with Jesus Christ, their connections with their friend groups at church left them without the moorings necessary to endure the storms. Many were simply blown away or at least pushed far off course.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the frailty of shallow Christianity, revealing its lack of depth and vertical strength. Sixteen percent of churchgoers stopped attending church altogether during the pandemic.⁸ The average church is still missing one in four churchgoers since the pandemic. And just before the outbreak in 2019, over 4,500 U.S. Protestant churches closed.⁹

As the church emerges from the pandemic, a radical course of correction and cleansing is taking place. The millennial-oriented church has seen multiple leadership and congregational failures bringing Generation Z to a startling cry for authentic, biblical Christianity that can endure the storms. In many ways, Generation Z, those born, roughly, between 1995 and 2015, finds itself emerging

from this overly horizontal model and is now seeking a restored vertical connection with Jesus. This search is one of the reasons the worship movement continues to be so strong with new generations. They are longing to connect vertically and establish a relationship with God that will hold them in the storm.¹⁰ They will also need to discover the spiritual disciplines beyond worship in a fresh way to develop the depth necessary to stand for Christ in the chaos of the twenty-first century. These disciplines include fasting.

The Vertical Answer

Personally, I believe God is calling many congregations to reemphasize their vertical relationship with Him and to reconnect with the eternal. Fasting is one of the most vertical of all spiritual disciplines, as well as one of the most effective at weaning believers away from earthly attractions and focusing them on their personal relationship with Christ. When individuals or local churches participate in a godly fast, they can expect renewed vertical activity.

Christ's cross is the greatest symbol of Christianity around the world. Wherever you are in the world, whether you can speak the language or not, you identify a cross with Christianity. The cross

Fasting is one of the most vertical of all spiritual disciplines, as well as one of the most effective at weaning believers away from earthly attractions.



remains God's plus sign to the world because of what Jesus did on a cross 2,000 years ago.

Jesus died on the cross to bring us to God and connect us vertically with our heavenly Father.

The cross embodies and reveals the Christian life. The traditional cross was made of two wooden beams—one horizontal and the other vertical. In this way, the cross represents the entire Christian life, which is both vertical and horizontal. Jesus died on the cross to bring us to God and connect us vertically with our heavenly Father. He also died to connect us horizontally with our fellow believers.

The Christian life is lived on these two planes:

- We are to live in pure relationship with God, and we are to live in pure relationship with one another.
- We are to serve God, and we are to serve one another.
- We are to love God, and we are to love one another.
- We are to submit to God, and we are to submit to one another.

Local churches also live on these two planes. The church should connect vertically with God in a strong way through prayer, worship, and supernatural activity. Likewise, and in as strong a way, the church should connect horizontally with one another in fellowship, service, and practical Christian living. When these connections get out of balance, the church tilts, becomes dysfunctional, and loses some of its effectiveness.

Many congregations well-connected vertically need to connect better horizontally by promoting greater fellowship with one another. However, in most Western churches, the reverse is true. The question is not whether we need both vertical and horizontal activity in the church. Like the chicken and the egg, they depend on one another. The real question is, Which of these dimensions is of primary importance? In God's order, connection with Him takes precedence over connecting with one another. The vertical must come first. Let me explain.

Jesus taught these two great principles of connecting with God and connecting with one another as the foundational principles of Christian life, yet even Jesus prioritized them.

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Jesus condensed the entire law of God down to these two basic principles. He then shared that our relationship with God must be placed above everything else. The first or primary commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Loving God and connecting with Him vertically is what separates the Christian church from the rest of the world. Yes, we are to love one another, resulting in others' knowing we are His disciples by our proper horizontal

*Yes, we are to love
one another, but
our loving Him
must come first.*

connection; but our loving Him must come first.

Millions of people around the world have learned how to treat others with respect, kindness, and even love, without trusting Christ

as their Savior. I hate to admit it, but sinners have treated me as well or better at times than those who professed Christ. Members of organizations, clubs, societies, and other religions have learned how to make friends. Again, it should never be true that the horizontal relationships outside the church are better than those inside the church. We should be the greatest example of love, acceptance, understanding, and compassion on Planet Earth, and we will be when the vertical dimension of our faith is our priority. What separates the church from the world is not simply that we know how to have better friendships than the world; it is that we know the living God, and He is in our midst. The church is different because it is God's house, His home, His temple, and we are His people.

Biblical Examples

We discover one example of this principle at Bethel.¹¹ When Jacob was leaving his father's house to go to Haran and find a wife, he came to a certain place where he would spend the night. There he took a stone and made it into a pillow, as his grandfather Abraham had done many years before on his journey to Canaan. While sleeping

on his rock-hard pillow, Jacob dreamed of a ladder extending vertically from the earth and connecting to heaven. He beheld angels ascending and descending on the ladder. Vertical activity was happening between heaven and earth.

The Lord stood above the ladder and spoke to Jacob, reaffirming His promise to Abraham through him. It was a powerful visitation for Jacob. He had connected vertically with the living God. When Jacob awakened, he rubbed his eyes and declared in amazement: “Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16). He was afraid and continued by saying, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (v. 17). Jacob called the name of the place *Bethel*, or House of God. Here, Jacob heard God’s promise, connected with the living God, and committed fully to God’s service. He knew this was the house of God because he met God there. Bethel was a place of vertical activity.

Solomon’s temple is another example of God’s house primarily being a place for vertical connection. The process David experienced for establishing the location of the temple that Solomon would build helps verify this point.

The devil can use even the best of us. According to 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, King David discovered this. The writer of 1 Chronicles says: “Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel” (21:1). Near the end of David’s life, he commanded

Joab and his leadership team to count the number of fighting men in his kingdom. He wanted to know Israel's physical battle capability and power. This action displeased the Lord because He always desired for the king and His people to depend on Him rather than their own strength or numbers. God had proven to Israel that He was able to save by many or by few, so glorying in their number of fighting men was not necessary. Although the census revealed that there were over 1,500,000 men in their fighting reserves, this exercise displeased the Lord, and Israel would receive God's chastisement.

God spoke through David's minister, Gad, giving David a choice of punishment for what he had done. The choices were three years of famine, three months of defeat by their enemies, or three days of pestilence in the land. David chose to commit himself to God's mercy rather than allow his enemies to defeat them for three months. The Lord determined that He would send a pestilence on the land and an angel to administer His plan. Over 70,000 men died quickly during the angelic-induced plague. When the pestilence arrived at Jerusalem, God's heart was touched, and He commanded the angel to stop His judgment.

The angelic warrior ceased his activity by the wheat-threshing floor of a Jebusite named Oman. As David sought the Lord, he saw the angel standing at this unique location. David bought this harvest-holding place where God's mercy was demonstrated and where he saw the angel of the Lord. The elderly king built an altar, offered burnt and peace offerings, and then called on the Lord and witnessed

fire from heaven descend on the altar in this place of grace. The angel sheathed his sword, and David connected with heaven on a former threshing floor. Like Jacob at Bethel, David called this place of vertical activity “the house of God.” Then David said, “This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel” (1 Chronicles 22:1).

It’s no coincidence that on this very place of vertical activity, Solomon, David’s son, built the temple of the Lord. God’s house has always been meant to be a place of vertical activity—a place where God and man connect, where prayer and praise ascend, and where God’s messengers and message descend. The temple was built as a gateway—a place where people could connect with heaven, a place of vertical activity.

When Jesus ministered at the rebuilt temple (still over the old threshing-floor site) in Jerusalem, He did not find a house of vertical activity. Whenever *God’s* glory is missing in His church, the church will move toward an overdependence on horizontal activity. The church will also move toward the corruption of human comparison. This move is what happened when Jesus visited the temple. It was a place of activity; the activity was just in the wrong direction.

“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,”

but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” (Matthew 21:12–14).

“Then He taught, saying to them, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it a “den of thieves”’” (Mark 11:17).

Jesus found God’s temple to be a house with virtually no vertical activity, while the horizontal activity was at a fevered pitch. This imbalance describes many churches in the Western world. Horizontal activities have slowly replaced the vertical. Many churches busy themselves with activities, but these are not taking their people anywhere. They are busily being connected within their church, enjoying religion, but their hearts are unchanged, and they are not experiencing God’s glory. This situation is the most dangerous of all. The elixir of religious activity done in the name of Christ has replaced the living Christ in His house.

Jesus came to reestablish the vertical. He cleansed the temple, reclaimed its primary purpose as a house of prayer for all people, and immediately began to demonstrate the wonder of vertical connection by healing those who came to Him.

Jesus came to reestablish the vertical.

Today, God’s house is not made of mortar and stone but of people.

According to Peter, the people of God are built as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), and, according to Paul, we are built for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). The church must be a place where vertical connection with heaven is primary, not secondary. The religious death surrounding today's church demands that we re-establish the vertical. We must allow the Spirit to drive out the horizontal corruption of political ambition, favoritism, human comparisons, and the temptation of trusting in our own strength in favor of vertical glory.

In Acts 3, we see the stark contrast between horizontal impotence and vertical power. The Beautiful Gate at the entrance to the temple was a great place for a beggar. People from around the world passed through this gate daily. They were religious pilgrims who had journeyed up to Zion to make sacrifices to God. Jewish patrons would be feeling religiously generous by the time they reached the temple. Thus, a beggar asking alms at this gate would be able to reap maximum benefit.

From the day of his birth until that day recorded in Acts 3, the forty-year-old man had never walked. Unable to work, he had spent his entire adult life asking others to help him. The shame and reproach of such a life had long since faded, and now he simply hoped to continue his existence. Every day he received great comfort from the religious pilgrims who passed by the entrance to the temple. Their smiles, their warmth, and, most of all, their generosity, allowed him to connect with people from around the world. He was comforted.

FASTING FORWARD

In the same way, religion can comfort people, but it does not have the ability to cure them. Many of today's churches are addicted to horizontal comfort, but they rarely see anyone cured. Their religious activity and church-related friendships make the people feel better, but there is no power to make them productive or restore the ability they have lost.

When Peter and John passed by the gate on their way to prayer, the crippled man encountered something beyond horizontal religion. Peter commanded the beggar to look at them. As he had many times, the man looked up, expecting to be comforted once again. This time, Peter stated that he and John did not have the financial resources to help the man, but they had something better to give him. Peter said: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (v. 6).

Taking the man by the hand, Peter lifted him up. Immediately, the man was walking and leaping and praising God. This forty-year-old man bypassed the crawling and toddler stage, moving immediately into running, leaping, and praising God. This miracle was amazing: He was not only comforted—he was cured!

What was the difference between the temple visits of others and the visit of Peter and John? The difference was their vertical connection. The real church, the new house of God whom Peter and John represented, was visiting at the old house of God, filled only with horizontal activity. The new house was full of vertical activity, as

well as wonderful horizontal connections. The old house of religion could bring comfort, but the new house of living relationship could bring a cure.

More Than Comfort

Our world needs more than comfort from a church filled with horizontal activity; it needs a cure from a church where people meet the living Jesus, because His glory is there. Just as Jesus drove out the money changers and reestablished God's presence at the temple, even so, I believe today's church must prioritize its vertical connection if it wants positive change.

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Warning! If you are in a church consumed with horizontal activity, it will not be easy to establish the kind of vertical activity that will allow your house to be known as Bethel, the house of God. Leading a church into fasting and prayer is one way to see your vertical connection increase.

Several years ago, I pastored a church that was extremely horizontal. This church was filled with wonderful people who really enjoyed connecting with one another. Unfortunately, most of the activity in the church was horizontal. Retreats, group meetings, special events,

sports, and so forth, consumed much of the calendar and energy of the people. All of these were good activities those participating could defend.

This problem faces overly horizontal churches. They have given themselves to good things, but they have neglected the best things: Prayer times, altar ministry, witnessing, and worship are often an afterthought. The main events seem to be fellowship and food. In many of these congregations. . .

- people attend, but their lives are not transformed;
- marriages struggle, despite the many classes and retreats;
- altars and baptisteries are empty, despite the eloquent sermons and good music;
- young people live like the devil at school, despite the great scavenger hunts and super recreational outings;
- a lot of people are comforted, but very few are cured.

Efforts to establish vertical activity in this church were not easy. We started prayer meetings, gave invitations, extended altar services, prioritized worship, and encouraged fasting. For five consecutive years, we led the church to participate in a forty-day corporate fast. I can say without hesitation that these forty-day fasts each year were the greatest and most difficult days we experienced in my pastorate at this church. One-third to one-half of the congregation would participate in the fast each year. Some people would fast one day, some one day each week, and some one meal each day. Others would fast for three days, seven or twenty-one days; a few would fast

for the entire forty days. Their commitment to fast was confidential, revealed only to me as pastor. My commitment was to make sure that on every day during those forty days, someone in the church was fasting. Among those who fasted, the testimonies were amazing: their lives were changed, as well as those of their families and of the church.

Every year when the church participated in this kind of sacrificial seeking of the Lord, we experienced breakthroughs and progress. At times, the progress was very painful. Sin was revealed, ugly spirits raised their heads, difficulties were encountered, and Satan always showed himself. Nevertheless, God's glory was noticeable; the altars were opened, worship was energized, and all those participating were wonderfully transformed. Most importantly, the congregation's attention was turned to God's priority of vertical connection. We still loved one another, still had great fellowship events, and still enjoyed activities together, but our focus had changed subtly. We wanted to be more than just a good house. We wanted to be *God's* house.

Encouraging your church to fast or, better yet, leading the way by

Encouraging your church to fast or, better yet, leading the way by fasting yourself, will move a church toward being people of the cross and dying to self in order to be properly connected both vertically and horizontally.



fasting yourself, will move a church toward being people of the cross and dying to self in order to be properly connected both vertically and horizontally. When we fast, we join our Christian brothers and sisters in connecting with *The Friend* who sticks closer than a brother.

Chapter 3 Reflection Questions

1. Do you tend to rely on your horizontal connections more than your vertical connection with God? If so, how does this reliance affect you spiritually?
2. How will having a stronger vertical connection with God strengthen your horizontal connections with others?
3. Have you experienced the church's being a place primarily of horizontal or vertical activity?
4. How might strengthening our vertical connection with God affect the church at large and the world around us?
5. Consider the following: "Religious activity and church-related friendships make the people feel better, but there is no power to make them productive or restore the ability they have lost." How might fasting help us regain godly productivity?



To the degree that fasting becomes more of a norm in our day-to-day Christian life as individuals and congregations, we will become more effective in Spiritual warfare.¹

Peter Wagner

“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls and You take no notice! In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day; to make your voice heard on high Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is It to bow down his head like a bulrush and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out, when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.”

Isaiah 58:3–8

CHAPTER 4

A Hunger Strike Against Hell: Changing the Perception of Fasting

The frail, skinny man looked surreal. His bones protruded from his body like a large coat hanger holding a thin sweater, while his dark skin contrasted starkly with the translucent white clothing he wore. His balding head, gentle smile, and thin eyeglasses are well-remembered by anyone who has studied Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi was a unique individual who changed the world.

This brilliant Indian leader led nonviolent protests against the British government for the independence of his nation. Although India was broadly diverse in the early twentieth century, Gandhi was able to communicate with the people by some unusual means.

One of the methods of nonviolent protest and nonverbal communication Gandhi used was fasting, or self-punishment by not eating. Gandhi would go days at a time without food to bring the attention of the nation and the world to India's plight. He embraced the restrictions of fasting, so his people could be free.²

Years later in America, Cesar Chavez adopted some of Gandhi's methods by leading hunger strikes to protest the plight of migrant workers on the produce farms of California. Chavez, like Gandhi, would go days at a time without eating with the intent of bringing attention to the mistreatment of California's workers. He hoped to bring them greater freedom. Over time, Chavez succeeded in

winning many reforms for the workers. Consequently, he is seen by many in the Hispanic American community as a figure likened unto Martin Luther King Jr. of the African American community.³ Both Gandhi and Chavez used fasting as a protest to bring greater freedom and political change. These leaders found success because of their willingness to suffer on behalf of others.

Throughout history, people have also used hunger strikes to protest their own personal situations. Imprisoned suffragettes in the early twentieth century fasted in hunger strikes. In 1909, Marion Wallace Dunlop led the way when she refused to eat as protest against being labeled a criminal instead of a political prisoner. Marion was released from prison for fear she might die. Other suffragette prisoners quickly adopted the hunger strike. Ultimately, authorities developed a plan of forced feedings for the prisoners to keep them from dying.⁴

History records that fasting, even for secular reasons, can be powerful. Fasting has gained personal and political freedom for many. However, fasting for the Christian is not about political or personal goals of

Fasting is about realizing spiritual freedom and change on behalf of others.

achievement. Fasting is about realizing spiritual freedom and change on behalf of others. In many ways, the believer's fast is a hunger strike against hell. We push away our plates in protest against the spiritual

bondage imposed by Satan on our fellow man. Our spiritual hunger strike pleads for heaven's attention and help in bringing release to the bound.

Biblical Perspective on Fasting

Fasting is very personal, and for some people, it can become very selfish. We must be careful to remember that the forward movement we make spiritually through any spiritual discipline is not just for our own good, but also for the good of those we serve. One of the greatest results we can expect from fasting is the blessing and freedom others will experience.

Isaiah 58 records the Lord's word through His prophet bringing correction to the people of Israel regarding their purpose in fasting. During one's first reading of this chapter, it could appear that the Lord is rebuking Israel for any participation in this discipline. However, closer investigation of Scripture reveals that God is not chiding Israel for fasting; rather He is reproofing them for *how* they are fasting. The people questioned God for His apparent failure in acknowledging their fasts: *Is our doing without food in vain? If not, then why does the enemy seem stronger? Are we defeated more than ever before?* The Lord used this moment of vulnerability to enlighten the people on why He was ignoring their fasts. A review of Isaiah 58 reveals the simple answer: They were selfish!

Israel was fasting so God would hear them and give them greater power for their personal plans. They were manipulating outward sacrifice to raise themselves, while putting others down. They were getting thinner, but they were also getting haughtier. The people used their time of not eating to get more work done and find greater pleasure. Their fasts lacked spiritual focus or, worse yet, were self-focused, and God was not interested in just making them look better—He wanted to touch the world through them.

Focusing on self is a danger we must avoid during any season of fasting. Because of the reflective nature of spiritual cleansing, the pain of detoxification, and the outcry of our body for attention during a fast, we can easily turn inward, believing that the fast is all about us, instead of being about God and others. To progress spiritually, we must defeat self-focus, which the Lord wants to do during our seasons of seeking Him.

One way to defeat self-focus is to continue reviewing the biblical purposes for fasting. When we fast for the right reason, our focus remains God-centered, and we desire to see others blessed more than we are, through our sacrifice. Remember, fasting is about self-denial, not self-fulfillment. With this goal in mind, I mention a few very wrong reasons to fast. Fasting for these incorrect reasons can actually harm us spiritually more than not fasting at all.

Wrong Reasons to Fast

1. *We should never fast to obtain merit with God.* Fasting does not make us better than other Christians or place us in line for some divine award. We can never merit God's grace or mercy no matter how many meals we do without or how many prayers we pray. God gives His grace to us only through the merit Jesus Christ earned at the cross. Fasting draws us closer to Him, where we can receive the grace He alone purchased for us.

2. *We should never fast to rid ourselves of sin.* Again, there is only one sacrifice for sin, and that is our Lord Jesus. Fasting does allow us to express our repentance before God in a tangible way, but it has no inherent power to eternally cleanse us of sin or its consequences. Trusting in the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for our failures, is the only way God cleanses us from our sins. When Israel fasted on the Day of Atonement, they fasted so they could remember the pain and wretchedness of sin.

The covering of Israel's sin on the Day of Atonement required the shedding of blood from a consecrated sacrifice. Jesus is God's consecrated sacrifice, and while our fasting reminds us of the terribleness of our sin, only Christ's blood can pay its debt.

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3. *We should never go on a spiritual fast to lose weight.* Many believers

become so consumed with the physical aspects of their fast that it becomes an accelerated Christian diet plan. Fasting for health reasons is acceptable, but health gains are only one of the minor benefits and should not be primary when fasting for spiritual reasons. Weight loss from fasting will usually be gained back almost immediately after a fast. Some actually gain back more weight because of changes in their metabolism and the tendency of post-fast storage by cells in the body. If you want to just look better, change your eating habits, go on a good diet, and exercise. During a spiritual fast, we should be looking into God's Word more than into the mirror. We are fasting so God changes our inner selves for His glory and for others to be blessed through our sacrifice.

4. *We should never fast so others will notice us.* Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount clearly lead us away from self-sacrifice for men's applause.⁵ The subtle temptations for others' admiration can be strong for some people. Sometimes, they release news of their fasting in ways that make them look more spiritual than others.

Over the years, I have met Christians who, though given to fasting, were immature, loveless, and struggling with their flesh. They were suffering a spiritual disconnection, and, for some of them, I believe it was because they fasted so others would recognize them. Remember, God notices things done in secret, and the more discreet your sacrifice, the more significant your blessing.

If we are motivated by what others think, then we will only get what others can give, which will be momentary recognition or congratulatory remarks. If, on the other hand, we are motivated by what our Lord thinks, we can receive what He can give. The potential of His blessings is unlimited. Easy choice, don't you think?

Focusing on the Needs of Others

Just as the Lord, through Isaiah, corrected Israel for their self-focus in fasting, He also encouraged them to focus on the needs of others. We are to remember the hungry and hurting as we experience hunger and hurt ourselves.

The early church adopted a practice I believe is worthy of emulating. When fasting, believers were to save the monies they would normally spend on food and use it to minister to the poor.⁶ In other words, their fasting had a very practical purpose of helping others with the money they saved. Though this was certainly not the highest spiritual value of fasting, it was a practical and blessed way to keep those who were fasting from focusing on themselves.

Several years ago, World Vision adopted a modified form of this plan with a program called “30 Hour Famine” — an all-night youth fast designed to help young people feel the pain of world hunger and raise funds for the needy.⁷ My participation in a couple of these 30-hour youth fasts was a blessing.

We must push back our plate because a world is lost and needs the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our times of seeking the Lord without eating should also focus on winning the lost. In my opinion, nothing is more important than this priority. We must push back our plate because a world is lost and needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. The brokenness we experience in fasting allows the love of God to flow through us and prepares us to be God's messenger to a broken generation. The greatest harvest of lost people for Jesus Christ in my ministry has happened during and after fasting. I have been amazed at how God uses these moments to loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free. Every missed meal is worthwhile as people find the forgiveness of Jesus and begin a new life with Him.

Binding the Strongman

Affecting this generation of lost people will require spiritual warfare at heightened levels. Fasting assists us in binding the strongman, Satan, so the church can move into his territory. Jesus said that unless the strongman is bound, we cannot enter into his house: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matthew 12:28-29).

Our desire is to plunder the house of darkness and deliver those who are bound into God's marvelous light. If we are going to invade Satan's house of hopelessness, we must first bind the strong guard who would seek to keep the gates of hell closed against the church. Jesus himself bound the strongman before entering his house. We can learn much about this plundering from Jesus' wilderness fast and temptation by the devil.

Following the water baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.⁸ The Father publicly affirmed the Son, and the Spirit anointed Jesus for His public ministry. After thirty years of relative obscurity in Nazareth, Jesus was thrust into a three-year ministry that would change the world forever. Before entering this most important segment of His earthly work, God's Spirit pressed Jesus into a lengthy fast in the rugged Judean wilderness. These days without eating would be preparatory for future ministry.

Two Gospel writers relate that the Spirit *led* Jesus into the wilderness, and another clearly states that the Spirit *drove* Him into the wilderness. Obviously, the anointing moved Jesus into this lengthy time of spiritual battle in what could be equated with hand-to-hand combat against earth's strongman.

For thousands of years before Christ's coming, Satan held mankind in spiritual bondage. Millions died under his captive watch, plunging into a Christless eternity. Through his rebellion, Adam relinquished

the scepter of his dominion on earth to this rebellious angel-turned-earthly-strongman named Lucifer. Jesus was coming to dethrone Lucifer from his assumed role, reclaim the scepter of earthly domain, destroy his works, and liberate his subjects. This salvation would mean war!

Many times, when the Spirit presses us to fast, He is trying to prepare us for what is ahead by leading us into spiritual warfare. Through fasting, we can win the victory before the war ever begins . . . if we bind the strongman in a preemptive strike of intercession. Our victory in the invisible realm will become visible through tangible progress against the kingdom of darkness. Christ's victory over Satan in the wilderness left the house of darkness vulnerable to an invasion of light. We need to examine Christ's wilderness battle with Lucifer closely to understand how we will be tempted during and after a fast, as well as how we can bind the strongman for future victory.

One discovery you will make while fasting is that the moments and days immediately after breaking a fast are key to gaining the victory God has for you. Many times during a fast, you will experience great calm and peace. You sense that all is well and feel as if you are in a spiritual cocoon. When the fast ends, you may feel as though all hell has broken loose. This is exactly what happens. Satan's kingdom takes notice of your pursuit

Through fasting, we can win the victory before the war ever begins.

of the Lord and realizes that your closeness to the Creator means his kingdom is in trouble. The messengers of darkness usually rush to stop you before the captives are set free.

When you are fasting, especially in a lengthy fast, you feel almost “heavenly minded” or as if you are somewhere between heaven and earth. Sitting together with the Lord in heavenly places and communing with Him takes on a dimension that is almost otherworldly. Conversely, when you break a fast, you will reenter the battleground of this world. This transition could be compared to emerging from a spiritual training school. You are graduating from boot camp and must pass the tests necessary to become victorious in the battles ahead. As you break your fast, handling the tests of temptation will determine your level of victory for the future. Jesus faced and passed the same kind of testing you will face during and following a fast. Although there are numerous day-to-day temptations we all face, 1 John 2:15-16 outlines three areas of world influence that must be conquered:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

These three ongoing, broad influences of the world’s system are anti-God, issuing from Satan’s and man’s rebellion against God. Satan uses these influences to lure believers away from God and keep the

kingdom of darkness intact. When Jesus was preparing to plunder the strongman's house, He defeated these forces first. Luke's account of the wilderness temptation records how Jesus won the victory.

The Lust of the Flesh

Following a fast, temptation escalates. The writer of James states: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (1:14, KJV).

Our desires make us vulnerable to temptation. Satan assists us in nurturing those desires to become sin. When you break a fast, you will normally have difficulty with the desires of your flesh. Don't be surprised by this; just get ready for the fight. Having been suppressed for a season, your fleshly desires seek to be satisfied quickly, which leads to magnified temptation. The desires of the flesh may in themselves not be sinful, but our enemy wants us to fulfill them in illegitimate ways.

". . . being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'' (Luke 4:2-4).

Jesus was hungry! Who wouldn't be after doing without food for forty days? This kind of hunger was not like the hunger pangs we normally feel around lunchtime. This was a deep hunger, beyond just a hurting stomach. Christ's body was depleted and needed nutrition to live. Physical hunger is legitimate. God created us with hunger so we would eat the nutrients needed for a healthy existence. One of a baby's first instincts is to find food. Eating is not a sin if it is within God's parameters.

In the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus to use this natural desire in the wrong way. The strongman tempted the new man to turn stones into bread and satisfy His hunger. This creative miracle would certainly have been within Jesus' power to accomplish. Later, He would multiply bread and fish to feed the multitude, turn water into wine, and bring a large catch to Peter's net. Jesus could have created an entire supernatural bakery out of the hillside and called it Stones Cafe, but He would not satisfy the desire of His flesh under Satan's direction. Jesus submitted to the Word of God by quoting Scripture.

Following a fast, our normal appetites will seek immediate fulfillment, making us vulnerable to temptation. When this happens, the real test of our fast takes place. We must evaluate our motives:

- Were we merely fasting to be seen because someone pressured us?
- Were we fasting because our trust is in the Lord?
- Were we fasting because we wanted *Him* or simply wanted to have our needs supplied?

If we trusted Him during the fast, then we can trust Him following the fast. Physical hunger, sexual desire, the need for rest, and a longing for human closeness are all natural desires which God created for His purposes. Satan tempts us to fulfill these desires in ways that take us away from God's will for our life. Get ready, because at the end of your fast, the enemy will try to stop you from hurting his kingdom by getting you to satisfy your fleshly desires in illegitimate ways. You can defeat him by submitting to God and trusting His Word.

The Lust of the Eyes

In the second part of Jesus' temptation, Satan appeals to the desire of the eyes.

“Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Luke 4:5–8).

The lust of the eyes, or desire to obtain things in this world, is a strong drive. Since God told Adam to subdue and replenish the earth, mankind has sought to excel and prosper here. This desire for dominion and prosperity is not evil. Scripture teaches us that

someday we will inherit the earth and rule here for a thousand years. The Bible also teaches that God blesses the righteous in this life because He designed us to be fruitful. However, Satan tempts us to fulfill these desires illegitimately.

Millions of people are drowning in greed, always wanting more than they have. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). Satan tempts today’s generation to possess more by cheating on taxes, stealing, gambling, overpricing, charging exorbitant interest rates, and failing to pay tithes.

Satan offered to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him. First, the kingdoms of the earth were not really Satan’s to offer since God has His way in the kingdoms of men. Second, I know Jesus will someday be recognized as King of kings and Lord of lords in all the earth. Satan was tempting Jesus to trade His future glory for the momentary pleasure of immediate possession. He was testing His patience!

We are all tempted to grasp what we can see now, even if it robs us of eternal reward. The employee who illegitimately presses his or her way to the top ignores God’s command to prefer others. The momentary reward of a better job will pale in comparison to the eternal judgment against selfishness and the wounds inflicted on their fellow employees. Some of the greatest family fights in history

have taken place because of an inheritance and the probating of a will. Anger, hurtful words, extreme selfishness, and bad attitudes surface over money, furniture, family heirlooms, and property. Family members turn against one another as they surrender to the lust of their eyes. Seemingly forgotten is the loved one who was just buried, the family memories, or the eternal call of God that the family circle be unbroken. Eternal values are swallowed up in the possibility of momentary gain.

The saddest sight in the world is those in authority who have succumbed to the lust of their eyes—consumed by the momentary, forgetting the eternal. The lust for power grips politicians who accept bribes for political favors, forgetting that the people they serve depend on them to have integrity. Darkness influences the minister who finds a way to place his family member on staff despite his or her incompetence, to the detriment of the church. Momentary madness overtakes the businessman who manipulates stock options for personal gain, while the company he is serving goes under. Obviously, the lust of the eye is very strong. After a fast, you can expect this desire of your humanity to demand fulfillment. Your patience will be tested. Satan is always prepared to offer you a compromise. This compromise may be for power, position, or property. At this point, the strongman must be bound by the power of God's Word. Jesus thwarted this appeal of Satan by quoting Scripture, which says we are to worship the Lord alone.

We must refuse illegitimate, momentary gain in favor of eternal fulfillment. “Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Meekness is

*Fasting is all about
self-control.*

not weakness. The meek are those who, though having great power, exercise great control. *Meekness* can be defined as “strength under control.” Moses was “meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3, KJV), but Moses was not weak. He was given great authority, and he exercised great control.

Fasting is all about self-control. Following a time of fasting, you will be tempted to give up control to the Enemy. Keep worshiping the Lord and allow Him to be in control. Be patient—the earth will be ours soon!

The Pride of Life

In the final test, Satan appealed to Jesus’ pride. This was an apex moment in Christ’s encounter with the strongman and one He won. In this temptation, Satan used the pride of life.

Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered

and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (Luke 4:9–12).

Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple. This was a 450-foot drop to the bottom of the Kidron Valley.⁹ Satan quoted Scripture in this instance. Are you surprised that Satan knows the Bible? You shouldn’t be; he was on earth during the writing of every word. He has tried to destroy, curse, and manipulate Scripture for years. The Bible is still around, and it is still true!

Satan quoted the Scripture that indicated God would send angels to bear His Son up so that He would not dash His foot against a stone. In other words, God would protect His own and keep them from harm. Satan was tempting Christ to make a spectacular entrance—revealing to Israel His power and personhood. With this act of assertion, Christ’s anonymity would be over. There would be no more carpenter shops, no more lonely nights without a place to lay His head, no cross to bear, and no smelly fishermen to train. Everyone would know His name. He would obtain instant ministry success (at least according to the devil). With such a miracle, all of Israel would proclaim Jesus as Messiah. All He had to do was push Himself forward and take things into His own hands.

Jesus refused this appeal to pride! Once again, Jesus used the Bible—only He used it correctly. Jesus answered and said to Satan, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (Luke 4:12). Jesus realized that to perform such an act, knowing the angels would

bear Him up, would have amounted to presumption. When Adam and Eve failed to submit to God and disobeyed His command, their desire to be like God caused them to assert *their* will over *God's* will. Their rebellion made them allies with Lucifer, who was cast out of heaven because of his rebellion against God.¹⁰

Spiritual rebellion is self-assertion against godly authority. Jesus would not rebel. He would not take things into His own hands. He would not trade His cross for the crowds' accolades. He would not push Himself to the pinnacle. Smelly fishermen would be His lot. Pride, Satan's primary device among men, was defeated in the wilderness!

When breaking a fast, we should expect a battle with pride. This temptation to self-assertion may come in different forms, but it will assuredly come. *Fasting* is all about humility and brokenness. Satan knows that these graces in our life will cause us to be lifted by God's Spirit, so he tempts us to choose the pinnacle instead of the cross. Defeating the pride of life is critical to maintaining the brokenness God brings to us during our fast. Without a doubt, this is the greatest battle of all. Following our fast, the impurities in our heart surface to where we can deal with them. Many times, pride resides deep within and hides from normal attempts at ridding ourselves of it.

J.C. Philpot stated in an 1853 sermon:

But where lust may have no power, covetousness no dominion, and anger no sway—here, down, down in the inmost depths, heaving and boiling like

the lava in the crater of a volcano, works that master sin—that sin of sins, pride! Pride is the mother and mistress of all the sins; for where she does not conceive them in her ever-teeming womb, she instigates their movements, and compels them to pay tribute to her glory.¹¹

Fasting will help us identify areas where the pride of life has deceived us, so that we can truly humble ourselves before the Lord and receive His grace.

In the Power of the Spirit

After this final attempt to lure Jesus to the ways of the world, Satan's power was broken. Luke says that the devil left Jesus for a season and angels came to minister to Him. Jesus' ministry would enter a new dimension after His forty-day fast. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about" (Luke 4:14, KJV).

Fasting will help us identify areas where the pride of life has deceived us, so that we can truly humble ourselves before the Lord and receive His grace.

Immediately, Jesus left the wilderness and returned home to Nazareth to announce that His ministry was beginning. His next stop was Capernaum, where He delivered a demon-possessed man. Jesus bound the strongman in the wilderness and was now plundering Satan's house.

The fasting and the temptation of Jesus were on a level none of us could ever experience. He was the one and only Son of the living God. We are not battling for the eternity of the world by dying for the sins of man, but we are working on this side of the Cross to see people delivered from the strongman's house. We

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pay the price.*

must also pass temptation's test if we are going to be effective in invading the kingdom of darkness with God's light. We can walk through our world in the power of the Holy Spirit only if we are willing to pay the price.

Several post-fasting encounters have occurred to me over the years. Most of them involved unique temptations and some that were not so unique. In every instance, when I continued in the spirit of the fast and responded to the temptation properly, I experienced great success. On the contrary, when I did not respond correctly to the temptation and succumbed to the Enemy's scheme, I seemed to lose most of the spiritual benefits I had gained rather quickly. Some of my post-fast tests have been severe.

While fasting one year immediately before a significant international youth gathering and just prior to our church's General Assembly, where I was scheduled to minister, I faced significant struggles. We

were launching a theme that encouraged our workers to attack Satan's kingdom of darkness. On the day I broke the time of seeking the Lord (slightly over one week), my back started hurting. I noticed that it continued hurting for the next day or two. My first thoughts were that my back was hurting from the strange bed at a campsite retreat where I studied and prayed. On the third night after the fast, I discovered that the pain in my back was caused by a kidney stone.

For anyone who has ever suffered through such an ailment, you know that the pain is much like having a baby, except when the suffering is over, all you get is a little speck of grit for your troubles and not a new family member. They rushed me to the hospital where I spent a couple of days trying to pass the stone, which had lodged in my kidney.

Something about this entire episode seemed to me like an attack of the Enemy. (I discovered later, after studying fasting that it was an attack of my ignorance for not drinking enough water during the fast.) Yet I seemed powerless to do anything about the attack. They scheduled me for surgery, which meant I would not be able to lead the youth gathering and possibly not minister at the General Assembly. On the night before the morning procedure, a friend came by for prayer. Wow! The Lord ministered to me powerfully. I walked around the room, hands raised, rejoicing in the Lord's touch. Still, the stone had not moved, and I went to sleep later that evening awaiting surgery. Early in the morning, about an hour before the procedure, a pain gripped me that was different from the suffering

of the previous two days. In moments, I passed the stone without surgery. God touched me, and we enjoyed great victory at the events that followed.

Following a much longer fast, I began hurting in my chest. My wife, Lisa, scheduled a doctor's examination for me. The first two physicians I saw thought I could possibly have lung cancer. Finally, after several weeks of anxiety and prayer, I was diagnosed with scar tissue in my lungs. Actually, fasting probably aggravated this because, in long fasts, the immune system sometimes tries to repair scar tissue or other abnormalities in the body. In both instances, my personal faith was attacked and refined. We faced both with prayer and trust in God's will. God gave us the victory.

You must face and conquer post-fast tests. Remember, you are fasting so others can be set free. Your battle with the Enemy is not only for your blessing but the blessing of those for whom you intercede.

My grandmother was a minister. Yes, she was a full-fledged, full-gospel woman preacher, and she was a good one. "Bessie," as she was called, was a very effective evangelist with hundreds of conversions over the years. I do not know much about her preaching because, by the time I was old enough to remember

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her, she was taking care of my sick grandfather and eventually living alone in an apartment in Cleveland, Tennessee. Nevertheless, Bessie was a powerful woman of God, even in her old age. Whenever she prayed, the heavens opened, and all of us grandchildren could feel the power of the Lord. In my child's mind, Bessie sounded like she was talking directly to God.

Bessie Wilson was also a woman who practiced the other spiritual disciplines. She believed in the power of fasting and sought the Lord fervently in this way over the years. After her death, my father related how his mother fasted extensively near the end of her life. She fasted two meals every day for several years.

Bessie had two sons, my father and his brother. She first committed to God one meal each day for one of her sons, asking the Lord to rescue and save him. Later in life, she committed the second meal each day for the other son that the Lord would bring him through a difficult season of struggle. For the last few years of her life, Bessie ate just one meal a day and gave the Lord the other two meals so her sons would not go to hell. My grandmother's hunger strike on hell worked. My father's brother died several years ago while in a right relationship with the Lord, pastoring a church. My father was fully restored and spent the last thirty-five years of his life in full-time ministry. I knelt at his bedside when he made his entrance into heaven. My grandmother's intercessory fasting and prayer continue to bless multiple generations of our family.

Interceding for the Lost

The first appearance of the word *intercession* in the Bible is found in Isaiah 53 and comes from the Hebrew word *baga*. *Vines Expository Dictionary* defines *baga* as “to strike up against, to be violent against,

*Our fasting
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into intercession
for the lost.*

to invade, to come between, to cause to retreat, to meet with and pray.”¹² Our fasting should bring us into intercession for the lost. We must petition heaven and impinge upon hell for the release of those held captive in sin. We must stay before the throne until the Father answers our plea. Like the woman in Luke 18, who would not quit until the judge avenged her of her enemy, we must continue to persist until the Lord answers our cry for victory over our adversary.

Hunger strikes in Ireland date back to pre-Christian times, when those who lacked power fasted to protest the more powerful to call attention to injustice or to claim a debt owed. The power, and thus the responsibility to end the fast, rested on the one being protested. If they did not answer the fast in the affirmative, they had to pay double. The person fasting would camp on the doorstep of the powerful until help and relief were granted. W.B. Yeats, in a play about Ireland titled “The King’s Threshold,” included these lines, which describe this activity:

*KING: . . . He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,*

*An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another's threshold till he die,
The Common People, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.¹³*

In fasting, we come to our King's threshold, pleading for the freedom of those we love. We intercede for their eternal destiny and for His grace to convict their soul. We must not underestimate the power of aggressive, anointed intercession.

In 1904, one of the most intense revivals in history was recorded in the small United Kingdom nation of Wales. A young man named Evan Roberts, a former coal miner, sought God in prayer for revival over a period of several years. The Lord chose and used him mightily to bring the revival to pass. Roberts had a vision that more than 100,000 people would be converted to Christ in a powerful revival in Wales. Within a period of just over fourteen months, beginning in

the autumn of 1904, more than 100,000 people were converted in the cities, towns, villages, and countryside of his nation. The Welsh Revival was a praying and worshipping revival.

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During the revival, intercessory prayer erupted across the nation

focusing on the lost. The heart and energy of the church were turned toward the harvest. Unique prayer gatherings sprung up in businesses, schools, coal mines, and other unlikely spots. Radical transformation in the society was realized. Court dockets were cleared, pub business was greatly reduced, and crime statistics plummeted. People even stopped attending sporting events, because they did not want to miss even one service of the revival. The praying and fasting of the people brought dramatic conversions across the nation.¹⁴

One of my favorite accounts of the revival is recorded in *The London Methodist Times*, in an article by T. Ferrier Hume called “The Wash Day of the Lord.” Hume shared the following:

“It will give to us all renewed faith in prayer, for this is emphatically a praying revival. Evan Roberts told me that prayer became so passionate and mighty at Caerphilly that at midnight a number of men formed themselves into a praying ‘Get-them-out-of-bed brigade,’ and in an hour or two three of the sinners prayed for became so miserable in bed that they dressed hurriedly and came on to the service and yielded to Christ there and then.”¹⁵

Like prisoners and paupers throughout history and Gandhi and Chavez of the twentieth century, today’s church must commit to a hunger strike for freedom—spiritual freedom. The Holy Spirit is calling this generation of Christians to push away our plates until those now under spiritual oppression go free. Thousands of spiritually hungry freedom fighters are answering this call.

This army of fasters will turn the attention of their own hearts and the resources of our heavenly Father toward the plight of today's hurting and lost. Those of us in this light brigade are determined. We will

The Holy Spirit is calling this generation of Christians to push away our plates until those now under spiritual oppression go free.

not be deterred; we will not allow our judge to sleep, and we will impinge upon our Enemy's territory by camping on the doorstep of our King until the house of darkness is raided once again. We declare a hunger strike against hell!

Chapter 4 Reflection Questions

1. How is fasting like a hunger strike against hell? Is God leading you to protest against the kingdom of darkness by fasting?
2. Like the Israelites, have you ever fasted for the wrong reasons? If so, what was the result of the fast?
3. What has been your focus while fasting? Do you spend increased time in God's word?
4. Have you experienced increased temptation following a fast? What happened? How can you win the battle in the critical moments following a fast and come out victorious?
5. How can we be a part of bringing a lost world to Jesus through fasting? Is the Lord calling you to fast and intercede on behalf of the lost in your life?

Learn from these men of the Scripture that the work which the Holy Ghost commands must call us to new fasting and prayer, to new consecration and to His fellowship. Those men gave themselves up to fasting and prayer, and if in all ordinary Christian work there were more prayer there would be more blessing in our own inner life.¹

Andrew Murray

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting but to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

Matthew 6:16–18

CHAPTER 5

Fasting 101

Learning the Principles of Fasting

Years ago, books for “dummies” began to appear in stores across America, with popular titles such as *Microsoft Word for Dummies*, *Excel for Dummies*, *Taxes for Dummies*, *German for Dummies*, *Guitar for Dummies*, and *Mutual Funds for Dummies*, to name a few. Now the DIY tutorials on YouTube and TikTok allow you to learn the basics of almost any life skill and “do it yourself.”

These books and tutorials are intended to take complicated subjects and break them down into simple, understandable language. One of my favorite dummy books was titled *Auto Repair for Dummies*. Now, that is a book for me! In fact, after reading over a list of all the book titles for dummies, I am convinced that I should probably buy the entire series. Then I could be an educated dummy.

I thought about calling this particular chapter “Fasting for Dummies” but felt it would be too self-incriminating. We could call it “Do-It-Yourself Fasting,” but, then again, we need God’s help in fasting. So, we are calling it “Fasting 101,” which means we will look at the basic principles of fasting to help us understand this discipline.

Principle 1: Every Christian Should Participate in Fasting

People around the world following many different religions fast. Hinduism has been called a religion of fasts, feasts, and festivals,

because it gives many days to each as Hindus celebrate their various gods. Hindus fast several times a year.² Some Buddhists also fast on certain holidays and during new-moon periods.³

Fasting is also a significant part of Islamic practice. During Ramadan, an entire month of the Islamic year, Muslims fast from food and drink while the sun shines.⁴ Jews continue to fast as a nation during Yom Kippur, Judaism's most holy day, the Day of Atonement.⁵

Considering all this global participation in religious fasting, should the Christian also fast? Reactions to this question have remained constant for the last 2,000 years. A quick study of the New Testament and Christian history reveals that not only is fasting permissible for the Christian, but these sources also encourage fasting as a vital part of discipleship. Jesus himself fasted for forty days before the beginning of His ministry, and all the apostles, including the apostle Paul, fasted.

Most of the early church fathers, leaders, and writers who lived immediately after the apostles, fasted and wrote about it. Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Hermas, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Tertullian all referred to fasting as part of the Christian experience. Tertullian wrote the book *On Fasting* in AD 208.⁶

The Didache, which is like a small handbook for early Christians and the oldest of the non-canonical Christian writings, discusses fasting before baptism and encourages fasting on certain days of the week.⁷

Catholic and Orthodox traditions designated fast days on certain days of the week and holidays. Protestants tended to react against these set days of fasting and leave the decision more to individuals in their devotion to the Lord.

Notable Protestant leaders, such as Martin Luther, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Andrew Murray, and Charles Spurgeon, among others, fasted. During the Holiness revivals of the nineteenth century and the Pentecostal revivals of the twentieth century, fasting featured as a devotional practice in seeking God's favor, blessing, and power. Protestants and Pentecostals have promoted fasting increasingly during the last few years of the twentieth century and into this new millennium.

Over the years I have attended conferences and meetings in which fasting was part of the experience. Dr. Bill Bright's Campus Crusade sponsored entire conferences given to fasting. Other meetings, such as solemn assemblies and conferences, have gathered people in corporate times of fasting and prayer. The Awakening America Alliance, which I led for several years, called national fasts in conjunction with their Cry Out America county prayer gatherings on 9/11 each year.

Several years ago, I visited a prayer mountain in Korea where the entire facility was dedicated to prayer and fasting. People came by busloads to fast for one, three, seven, twenty-one, and forty days. With so many Christians seeking God fervently, the atmosphere

“Should Christians fast?” Yes, Jesus expected us to practice this discipline and experience His fullness.

was powerful and humbling. No wonder Korea has outdistanced the rest of the world over several decades in church growth and the sending of missionaries. Recently, I have participated in beginning-of-year fasts in

local churches, called for fasts in global prayer networks, fasts for Israel, and fasts for global revival and outpouring.

Given this kind of information, I again ask, “Should Christians fast?” Yes, Jesus expected us to practice this discipline and experience His fullness. Some early Christian writers, including those as late as John Wesley, believed it was a sin not to fast, just as it would be wrong for a Christian never to pray. Wesley is reported as saying: “One who never fasts will no more enter heaven than one who never prays.”⁸

I am not sure we can go this far with the evidence of Scripture, but we can state emphatically that a Christian who has never fasted has missed a significant step in his or her walk with Christ. Those who seek Him with all their heart while fasting receive greater grace for victory over the flesh and released power for service.

Every Christian should fast!

Principle 2: Fasting Is Doing Without Eating!

In the Bible, the word translated as “fast” or “fasting” comes from the Greek word *nesteia* or *nesteuo*, which is actually a compound word. The first part of the word, *ne*, is a negative prefix. The second part of the word, *esthio*, means “to eat.” Therefore, the word *fast* is the negative of “eating” or “not to eat.”⁹ Put simply, biblical fasting is doing without food voluntarily for spiritual purposes. Fasting involves relinquishing our desire for physical nourishment and comfort to express our desire for God.

Over the years, people have forsaken many things for spiritual reasons. I know individuals who have sacrificed watching television, surfing the Internet, listening to music, participating in some enjoyable activity, and sleeping for hours to use their time in radical ways to express their desire for the Lord. All these sacrifices have been honorable, and I am sure they were pleasing to the Lord, but in the strictest sense, they were not fasting. Fasting is doing without food.

One of the reasons God chooses to bless this discipline to such a degree is because of food’s role in our lives. Food and eating are basic to our humanity. The statement “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” could be true in

Fasting involves relinquishing our desire for physical nourishment and comfort to express our desire for God.

more than one way. One of the things I have discovered during times of extended fasting is how absolutely addicted I am to food. The withdrawal pangs experienced during an extended fast are not just physical, but also emotional. Several hours each day of our lives are given to thinking about, preparing for, and actually eating our food. Elisabeth Elliot wrote, “One way to begin to see how vastly indulgent we usually are is to fast. It is a long day that is not broken by the usual three meals. One finds out what an astonishing amount of time is spent in the planning, purchasing, preparing and cleaning up of meals.”¹⁰

From our earliest moments of life, mealtimes have not only provided us with the substance needed for living, but they have also provided us with comfort, solace, and some measure of control. Most of us don't eat just because we need to, but because we want to. We enjoy eating.

When we give up food to seek the Lord, we are also releasing something that is critical to our very survival. We can live forever without

Fasting opens the door to God by unlocking this intimate chamber of need and desire.

television, Netflix, Amazon, social media, the Internet, chocolate, our favorite music, or our favorite hobby, but we cannot live forever without food. Fasting opens the door to God by unlocking this intimate chamber of need and desire. As we sacrifice that which

we enjoy so much and that which is basic to our survival, we move into a dependence on God which allows Him to invade our hearts with His supernatural provision.

The way to a man's heart may really be through his stomach!

Principle 3: Spiritual Fasting Must Be Done God's Way to Receive God's Blessing

The Bible gives several simple principles regarding how we should fast. The most notable is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), which pertains to the privacy of our fast (6:16–18). Jesus assumes that believers will fast, and He encourages us to do this unto Him and not unto men. Jesus discussed the motives for our fasting and discouraged ever doing this to be rewarded by others.

In the Old Testament, fasting was accompanied with great outward displays of mourning and grieving. Many times, people would put on sackcloth and ashes when they were fasting: “Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Daniel 9:3).

“Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God” (Joel 1:13).

Sackcloth was a coarse, black cloth usually made from camel or goat's hair. This loose cloth garment could have been worn for several reasons. Sometimes it was a sign of mourning for the dead or for grief of personal loss. Other times, it was worn as an outward sign of repentance. Some shepherds simply wore sackcloth because it was inexpensive, but sackcloth represented humility.

The ancient Hebrew people also sprinkled ashes or sat among them as a mark or token of their grief, humiliation, or penitence. Ashes represented brokenness, humility, or insignificance. By wearing sackcloth and ashes, the people were outwardly displaying their feeling of desperation or humility.¹¹

Because these outward displays accompanied fasting at times, anyone can relate how this discipline became more of a public display than a private devotion. Jesus recognized that many people would wear sackcloth and ashes on the outside to appear to be fasting, while on the inside they were not broken, humble, or mourning their sin. Consequently, Jesus reversed the emphasis toward the inner life. In a way, He was encouraging the people to wear their sackcloth and ashes on the inside for God to see, instead of on the outside for man to see.

This purifying of the purpose for fasting is important for us as we participate in this discipline. If we fast for others to notice, we lose the greater benefit of God's reward. This does not mean you never tell anyone you are fasting. Sometimes you must let your spouse or

others know. However, it does mean that you should never fast so others will recognize, applaud, or feel sorry for you.

Principle 4: There Are Many Kinds of Fasts

The water or normal fast. This seems to be the most typical in both biblical and Christian history. This type of fast includes drinking only water, with no nourishment from food or other drinks. Several instances in Scripture, including Acts 13 and Ezra 8, seem to record this kind of fast. By using only water, those fasting can go several days without taking in any nutrition. The body is cleansed, though weakened.

In my opinion, this is the best type of fast to pursue, especially for a period of three to twenty-one days. Breakthroughs are significant, and the purity of the experience brings true discipline before the Lord. Drinking ample water during this type of fast is very important. I also recommend bottled or distilled water to reduce any unwanted chemicals from entering your body.

The absolute (or emergency) fast. In this fast, no food or liquid—including water—is consumed. This kind of fast was followed before Esther risked her life to see the king.

“Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my

maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:15, 16, KJV).

The need for speedy help from the Lord pressed Esther to request that the people follow this absolute fast to gain God’s favor and break the death wish of Haman against the Jews. God heard their cry. Esther found favor with the king, and Haman’s wrath was supernaturally reversed.

Saul of Tarsus, or as we know him, the apostle Paul, also participated in an absolute fast after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. This was a time of total desperation and dependence on God. Paul needed his eyesight. He needed direction. Paul’s expressed inner desire, along with the trauma of his conversion experience, pressed him to put away food and liquids until he could hear from God. “And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (Acts 9:9, KJV).

Those who participate in absolute fasts must be careful to avoid injuring themselves needlessly. The human body has been known to survive for over sixty days without food, but depending on the environment, it can only survive from three to seven days without water.¹² In an arid Mediterranean climate, Paul and Esther were both pushing the normal limits during their three-day absolute fast. They were desperate.

The extended fast. This is a fast of long duration, usually beyond ten days. In this type of fast, the person can break through some of the physical barriers and hindrances faced in the first few days of fasting. This fast includes the drinking of water and perhaps other liquids, such as natural juices. We believe that during Jesus' forty-day fast, He did drink something because at the end of the fast, the Gospel writer states that He was hungry, not thirsty.

Personally, I have discovered my greatest breakthroughs in extended seasons of water fasting. I have also had longer fasts that included some juice to give me strength for my responsibilities. These have also been wonderful times of discipline and breakthrough. When one can get past the initial pain of this kind of fast, the strength of God's presence is amazing.

The supernatural fast. Scripture records at least two incidences of this type of fast.

“When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water” (Deuteronomy 9:9).

“So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exodus 34:28).

Moses fasted for forty days on Mount Sinai two times, with only a couple of days in between. These forty-day fasts were absolute fasts without any food or water. We assume Moses did not drink any juices, since he was in a desert region. If this assumption is true, then this is a miraculous fast, because normally man can live only a few days without water.

Many people also believe that Elijah's forty-day fast during his journey to Mount Horeb was without food or drink. Again, if this belief is true, God supernaturally sustained Elijah during this time. "So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:8).

If these long fasts were done without the intake of any liquids, these were indeed supernatural fasts done in the presence of God and through God's provision. I cannot recommend that you pursue this kind of fasting. This would need to be done only with the Holy Spirit's direction.

Juice-only fasts. Many physicians recommend juice fasts as a means of restorative health and cleansing of the body. In a juice fast, the body does detoxify and cleanses itself of impurities, as well as goes into limited ketosis, which breaks down fat cells for energy.

I believe that juices are allowed during times of fasting, and we should not be legalistic in this regard. This is a matter of conscience

and commitment between the person fasting and the Lord. It is recommended that if partaking of a juice fast, only 100 percent natural juices be used because of the effect processed sugar has on the body.

The partial (or Daniel) fast. Daniel 1:12 says, “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.” Then verse 15 records: “And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.”

The partial fast is practiced by severely limiting our food intake. This is the type of fast Daniel and three other Hebrew young men participated in while they were held captive in Babylon. These four men, along with other promising, young Hebrew leaders, were brought to Babylon in the first deportation from Judah. The Babylonian government scheduled them for special training. They hoped these young leaders would adopt Babylonian ways and lead their people into peaceful submission to Babylon.

The original plan was to feed them from the king’s table and give them the wine that he drank. This would give them a wonderful taste of Babylonian power and privilege, causing them to desire to remain in good stead with the king. This simple plan sought to make these leaders as healthy as possible for their future employment.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—whom we know as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—joined Daniel in a plan for maintaining their Hebrew diet and thus their purity. Daniel requested the Babylonian in charge of their meals to give them pulse, which was lentils or beans, to eat and water to drink for ten days. At the end of the ten days, the eunuch servant could examine them to see if they were still healthy.

He agreed, and the four Hebrew men ate beans and water while the rest of the chosen leaders ate meals fit for a king. God blessed them during this time of restricted eating; at the end of the ten days, all four of them were healthier than before, and they were spiritually blessed as well.

In addition to the spiritual benefits, some health experts believe a partial fast for cleansing and separation can benefit one physically. A partial fast limits food and liquid intake for spiritual purposes. When done for the correct purposes, a partial fast seems not only acceptable but blessed by the Lord.

Restricted fasts may include eating only raw vegetables and fruits, along with drinking plenty of water. Other restrictions may also express your desire for purity to the Lord in a world where the king of darkness seeks to corrupt God's people. Elmer L. Towns wrote a good book on this kind of fasting, as well as others: *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts*. He devoted an entire chapter to the Daniel fast.

Principle 5: Prayer Should Be Combined with Fasting

Christians fast not merely for health or medicinal purposes, but we have in mind the spiritual goal of drawing closer to God and connecting with Him in a new way. By combining prayer with fasting, we can stay centered on the purpose of our sacrifice. Consistent prayer during a season of fasting allows God the opportunity to guide our prayers, reveal Scripture, or speak to us personally.

During times of personal fasting, some of my greatest moments of revelation, spiritual discovery, and cleansing have come while in prayer. Because our energy level breaks through to a new dimension during an extended fast, we are often tempted to work more, instead of taking the time necessary to sit at Jesus' feet. During a long fast, I usually find that my strength and intensity in prayer are not always what they are when I am eating; however, I have experienced more answered prayer and much more listening prayer (allowing God to speak to me) during a fast than otherwise.

Keeping our prayers focused can be difficult anytime, but this is especially true during a fast. Our minds want to drift, and because of our weariness, we have difficulty staying focused. At times during an extended fast, it is difficult to pray. I am not sure whether this is because of satanic resistance or

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simply because energy levels are low, perhaps both. I have discovered that having a structure for my prayers (or a prayer track) can help keep me focused.

Prayer tracks help our prayers go somewhere. As railroad tracks bring direction and guidance to the train, a prayer track directs and guides our prayers. Since I am convinced that we must pray in order to maximize our fasting, I wanted to share a few of the prayer tracks I use. If you have seen or used some of these before, you may want to review them or even create new ones on your own.

ACTS

The church in the Book of Acts was a church of prayer. You can join with them in prayer as you proceed to pray through the following acrostic:

Adoration—begin this time of prayer with worship and praise unto the Lord. He is worthy to be adored.

Confession—after praise comes a time of repentance, brokenness, and confessing of sins and weaknesses before the Lord. This is usually a very special time.

Thanksgiving—a thankful heart and mindset of gratitude is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself. During this time, you may count your blessings and give God thanks for all He has done.

Supplication—the final phase of this prayer time is given to bringing the needs of others and yourself to the Lord in petition.

JOY

Another simple prayer track I have used involves the word *joy*:

Jesus—prioritize your relationship, and praise Him for being your Savior.

Others—place the needs of others including family, friends, Christians around the world, and the lost before the Lord.

You—finally, take your personal needs to the Lord.

If you want to live with *joy*, you can embrace this prayer track by putting the Lord and others first.

The Lord's Prayer

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9-13, KJV).

Our Father which art in heaven. . . . Begin your prayer time by focusing on the fact that God calls you His child, and you can approach Him as your loving, caring Father.

Hallowed be thy name. . . . Continue by sanctifying the names of God and honoring His nature and person. During this part of your prayer time, you can pray some of the Old Testament names of God, like *Jehovah-nissi*, the Lord my banner; *Jehovah shalom*, the Lord my peace; and *Jehovah-jireh*, the Lord who sees and provides, or

the Lord my provider. Many other Old Testament names for God can be used. After this, you may want to pray the names of Jesus. One great way of meditating, worshiping, and honoring Him is by praying through the “I Am” statements of Christ.¹³

Thy kingdom come. . . . At this point, pray for God to actualize his kingdom. Paul tells us God’s kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17), so you can particularly pray for these attributes in your life.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. . . . Next, focus on His will and not your own will being done in your life. This is a time of surrender, asking the Lord to crucify your will, so His can be realized.

Give us this day our daily bread. . . . Now, bring your needs to the Lord and ask Him to be your source of supply for that day. He never fails to answer this or any other petition in this Prayer, when my heart is sincere.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors Focus on releasing and forgiving anyone who has failed you. This petition is usually one of the most difficult, yet it is one of the most spiritually rewarding.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. . . . You should always spend time praying against the plans of your adversary and asking for your Father’s spiritual protection.

Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever Praise and exaltation of God over all that has been committed to Him concludes our prayer.

Amen! . . . *Amen* is a Hebrew term we transliterate into both English

and Greek. Said by God in Scripture, it means “it is and shall be so;” said by individuals in Scripture, it means “so let it be.” *Amen* was a term of assent or affirmation. We should never forget the “Amen” after our prayers, because it reminds God that we want Him to let it be so.

While praying this prayer over the last several years, I have always been enriched, refreshed, and blessed by it. Amazingly, I never get bored with the Lord’s Prayer. Since this form of praying came directly from Jesus, it has exceptional supernatural energy and grace within it—at least for me. Entire days of a fast could be spent walking with the Holy Spirit through this prayer track. *Amen!*

The Prayer of Jabez

Another popular prayer track is the Prayer of Jabez. When the small book on this subject was released many years ago, it became one of the best-selling books in America—even in secular bookstores. People were looking for direction in prayer that would work. Personally, I continue to be blessed and challenged by this simple prayer from the Old Testament:

Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain.” So God granted him what he requested.

—1 Chronicles 4:9, 10

This prayer track divides Jabez's prayer into the following four parts: **Bless me indeed.** . . . Begin this prayer by asking for blessings on your personal life, your family, and others nearby. You simply ask God to favor you with blessings.

Enlarge my territory. . . . In this part of the prayer track, we ask God to expand ministry opportunities and effectiveness. This petition is one I have always had answered. In fact, in a few seasons I stopped praying this petition because I did not think I could survive any more ministry opportunities. You may have to do the same.

That Your hand would be with me. . . . You should always pray that God's hand would guide and provide opportunity and blessing. In this time, you may pray for resources and specific direction you need for ministry.

That You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain. . . . As in the Lord's Prayer, ask the Lord to keep you from temptation and to circumvent the activities of your Enemy. Pray that Satan will not be able to use you and God will fill your life with grace, so others will not be hurt.

PRAY

Another easy-to-remember prayer track comes from turning the word PRAY into your list of prayer points:

Praise—God's Word teaches us to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Begin your prayer time with praise.

Remember—We reflect on God's blessings and answers to previous prayers. When you take time to remember, you will be amazed at

how much you have to be thankful for.

Ask—Intercede with God for others. Through intercession, we stand in the gap for others and petition our Father for their needs.

You—Now it is time to bring your personal requests, needs, questions, and most intimate thoughts to the Father. Be honest; tell Him how you really feel and what you really need.

Spirit-Directed Prayer

You can use many other words or portions of Scripture in your devotional praying. The principal thing is that communicating with God requires a focused effort and dedicated time. Fasting frees up the time spent thinking of, preparing for, and actually eating. Why not use this extra time for seeking the Lord?

Our spiritual senses are heightened during the fast, allowing us to hear God's voice and respond more readily.

We should also be open to Spirit-prompted prayer during our times of fasting. Often during a fast, the burden to pray will come at unusual times, including the middle of the night. Our spiritual senses are heightened during the fast, allowing us to hear God's voice and respond more readily. We never know what the Spirit may be doing as we respond to intercession. The following account, from the book *Titanic: A Survivor's Story*, should remind us of this truth:

Archibald Gracie relished his swim on April 14, 1912. The ship's pool was a six-foot deep tank of salt water, heated to a refreshing temperature. "In no swimming bath had I ever enjoyed such pleasure before." But his account went on to say, "How near it was to being my last plunge. Before dawn of another day I would be swimming for my life in mid-ocean in a temperature of 28 degrees!"

After his swim that Sunday night aboard the ship, Colonel Archibald Gracie retired to his cabin and fell asleep, only to be awakened by "a sudden shock and noise." Dressing quickly, he ascended to the deck and learned the ship had just collided with an iceberg.

At the same time in New York City, Archibald's wife was awakened from her sleep. Gripped by a sudden anxiety and spiritual pressure, she slipped to her knees holding her prayer book, which by chance opened to the prayer "For Those at Sea." Mrs. Gracie prayed through the early morning hours until around 5 a.m. when the burden of prayer lifted. She went back to sleep until around 8 a.m. when her sister "came softly to the door, newspaper in hand, to gently break the tragic news that the Titanic had sunk."

What had happened to Archibald?

I was in a whirlpool, swirling round and round, as I still tried to cling to the railing as the ship plunged to the depths below. Down, down, I went: it seemed a great distance ... (ascending back to the surface) I could see no Titanic. She had entirely disappeared beneath the surface of the ocean

without a sign of any wave. A thin light-gray smoky vapor hung like a pall a few feet above the sea. There arose the most horrible sounds ever heard by mortal man, the agonizing cries of death from over a thousand throats.

Gracie was one of the few people rescued from the freezing Atlantic waters that night when the Titanic went under. Colonel Archibald Gracie later wrote: “I know of no recorded instance of providential deliverance more directly attributable to prayer.”¹⁴

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Pray regularly; pray
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Prayer is essential in making your time of fasting effectual. Pray regularly; pray fervently; pray with understanding; pray in the Spirit; pray when prompted by the Lord. Your prayers travel farther than you think and are more powerful than you can dream. You do not have to be smart to realize

the potential that is released when you practice these disciplines. Even *dummies* can do this!

Chapter 5 Reflection Questions

1. How has fasting caused you to become more dependent on God?
2. Have you ever “fasted” something other than food? How was this, and the result, different from Biblical fasting?
3. What is your experience with the different types of fasts? What kind of fast might God be leading you on next?
4. When you fast, do you spend extra time in prayer that you would otherwise spend on food? Why is it important to spend this time wisely?
5. Have you ever used a prayer track while fasting? Which prayer track(s) might you incorporate in your next fast?



The first thing I learned about myself in experiences of fasting was my passion for good feelings. I was hungry, and I did not feel good. All of a sudden, I began to realize that I would do almost anything to feel good. Now there is not a thing wrong with feeling good, but that has got to be brought to a place in our life where it does not control us.¹

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

*My knees are weak through fasting and my flesh
is feeble from lack of fatness.*

Psalm 109:24

CHAPTER 6

Fasting Hurts! Solving the Problems of Fasting

“**W**ooo! Hot fire burn!” These are the words my son, Ashley, would say when he was near fire. During his toddler stage, we were convinced that Ashley was either going to be a fireman or an arsonist because of his fascination with anything that was burning. Every time he saw flames, he would shift into another gear of amazement and curiosity. He wanted to be near fire and observe it closely.

As parents, we were concerned Ashley could be severely hurt or hurt someone else because of this fascination. However, Ashley learned a great lesson early in life by touching a red burner on the stove. He learned that hot fire, though wonderful to look at, could hurt you if you touched it. As a result, he would run up to the fire, look in fascination and say his “Wooo! Hot fire burn!” but he would not touch it. He was never severely injured by fire.

It’s only natural to stay away from things that hurt us or bring us personal pain. We have learned to keep our hands away from the stove, our toes away from falling objects, our knees away from the sidewalk, our fingers away from razor blades, and our eyes away from direct sunlight. We have also learned how to avoid bees, spiders, snakes, and other dangerous animals. Some of us even try our best to stay away from doctor’s offices, hospital rooms, and dentist chairs. We all want to avoid pain. For most people, avoiding pain is a daily task.

Although I still don't understand many mysteries about fasting, I am certain of one thing—fasting hurts!

Although I still don't understand many mysteries about fasting, I am certain of one thing—fasting hurts! We will not be able to avoid pain while fasting for long or short times. If fasting didn't hurt so much, everyone

would fast. Fasting's pain is the number one reason Christians resist it. Early in my journey with this spiritual discipline, I felt overwhelmed with pain. Many times, I would break a fast too quickly because I just couldn't function with the headaches or stomach pain. Through experience, I learned what to expect when fasting, and these insights helped me prepare for the pain.

Why Does Fasting Hurt?

Basically, fasting is painful because it involves the death of cells in our body. Death is painful whether on a cellular or a systemic level. Much of the pain in an extended fast takes place during the first few days. The first and most severe pain experienced in fasting normally comes from headaches during the first hours and days of a fast. These headaches are usually withdrawal pains from the caffeine our bodies receive in coffee, tea, or soft drinks. As the body begins cleansing itself of these and other toxins, the pain can be severe, but it gradually subsides.

Our stomach also hurts because it has been trained to do so. Since we were infants, hunger pangs served as a trigger for feeding. As adults, most of us have overabundant hunger alarms, which cause us to eat even when eating is unnecessary.

While depriving your body of nutrition and food, your stomach will signal your brain increasingly. Sometimes during a fast, you may feel as though your stomach has convinced your brain that if you don't receive food immediately, you are going to die. Usually, if you can endure these panic points, you will be on your way to breaking through. As you fast, your stomach shrinks to a smaller size, which also causes discomfort.

During a longer fast, you may also experience pain in particular areas where your body needs healing or is cleansing itself. Our bodies' self-healing capabilities are heightened during a long fast. We may also simply ache or feel weak because of changing blood sugars and electrolyte shifts during the fast.²

Should I Prepare for a Fast?

Preparing your body, your mind, and your life for a fast is very important. Physically, you may want to consult a physician before embarking on a fast, especially an extended fast. I recommend that you mark your calendar as the Lord directs you. Setting aside certain days on my calendar has been very helpful in rearranging schedules, receptions, parties, or other engagements to avoid the fast days.

If married, you should communicate clearly with your spouse about your fast. I remember on one of my early attempts at fasting, the very morning I was going to begin a fast, I awakened to the smell of bacon cooking. Lisa, my wife, had risen early and fixed an exceptional

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breakfast as a treat for me. I told her later that the devil really used her that day, but she did not know I was starting a long fast. If I remember correctly, I started the fast the next day. Your spouse will need to agree with your time of seeking the Lord.

You should also heed Paul's instructions to abstain from sexual activity with your spouse while fasting: "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

What is Happening in My Body When I Fast?

For many, fasting has proven to be therapeutic and healthy. Though the Christian fasts for spiritual reasons, we benefit from understanding some of the things that are taking place in our body while fasting. The physical benefits of the fast are an additional blessing. From ancient history, fasting has been practiced for its medicinal, healing effect in the body. The three ancient fathers of Western medicine—

Hippocrates, Galen, and Paracelsus—believed fasting could be healthy for a person. Paracelsus declared fasting as “the greatest remedy, the physician within.”³

People have also understood from ancient times that improper eating habits can do great damage to their bodies. An ancient Egyptian proverb says, “One-quarter of what you eat keeps you alive. The other three quarters keep your doctor alive.”⁴

Fasting . . .

- promotes detoxification and elimination of stored toxins:⁵
- gives the digestive tract a much-needed rest:⁶
- promotes the healing of inflammatory processes,⁷ quiets allergic reactions,⁸ can dry up abnormal fluid accumulations in the body such as edema,⁹ and even helps many cases of high blood pressure:¹⁰
- moves the body into ketosis, which breaks down the stored fat for the release of energy that causes weight loss;¹¹
- helps people with skin problems, causing them to look and feel rejuvenated;¹²
- assists some people in breaking addictions and overcoming bad habits.

When you begin to fast, your tongue will usually become coated with a white, thick substance. This happens as the body begins to remove toxins. Your tongue can be brushed to help tolerate this situation. As your body begins detoxifying, your breath will smell bad during

the first hours and days of a fast. However, as your body moves into ketosis, during which the fat stored is converting into an energy supply, your breath will usually turn sweet.¹³

This turning point of ketosis in your body usually coincides with a feeling that you have broken through in the fast. The headaches are gone or reduced. The hunger pangs recede, and your sense of well-being is enhanced. Many Christians never reach this breakthrough phase because they end the fast too soon.

Ketosis allows energy to be released so you can continue activity at a fairly constant pace. During the early days of fasting, I usually feel groggy and want to rest. However, as the fast progresses, my energy increases, and instead of wanting to take a nap all the time, sometimes I have trouble sleeping. I am always amazed at the energy I feel during an extended fast. My body has cleansed itself and is feeling rejuvenated. In every long fast, I have come to a place in which I thought I could probably fast forever. Of course, that is not true, and the fast must be broken at some point.

What Should I Do During the Fast?

If you are on a normal, water-only fast, drink large amounts of water daily! I recommend that you drink bottled or distilled water, because many public water systems have chemicals that could hurt your stomach.¹⁴ I usually drink numerous bottles of water a day. If you are in a restrictive fast and are drinking juices, I recommend

100 percent natural fruit juices only. You will need to read the labels to determine if sugars are added. The added sugar will keep your body on a physiological roller coaster and make it more difficult to maintain the fast than if the juice is pure. You will also need to drink plenty of water even if you are drinking juice during your fast. When you think you have drunk enough water, drink more.

If you are fasting during winter, your body temperature will be lower than normal during the fast, causing you to feel cold.¹⁵ Sweaters, extra blankets, or even an electric blanket can help comfort you during the fast.

While fasting, you may find yourself feeling weak and find normal physical work more difficult. You may experience such weakness or dizziness after lifting something heavy. You may need to rest periodically, if your schedule is full.

I recommend working ahead to clear your schedule of luncheon and dinner engagements, as much as possible. Inevitably, a big dinner, the boss's special party, or something disruptive will be scheduled during your fast days. You will need a strong determination to negotiate these situations without violating your fast. In handling these difficult moments over the years, I usually just say that I am not available for the occasion; or if caught where I cannot avoid it, I just say that I am not eating. Periodically, you may have to tell someone you are fasting; however, Jesus' teaching on this subject encourages us to keep our fasting private, as much as we can.

Accessing increased grace will be one of the wonderful results of disciplining your life for Christ.

Prayer and other spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading and church attendance, should also be a part of your fasting. Accessing increased grace will be one of the wonderful results of disciplining your life for Christ.

How Should I Break a Fast?

Breaking a fast is one of the most critical parts of fasting. Because your digestive tract has been resting, you should break the fast gradually, because you are about to wake up this part of your body. How you do this is very important.

A good rule to follow is the longer the fast, the longer you should take in breaking the fast. Extreme discipline will be required at this point. Psychologically, you will be ready to eat a lot of food quickly. Physiologically, you are not ready to plunge into your old eating patterns.

Breaking your fast with fruit or vegetable juices, then moving on to soups, fruits, vegetables, and softer foods is the best plan. Eat meat, harsher grains, and spicy foods only after your digestive system is functioning properly. Great care should be taken in breaking the fast slowly to avoid any damage to your system.¹⁶ Many people experience diarrhea or constipation after a long fast. I know one

young man who broke a long juice fast by eating a steak. Needless to say, after days of his digestive tract's suffering, he will never break a fast that way again!

Continue to drink a lot of liquids as you break your fast. Drinking will help your kidneys and other organs as they begin processing the nutrition you are receiving. Also, increase physical activity immediately before and during the time you are breaking the fast, because your body's metabolism has slowed to conserve fuel.¹⁷

Many people are surprised at how quickly they regain weight following a fast. The reduced metabolic rate is one of the reasons this is true. Also, the body quickly acts to conserve and store fuel in case you decide to fast again.¹⁸ Exercise will force the body to increase metabolism, which will help as you reintroduce solid food to your system.

After a long fast, one has a great opportunity to change his or her eating patterns and diet for the long term. Just as you were able to maintain discipline during the fast, stay disciplined following the fast.

We discuss the spiritual dynamics of breaking a fast in another chapter. These are important, and how you handle them affects the long-range spiritual results of your fast critically.

Most of us have learned (as my son, Ashley, did) that we can be near fire without getting burned. Fasting figuratively invites us into

the fire. Despite our best efforts and numerous precautions, fasting will be painful and discomforting at times. Remember, no pain, no gain. During the times when fasting hurts the worst, our inward despair is expressing itself the most. We willingly embrace the pain for the gain of Christ's presence and fullness.

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Chapter 6 Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever avoided fasting, even when you felt the Lord's leading, because of the pain you anticipated you might experience during the fast?
2. Have you ever broken a fast early because of the pain you experienced?
3. Have you struggled to change your schedule to accommodate your fast? Why is this important to do?
4. How can you prepare your body physically for fasting?
5. Have you ever reaped great spiritual reward from fasting despite the physical pain endured?

Fasting is only a way which God hath ordained, wherein we wait for His unmerited mercy and wherein, without any desire of ourselves, He hath promised freely to give us His blessing.¹

John Wesley

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5, KJV

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:26–27

Because zeal for Your house has eaten me and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting that became my reproach.

Psa 1m 69:9–10

CHAPTER 7

Dying For Your Destiny: Releasing the Potential of Fasting

Several trips around the world over the years have been unusual, but one trip several years ago was amazing, or perhaps I should say I was amazed at my lack of wisdom in agreeing to take it. We landed in a West African nation late in the evening. After clearing customs, which was no easy task, I found the brethren who came to meet me.

One was my host for the week, and the other was wearing an army uniform—pistol and all. I should have known immediately that this was going to be an unusual trip. They grabbed my luggage, and we headed to a waiting taxi, and I was asked to get into the rather small seat (at least for my large body). Immediately, we began our journey through the city streets to the edge of town and beyond.

“How far are we going tonight?” I asked.

“All the way to the conference site,” my host replied.

“How far is that?” I asked again as my body jostled on the pothole-filled road.

“About five hours,” the voice beside me shared.

Sigh!

An almost two-day trip across the Atlantic, through Europe, and into West Africa, plus five hours in a cramped car with a soldier and a host you have never met is not the most welcoming situation. Not to mention that the cramped, seemingly spring-less seat and shock-less car was on a road that could pass for a four-wheeler obstacle course test site. (Oh, I failed to mention that in the hustle of landing and getting through customs, I forgot to stop by the restroom.) These five hours were going to be long!

We received the invitation to this nation in an unusual manner months before. It was an Internet response to our television program with a request to hold a crusade, along with teaching at a ministers' training conference. Although we receive several of these inquiries each month, I rarely accept any of them. Usually, my international trips are with known-and-trusted sources through our ministry networks. However, in prayer, I felt unusually drawn to say yes to this invitation.

About two hours into the trip, I was certain that I had not prayed enough before agreeing, or perhaps the devil was in this schedule instead of the Lord. African nights, potholes, soldiers with guns, and a really tired body can be disorienting.

The small car entered a rougher (if that was possible), curvier section of the road, which led us into a mountainous area. As we rose from sea level, the air thickened with what appeared to be smoke. My trusty host informed me that it was fog. For the next two

hours we drove, I could not see anything. There were no lines on the road, and the fog was so dense that the sides of the road seemed to disappear. The consistent potholes helped assure me we were still on the highway, but overall, my assurance level was running very low.

As I sat on the edge of my small backseat looking between the front seats toward the road, I could not see. Reality (or at least some possibilities) began to sink in. In foggy, mountainous West Africa, a person's imagination can run wild. I started thinking, *I don't know these people. What if they invited me here to rob me? What if they kill me and leave my body on the side of the road in the fog? Will anyone ever find me? Will my wife ever know what happened?* You get the picture.

Finally, after the five-and-one-half-hour trip (I did get to make a couple of necessary stops along the way), we arrived safe and sound at the place where I would be housed. By the next morning, the fog lifted, and ministry began.

For the next few days, we experienced wonderful blessings from the Lord, equipped several young African leaders, reaped a great harvest during the crusade, and made some excellent ministry connections. We also accepted an offer to launch our radio program in French for the first time, on a group of national radio stations—free of charge. I was glad I went and thankful I did not turn back or quit. Though difficult, it was definitely a divine appointment.

Divine appointments usually require a difficult trip.

Divine appointments usually require a difficult trip. Sometimes the journey to our destiny can be disorienting. The darkness, spiritual fog, rough road, and characters traveling with us can make our imagination run wild. Getting to where God wants

us to go is not always easy. Some of us never get there. We are somewhere between calling and completion, between decision and destiny, between initial hope and ultimate harvest.

Elisha's Journey to Destiny

As with all of us, Elisha's journey to his appointed destiny required things he did not expect. The great prophet of Israel, Elijah, had received a message from God that he was to anoint the young man Elisha to take his place. He found Elisha behind a plow, working his father's field. Elijah threw his mantle, or robe, around Elisha, expressing God's calling. Elisha quickly told the prophet that as soon as he said goodbye to his family, he would be glad to serve.

In one day, Elisha went from being his earthly father's plowboy to becoming his spiritual father's water boy. ("So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, 'Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah'" [2 Kings 3:11]). This new task would not have been considered much of an

advancement, except for Elisha's spiritual sense that the touch of the mantle signified something beyond his present employment.

While Elisha's destiny was decided in heaven, it was actualized on earth. God chose him to become the next prophet of Israel at a time when Elijah was unable to defeat Jezebel and the evil empire she inspired. Elijah's despair at Israel's darkness necessitated Elisha's call. After the excitement of being prophetically chosen, the early part of Elisha's work with Elijah was relatively uneventful. This first part of his road to divine appointment could have been disorienting for Elisha. Like Elisha, obscurity, anonymity, and the darkness of standing in the shadow of others tempt many people to turn around before the real tests of destiny begin.

For several years, Elisha faithfully served Elijah, the prophet of God. Finally, as Elijah neared the end of his ministry, Elisha's life entered the curvy, hilly section of the road where the fuel of great determination and patience would be needed. In 2 Kings 2, the writer gives his exciting account of a spiritual father about to make his exit and a spiritual son about to make his entrance.

Moving from prophetic water boy to miracle-working prophet would be a process. This same process is required for anyone who moves into the destiny God has for them. Elisha's journey to fulfill his calling recorded in 2 Kings parallels the believer's and the church's transition into new dimensions of effectiveness in every generation.

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel."

And Elisha said unto him, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?"

And he said, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

And Elijah said unto him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho."

And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?"

And he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

And Elijah said unto him, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan."

And he said, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.”

And Elisha said, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.”

And he said, “Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.”

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

—2 Kings 2:1–11, KJV

For years, I read this passage and sensed that the Lord was trying to reveal something to me about the trip Elijah and Elisha took together, but I was unable to grasp any unique significance. Even now, I may err in overly spiritualizing this journey. If so, please forgive me. Undoubtedly, varying depths of revelation are interwoven throughout 2 Kings 2, and I will only begin to scratch the surface.

The insights shared are my own and represent my personal experience. However, I believe that if you are called, if you sense the mantle of God's touch on your life involves destiny, and if you want to see today's church move into more effective ministry, then the next few pages of this book hold great potential for you.

The account in 2 Kings 2 begins with the Lord preparing to take Elijah up by a whirlwind. This great prophet could sense that his time was ending; something was stirring within him. He and Elisha start their journey to Elijah's departure and Elisha's destiny in Gilgal. We will also begin our journey in Gilgal as we examine what is required to move toward greater fruitfulness and fulfillment in Christ.

Gilgal – Separation

Elisha's stop at Gilgal could represent separation. If we are going to fulfill God's desire for our life, we must be separated unto Him. Let me explain: Gilgal was the first place the children of Israel camped after entering the Promised Land. At Gilgal, the Lord told their leader Joshua that all the men must be circumcised. The outward sign of God's covenant with Abraham had yet to mark the entire generation born in the wilderness.

Circumcision signified outwardly the inward separation God chose for His

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chosen people. Thus, before the land could be conquered, before any cities were taken, or before the promises of Abraham were claimed, the people were required to endure the same process of separation as their forefathers.

The word *Gilgal* means “rolling away,” for it was there the Lord helped His people roll away their past.² “Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’ Therefore, the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day” (Joshua 5:9).

Just as the outward circumcision of Joshua’s generation allowed them to roll away their past and prepare for the blessed future ahead, the inward cleansing and separation of the heart by Jesus Christ allows us to prepare for the future He desires for us. Under the new covenant, our “circumcision,” or separation, is not just a cutting away of our flesh but a purifying of our heart from carnal desires. “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Romans 2:29).

Elisha was separated unto God’s service. When called by Elijah, he killed his oxen and burned his plow. He did not plan on returning to his past. If we are going where God is taking us, then we must get past our past. Our old way of life will never lead us to fulfill God’s purposes. God’s call is for us to turn away from our old ways and be separated unto the Lord. Therefore, “Come out from among them

and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).

God uses people with a past. He must; they are the only kind of people available.

Whatever is in your past, God can roll it away as you surrender completely to Jesus Christ. God uses people with a past. He must; they are the only kind of people available. All of us have sin in our past, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). God chooses those who are rejected—those whom others would never suspect as His vessels.

The New Testament records numerous accounts of people who endured difficult pasts and still fulfilled their destinies.

- When God wanted a person to take the gospel to the Gentile world, He chose a man with a Christian-killing past named Saul, who would become the apostle Paul.
- When God was looking for the first messenger of the Resurrection, He chose a woman with a demon-possessed past named Mary of Magdala.
- When Jesus was looking for an evangelist to reap the Samaritan harvest, He chose a woman with a relationally dysfunctional past who was living with a man after five previous marriages.

- When the Lord wanted someone to carry His message to a group of powerful cities near the Galilean Sea called Decapolis, He chose a man with a past of bondage, scars, and terror. The man possessed of a legion of devils would be just the right person to introduce this difficult region to Christ after Jesus got him past his past.
- When God was looking for the first Pentecostal preacher, He chose a man, Peter, who just fifty days earlier had cursed and denied Christ's name.

These Elisha-style plowboy types did not look like the world-changers they would become; nevertheless, God's calling and love separated them for their future destiny.

If you are going to move to the next level, you must go through Gilgal. You must be separated, but separation alone is not enough. Elijah encouraged Elisha to remain at Gilgal. At this point, Elisha begins revealing his character. He was not a quitter, and he was too far from his past to turn back. His days of serving Elijah created a thirst for God that pushed him beyond separation to the next important city.

Bethel – Visitation

The next stop for Elisha and Elijah was the city of Bethel. Biblically speaking, Bethel was a place of visitation. As discussed earlier, there Jacob received a night visitation from God, seeing a ladder reaching

to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. Jacob would hear God's voice and receive a personal promise while asleep on a stone pillow. When Jacob awoke from this encounter with God, he called the place *Bethel*, "house of God," for he admitted readily that the Lord was in that place.³

If you are going to become all God wants you to be, you must experience His visitation. These blessed moments and places in our journey are critical. Every person I know who is walking in personal effectiveness has experienced moments of divine surprise when God's Spirit brought direction to his or her life. Usually, the person can take you to the place and explain in great detail the moment when God visited them. Jacob certainly could. No doubt, Elisha could have taken you to the very spot in the field where Elijah's mantle touched him for the first time or to the first place he saw fire called down from heaven.

I have had several of these surprise visitations in my life. At age eleven, my grandfather died. He was a strong leader in his church movement and considered by many a stalwart, faithful man of God. At the funeral home the day before his funeral, our family was greeting friends when a moment of visitation occurred in my life. As I stood near my grandfather's casket, one of his brothers was grieving over his great loss. In bemoaning tones, he said, "No one will ever preach like Marion (my grandfather's name) again." To which I boldly replied, with tears in my eyes, "Yes, they will." Immediately, the Holy Spirit fell on me, and I began to cry. Somewhere deep

If you are going to become all God wants you to be, you must experience His visitation.

inside my heart, I knew from that day forward I would preach the gospel.

Another occasion of visitation happened to me at age sixteen. Only one month after committing my life to Christ, I was traveling

with my father across the United States. It was a great trip leaving my home state of Kentucky and traveling west for the first time in my life. We ministered on an American Indian reservation, visited Yellowstone National Park, saw the Black Hills, and drove many miles.

During the journey, we would connect with various preachers and other friends. One day we visited the church led by one of Dad's minister friends. Before leaving his small church in Illinois, we had a prayer meeting. During the prayer time, the minister laid his hands on my head and changed from praying to proclaiming a message over me. Along with several other things, he said, "You will go into all the world and preach the gospel."

This was during my first trip ever west of the Mississippi River. I had never been on an airplane and only traveled out of the country once during this same trip when we visited a Mexican border town. Now, almost fifty years later, the Lord has opened opportunities for me to share the gospel literally around the world, both through personal

and media ministry. My entire adult life has been given to sharing Jesus with millions of people, personally preaching in almost one hundred nations and ministering on television networks reaching every nation on Earth. Now that was a visitation!

Christians have always experienced times of visitation that propelled them toward their destiny.

- John Wesley, the father of Methodism, had his heart strangely warmed at a Moravian prayer meeting.⁴
- Martin Luther, the great Reformer, had a moment of revelation concerning justification by faith.⁵
- Billy Graham, the famous world evangelist, had a night of decision when he took the Bible as God's final word.⁶
- Oral Roberts, the great healing evangelist, experienced supernatural healing from tuberculosis and was called to take God's healing power to his generation.⁷
- Loren Cunningham, a modern-day missionary, experienced a visitation when he saw waves of young people flooding the continents of the world, after which he started the Youth with a Mission organization.⁸
- Agnes Ozman, a Bible school student, began speaking in tongues after other students laid their hands on her at a Kansas Bible school in 1901.⁹
- Evan Roberts, the leader of the Welsh Revival, experienced God in a dramatic way as he cried, "Lord, bend me."¹⁰

The list could go on and on of those whose encounters with God or moments of visitation propelled them on a path that led to spiritual fullness and effectiveness. Every person I know who is changing the world for Christ has experienced a moment (or moments) of divine visitation.

Visitation may come through a dream, a vision, a Scripture, a prophetic message, a phone call from a friend, a special song, an angelic manifestation, or a word during a sermon. A visitation could occur in a car with the radio playing or while singing in the shower or sitting in a quiet field by a river. We can't always choose when or how God visits us, but we must be open to His supernatural surprises.

As you become fully separated unto God and pursue Him with all your heart, visitations will take place in your life. God wants to encounter you personally and assure your heart that you are on the right path or change your path to match His plan.

However, for us to enter the fullness God has for us, we cannot stop at visitation. The journey must continue. At Bethel, Elijah discouraged Elisha once again from continuing further. Elisha also encountered discouragement from his peers at the "Bethel

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School of Prophets,” who reiterated to him that Elijah was about to be taken to heaven.

What would Elisha do? He would soon lose his prophetic water-boy status. Perhaps, he should go home. Again, Elisha revealed his heart and continued pursuing his purpose. We cannot camp out at our places of visitation, or we will never become what God has in mind for us. We must continue to the next place of spiritual growth.

Jericho – Activation and Restoration

Upon his arrival in Jericho, the cacophony of negative voices crescendoed in Elisha’s ears. Again, when the young men from the School of the Prophets told him his journey was futile because Elijah was about to leave this world, Elisha’s determination remained intact. After being touched by the mantle of future ministry, Elisha refused to retreat from the curvy road of uncertainty.

Jericho is a place of activated victory—a place of inheritance, restoration, and reclamation. This city was the first conquered by the ancestors of Abraham in Canaan. It was the place where God’s promise to Abraham would manifest as physical reality.

Following our separation unto the Lord and our moments of supernatural visitation, we must also pursue God’s promises for us. We become inheritors, active recipients of divine blessings that must be claimed by faith. Jericho was not taken by the craft of human

ingenuity but by a plan so preposterous that when it worked, only God could possibly receive the glory. Faith would be required to activate conquest.

Those who become people of destiny must also be people of faith. We must learn how to inherit God's promises in God's way. His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways, so we must change our mindset to live in a way that will position us for promise. Faith in God's ability defies human logic.

Your Jericho can be inherited. Victory is possible. God wants us to move beyond separation and visitation into activating our faith for His glory. Much land remains to be possessed as we move into the days ahead, and we will need supernatural help to possess it. Those who activate their faith will win some of the greatest victories for Christ's church in history.

We find people in all three of these places who were on their way to becoming what God chose them to be but never arrived. Many stay at separation (Gilgal); consequently, they live good lives, attend church, pay their tithes, renounce past sins, and commit to Christ, but they stagnate. They are not open to God's ongoing work. Resistant to

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the power of the Holy Spirit, they do not receive fresh encounters and thereby fail to experience a true visitation from God.

Others camp out at visitation (Bethel). This is where they live—always looking for the next prophetic word, the next great worship service, the next wonderful conference, or mighty preacher. They love the spectacular, the fire from heaven, the angel on the ladder thing, or even angels swinging from the chandeliers. Their whole life is consumed with Bethel. Although they love the house of God, they never do the work of God. These “Bethel dwellers” never move mountains, never claim promises, never advance the Kingdom, and never reach their destiny.

A few others in the Kingdom have arrived at Jericho. They have seen God do mighty things through them. Not only have they witnessed His glory, but they have also inherited His promises. These “Jericho takers” always embrace Scripture. God’s promises form their Christian “to-do” list. Their faith has been activated with works. They are separated; they have heard from God; they are focused on Kingdom expansion and spiritual growth.

Elisha later saw great miracles at Jericho, as he healed the cursed waters of the desperate city, but the full actualization of his destiny was just down the road from any Jericho victories.

Most of us do not move into our fullest mission until we move beyond claiming promises and start taking our territory. The next part of the journey is one I always dislike. My flesh recoils from it, yet this is the most important part of the journey for Elisha.

Since Jericho would be Elijah's last city before his flight home, he pressed Elisha to remain there. Once again Elisha moved to the next level and continued the journey, faithful to God's calling in his life.

The Jordan – Mortification

Elijah left Jericho and made his way to the nearby Jordan River with Elisha close behind. Elijah was heading toward both his earthly and heavenly home. All we know of Elijah before his ministry in Israel is summarized in this one verse: "Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead . . ." (1 Kings 17:1, KJV). This means that Elijah's hometown would have been on the opposite side of the Jordan River from Jericho; therefore, as Elijah made his way back to the Jordan, he was moving toward home.

Something in all of us wants to be home before we go home. This trend of returning to home for our final days takes place in our world daily, from the salmon returning to its native waters to the Tennessean moving home from up north after retirement. More importantly, Elijah's home was across the Jordan River. When Elijah struck the river with his mantle, he witnessed his last miracle before heaven. The waters parted, and he was able to cross over on dry ground.

This crossing of the Jordan was a critical moment for young Elisha. Whereas Elijah was going toward home, Elisha was moving away from his home. Elisha was from Abel Meholah, of the tribe of

Issachar, which was on the west side of the Jordan River near Jericho. Elisha would not only have to put his past behind him, but he would also have to leave his comfort zone in pursuit of God's anointing and his destiny. Crossing the Jordan would be a moment of mortification, or death, for the water boy about to become a prophet.

The Hebrew word *yar-dane* is translated as “Jordan” and means “descender.”¹¹ This is an appropriate name for the river that descends 2,380 feet from the tributaries of Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea—the lowest place on Earth. From the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is a distance around 65 miles.¹² The Jordan River curves through this region, descending into the deadliest body of water on the planet. Because of this, throughout history, the Jordan has been associated with death.

The crossing of this river by the children of Israel after three days has been thought by many to represent both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist used the Jordan River for his baptism of repentance to prepare Israel for the new dimension of God's kingdom. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, signifying His willingness to submit to the Father's plan and die for the sins of man.

Elisha would have to pass through this symbolic water of death in pursuit of God's purpose. I am convinced that we will never move into our destiny until we are willing to die to get there. In most instances, the greatest anointing and ministry follow seasons of

spiritual death. To be what God has called us to be and to see His purposes accomplished in us requires the crucifixion of our will.

Elisha must have wondered about this journey into the mortification of his flesh. As he crossed Jordan, he may have felt like he was moving away from his prophetic destiny. He was not even going to be in Israel if Elijah kept traveling eastward. This was a death to his way, a death to his desire, and a death to his will.

WARNING! If you want the increased portion needed to be effective for God in your generation, it will cost you everything. You will have to die!

While studying the lives of ministers who were effective in their generation, I have been amazed at how many of them went through devastation and what must have felt like death on the way to their destiny.

William Carey is considered by most Christian historians as one of the fathers of the modern missionary movement. Once a shoemaker, Carey felt called of God to India. When he arrived, Carey translated Scripture into as many Indian languages as possible and founded a large press operation in Serampore. The burden of his work grew heavier daily. To make matters worse, Carey's wife battled mental illness during their early years on this difficult Indian mission field.

While Carey was away from Serampore on March 11, 1812, his associate, William Ward, was working late at the press when he smelled something burning. Running to the source, he discovered clouds of smoke belching from the printing room. He and the workers present rushed to save the press operation, but they were too late—everything was destroyed.

On March 12, 1812, missionary Joshua Marshman entered a classroom in Calcutta, India, where Carey was teaching. “I can think of no easy way to break the news,” he said. “The print shop burned to the ground last night.” Carey was stunned. Gone were his works—the massive Polyglot dictionary, two grammar books, translated versions of the Bible, sets of type for fourteen different Eastern languages, 1,200 reams of paper, 55,000 printed sheets, and thirty pages of his Bengal dictionary. His complete library was destroyed. “The work of years—gone in a moment,” he whispered.

Carey took little time to mourn. “The loss is heavy,” he wrote, “but traveling a road the second time is usually done with greater ease and certainty than the first time, so I trust the work will lose nothing of real value. We are not discouraged; indeed, the work is already begun again in every language. We are cast down but not in despair.”

When news of the fire in Serampore reached Carey’s home nation of England, it catapulted Carey’s ministry to instant fame. Thousands of pounds were raised for the work, and volunteers offered to help. The enterprise was rebuilt and enlarged. By 1822, complete Bibles,

New Testaments, or separate books of Scripture had originated from the printing press in forty-four languages and dialects. God had taken what must have felt like death to a ministry and used it to move the mission into an entirely new level of effectiveness. I love what Carey would say about his situation: “There are grave difficulties on every hand, and more are looming ahead. Therefore, we must go forward.”¹³

October 19, 1856, was a grand day in London, England. For the first time in history, a Christian service would be held in the beautiful Surrey Music Hall, which seated over 10,000 people. Charles Spurgeon’s congregation had outgrown Exeter Hall, where large crowds thronged to hear this young preacher share God’s Word. The congregation of the New Park Street Chapel leased Surrey Music Hall for their services. The first service on that October evening was packed with over 10,000 people in attendance. Excitement filled the air until tragedy struck. Just as Spurgeon was taking the pulpit, someone shouted, “Fire! The galleries are giving away, the place is falling!”¹⁴

Although the human fire alarm was bogus, immediately the huge crowd went into a panic. During the ensuing few minutes, people rushed for the exits, crushing others in their path. Within moments, seven people were trampled to death and many more were severely injured. Spurgeon was ushered from the pulpit and out of the building without harm.

In the days that followed, depression came crashing in on Spurgeon. “How could a wonderful moment turn into such a tragedy?” Questions such as these and many others bombarded Spurgeon’s mind. He wanted to resign and leave London. He felt as though he was dying inside.¹⁵

After several days, Spurgeon heard the Lord speak to him through a friend. Within two weeks, Spurgeon was back at Surrey Music Hall preaching the gospel. For the next three years until 1859, Spurgeon preached weekly at the very place where tragedy struck. Hundreds of people were saved, and God used his pain to give the young preacher an even greater platform from which to declare the gospel. Though scarred by this incident for the rest of his life, Spurgeon preached to overflow crowds in London.¹⁶

Our willingness to endure the death of our flesh allows God to bring us to a new place of anointing and power in which He will receive all the glory. God uses our times of brokenness and pain to propel us forward. Tim Hansel, in the book *You Gotta Keep Dancin’*, reminds us of this principle:

Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written from prisons. Bunyan wrote Pilgrim’s Progress from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semi-paralyzed and under the constant menace of apoplexy, Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease. Sometimes it seems that when God is about to make preeminent use of a man, he puts him through the fire.¹⁷

Great missionaries like Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, and David Livingstone all suffered devastating losses to their family while serving on the mission field. Still, they crossed over their Jordan into greatness for God's kingdom. The principles of this Kingdom defy my ability to comprehend them. How the high and lofty God dwells in the low and humble places simply does not make sense, but it is true. When we die for His sake, we live.

I have also experienced "Jordan River" seasons in my personal ministry. In the early 1990's I served as Evangelism and Communications Director for the Church of God of Prophecy for several years. When I began leading these departments after serving as International Youth Director for eleven years, the denomination had a television program. In my first year in this new role, donations plummeted and significant budget pressure on the denomination ensued. By the end of my inaugural year of serving as the television and radio minister for the denomination, the television program was discontinued by the church's executive committee. I felt like a failure.

Actually, that is an understatement. I felt as if I was dying inside. Never in my past ministry had anything I was leading gone down instead of up. Perhaps worse than the failure of that first year was that I was appointed again to the same position at the next general conference. I didn't run away or quit, although I certainly wanted to. I was embarrassed, defeated, and broken. My emotions were at a low ebb. It felt as if the horse I was riding had died underneath me and yet I was still in the saddle, on a dead horse. I didn't know what to do

or who to turn to. I was desperate. So, I went into a twenty-one-day fast, asking God for direction and hoping He would find me another assignment quickly. On the second day of the fast, the Lord spoke to me, instructing me on three steps I was to make, and then promised me that if I would make those three steps, the ministry would go back on television. I wasn't sure this was the answer I wanted, but it was the only answer I received during that season of seeking.

Over the next months, God kept His word. After presenting my idea for a new direction for television in the movement, the same executive group that closed the television program allowed me permission to launch again yet without restoring budget dollars. (The budget was reduced by two-thirds when television was canceled and there were no monies to restore the lost funds. They did, however, grant me a one-time, minuscule offering, just to give me some encouragement.) Without denominational funding or any large donors, things looked impossible. Yet, He opened a way for us to launch *World Impact with Billy Wilson*. A friend produced the programs for free, and we found air-time opportunities that were either complimentary or at a fraction of the costs.

Within two years of its closure, a new television program was on the air and thriving. We even aired on the Hallmark Channel for several years free of charge because our ratings remained high. Ultimately, the denomination did not embrace the media ministry and gifted it to the ministries I would lead. Now, almost thirty years later, *World Impact with Billy Wilson* is a television ministry of Oral Roberts

University and at the time of this writing is seen in over 150 nations every week. The *World Impact* journey has been nothing short of miraculous, and it was birthed out a season of spiritual brokenness and fasting. The days of inner death I endured helped me cross over to a new place of blessing and fulfillment.

Fasting is truly one way that our flesh can die to our own will and be brought to brokenness so God's plans might come to pass.

Fasting is truly one way that our flesh can die to our own will and be brought to brokenness so God's plans might come to pass.

Repentance

In a previous chapter, we discussed repentance and its purposes in fasting. Repentance is part of the mortification process. The depths of self-discovery, which take place during long seasons of fasting, can be scary. However, the depths of repentance possible as we humble ourselves can be exciting if we understand God's ways.

When John the Baptist stood in the Jordan River preaching repentance, he was calling for a nation to pass through spiritual death once again. A new "promised land" of Messiah's coming was just before them. Their days of spiritual wilderness wandering were about to end. A new day of destiny and effectiveness was coming. They were being called to get ready: Repent, turn from your wicked

ways, humble yourself, and die to your old understandings! This was John's message to haughty Israel.

Most of the nation was unwilling to pass through Jordan and prepare their hearts to receive Jesus. His ways would not be their ways because they failed to die to their own desires and accept His calling. Because they were not ready, they missed their destiny.

God is calling today's church to repent. Every great move of God and dimensional shift in history happened because God's people entered their generational Jordan in deep repentance and brokenness. Our humility and a willingness to die to self opens the door for God to work among us—thrusting us into a new, double-portion dimension.

As in Elisha's day, when darkness covers a generation and modern-day Jezebels rule the land (or church), we need increased power to break the stronghold and deliver the people. Effectiveness that makes prophets out of plowboys and spiritual fathers out of spiritual

Our humility and a willingness to die to self opens the door for God to work among us—thrusting us into a new, double-portion dimension.

sons comes only when we embrace humility, brokenness, and contrition. We must always cross our personal Jordan to find new power.

In early 1905, Frank Bartleman, an eyewitness historian of the Azusa Street Revival, wrote, "I

received from God the following keynote to revival: *The depth of a revival will be determined exactly by the depth of the spirit of repentance...*” Bartleman also felt a body must be prepared in repentance and humility for every outpouring of the Spirit.¹⁸ I agree and believe that individually we must also prepare for God’s purpose in our lives with extreme humility and brokenness.

One Sunday at the beginning of my Christian journey, my pastor was preaching with tears flowing from his eyes. I had rarely, if ever, seen this pastor cry. He was always under control and had great composure, but on this Sunday, his brokenness was obvious. God’s Spirit and love flowed through him during his sermon to bless the congregation. Near the conclusion of the morning, he stated, “I know I am crying a lot today, but I fasted for three days this week, and God has broken me. You should try it.”

When we fast, we are mortifying our flesh and bringing it under the discipline of God. We literally experience a breaking of our fleshly desires as we fast and seek the Lord. This breaking of our outer self allows the treasure God has placed within us to be brought to the surface to bless others. Our outer self is like a veil concealing our inner self. When we fast with the right intent, our outer self becomes weakened and broken, allowing our inner man to gain ascendancy.

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. The way into the Holy of Holies was made available to all of us. However, this veil only symbolized the real veil that

was being torn open at the cross: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:19–20).

When we fast, the veil of our flesh is weakened, broken, and torn so God can meet with us more easily.

From this passage, we learn that the body of Jesus was the real veil separating God from mankind, concealing the glory of God in Christ. On the cross, Christ’s broken body opened the way for us to personally meet with God. Christ’s body was torn because God wanted to have fellowship with us.

When we fast, the veil of our flesh is weakened, broken, and torn so God can meet with us more easily. In fasting, we are opening ourselves to God in an intimate way and saying, “Lord, I want You more than my necessary food, and I am willing to be broken to receive more of Your grace.”

Please understand, I do not believe fasting gives us special merit with God or that fasting can cleanse our sins. Only the sinless death of Jesus on the cross could accomplish that. Sinners who do without eating but fail to turn their hearts to God and trust in the crucified Christ for forgiveness only become skinnier sinners. Fasting expresses a desperate heart and prepares us to move into a new level of intimacy with our heavenly Father.

Realization

When Elisha crossed the Jordan with Elijah, the restless prophet finally communicated with his protege concerning his desire.

- Why had he followed Elijah on this reflective Biblical sightseeing tour?
- Why was he willing to cross Jordan and move beyond his comfort zone?
- Why had he not given up, gone home, or just quit?
- What did Elisha want?

“And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?’ Elisha said, ‘Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me’” (2 Kings 2:9).

Elisha’s request was startling. Elijah knew that Elisha was to be the next prophet of Israel; that’s why he called him. But not only did this younger man want to be a prophet, he wanted to be twice the prophet Elijah had been. Obviously, Elisha knew that the grace on Elijah’s life was thus far unable to defeat the great powers of darkness in Israel. He would need to be more effective than Elijah had been and have more power than Elijah possessed. His request was to receive a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

In this request, Elisha was also asking to be recognized as Elijah’s spiritual son. In the ancient East, the first son received twice as

much of the inheritance as the other children. Elisha was asking as a spiritual son for his spiritual father to make him legitimate by granting him a double portion.

Elijah responded by saying, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so” (2 Kings 2:10); or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases in *The Message*: “That’s a hard one!” said Elijah. “But if you’re watching when I’m taken from you, you’ll get what you’ve asked for. But only if you’re watching.”

Elijah promised Elisha if he did not quit, his request for a double portion would be granted. If he endured to the end, he would move from water boy to world changer. Elisha’s heart must have skipped a beat or two. His energy increased; his determination escalated; his eyes remained fixed on his spiritual father. He was ready!

Suddenly it happened—spiritual transitions always take us by surprise even when we are expecting them. A fiery chariot led by fiery horses swept from heaven in rapture-like quickness. The shuttle to eternity separated the prophetic father from his spiritual son. In an instant, Elijah was gone, and Elisha was left behind.

The smoking scene of ministry was interrupted as Elisha discovered that while rushing into eternal glory, Elijah’s mantle had been left behind. The inheritance had been granted. This cloak of calling,

which Elijah had thrown around Elisha years before, would now be the spiritual son's uniform of identification, his official declaration of spiritual adoption to all of Israel. God's new man slowly walked back to the descending river; the well-worn garment of prophetic responsibility once again called into action: It struck the river, invoking God's power. The schoolboys watched as the water boy who would not quit moved from mortification to realization. God parted the river and Elisha entered his destiny.

Remember the account of my trip to West Africa I shared at the beginning of this chapter? The return trip to the airport during the daylight hours was amazingly easy. We traveled on a road I could see. My host, soldier friend, and I laughed and shared experiences all the way to the city. I praised the Lord for new brethren who took such good care of me. My fears were unfounded, and the journey through the fog was worth it.

Like that trip to West Africa with all its trials, fears, and uncertainty, Elisha's journey from separation, to visitation, to activation, and through mortification was worth it. The harvest before him would be worth the pain behind him. He was glad he had not quit, glad he did not go home, glad he refused to be discouraged, glad he moved out of his comfort zone, glad he went across Jordan, and glad to finally enter his double-portion destiny.

You will be glad, too.

Chapter 7 Reflection Questions

1. Do you believe God can use you despite past sin? How might God be calling you to move forward and be separated unto the Lord?
2. Out of the numerous people in the Bible that God used despite their past, with whom do you most identify and why?
3. Have you ever experienced a supernatural visitation from the Lord? What part does fasting play in these encounters?
4. Where are you right now spiritually: Separation, visitation, activation, or mortification? How can you submit your season to God and move toward the fulfillment of His plans for your life?
5. Have you ever experienced a season of spiritual death in your life and/or ministry? What happened, and how did you make it through?



As men and women are beginning to consider the days and times through which we are passing with a new seriousness, and as many are beginning to look for revival and reawakening, the question of fasting has become more and more important.¹

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them, And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:1–4

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the lord, and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the lord.

2 Chronicles 20:3–4

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the house top to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

Acts 10:9–10

CHAPTER 8

Fasting Forward **Experiencing the Power of Fasting**

Atlanta's gateway to the world, Hartsfield International Airport, is an amazing place. Covering over 4,700 acres of land, with its passenger terminal complex filling a staggering 5.7 million square feet, Hartsfield is the largest employer in Georgia. With more than 63,000 employees, the airport's total regional economic impact exceeds \$64 billion a year.²

Noted as the busiest airport in the world, Hartsfield's sheer volume of people traffic is astounding, with over eight million passengers arriving and departing each month on over 80,000 flights.³ The big spaces, big money, big planes, big facilities, and especially the big numbers of people could potentially all be a big headache. Hartsfield's passenger concourses are spread out in several different buildings, each denoted with an alphabet letter. Getting from the E, or International concourse, to the T, or Terminal concourse, takes one approximately 2.0 miles.⁴ What if everyone walked or ran from concourse to concourse, rushing to make their connections? A few million passengers missing their flights each month would really be a headache!

Instead, passengers move between concourses through underground walkways, moving sidewalks, and, most importantly, the "Plane Train," an underground APM, or Automated People Mover, which connects the concourse buildings to the main terminal. This rapid-

transit system consists of eleven, four-car trains operating on a three-mile loop track and carries more than 200,000 passengers per day.⁵

Since I have spent a lot of time in the Atlanta airport over the years, my experiences with the Plane Train have been numerous. Time after time, I have been relieved to hear the *swoosh* of the sleek, red train, which quickly whisks me to my next concourse. I have also delighted in plopping down on the gray-carpeted seat with my heavy carry-on luggage after a long international trip. I am always especially pleased with the Automated People Mover when I consider the other transportation options available, both of which include using my feet!

The underground walkway and the underground moving sidewalk each require more exertion from the passenger than the speedy shuttle, and at a much slower pace. Even when I have walked at full speed on the moving sidewalk, the Plane Train has beaten me to the next stop. It is simply a more efficient way to travel. Thousands of people ride the Plane Train, allowing Atlanta to manage an exceptional volume of over 200,000 passengers daily.

Experiencing God's APM

When Jesus left the world, He sent His church, consisting of 120 followers, on a global, two-millennia journey with the gospel. Before making their first connection, Jesus commanded them to go to the Jerusalem “concourse” for their introduction to God's Automated

People Mover. This supernatural, advanced transport system would carry the church to her preassigned destinations. Their ten-day wait for this “Spirit train” must have seemed long, considering the condition of the world and the great news they were bearing. Wouldn’t it be faster to exert themselves on the walkway of works or the moving sidewalk of human effort? Nonetheless, the church waited for their train to come in.

A heavenly *swoosh* filled the Upper Room, announcing the arrival of God’s “Spirit train.” On the Day of Pentecost, God’s accelerated transport pulled into church station, and the disciples were rapidly whisked from their waiting room to the H, or Harvest, concourse. In one day, 3,000 more people were converted to Christ than had been converted in all the days since the Resurrection. God’s church was on the move. They had entered God’s accelerated mode of transportation; or more precisely, the Spirit train had entered them.

The Holy Spirit is God’s last days’ rapid-transit vehicle. He is the heavenly designated medium for carrying the church to a hurting world. Throughout the Book of Acts, we see Him at work: first in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally the distant parts of the earth. Not only did

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the church advance geographically, but also anthropologically to different people groups.

The Jewish people received the message first, and then the Holy Spirit propelled the gospel forward to Samaritans, disciples of John the Baptist, persecutors of the faith, and Gentiles from Asia, Europe, and Africa. Within twenty-five years, the church had turned the world upside down.

Like leaven, the church's small initial influence grew rapidly, filling the entire Roman Empire. Traveling this broad and diverse expanse would have been impossible by human strength alone. Those pioneer believers were required to get on board God's Spirit train in order to fully connect with their generation.

Today, the Holy Spirit— God's People Mover—is more important to us than ever. We face a world that desperately needs the good news we carry. But without supernatural help, we will never reach our destination of global evangelization.⁶The statistics facing us are staggering. Take a moment to consider the following:

- The world's population now numbers over eight billion. This number increases by 150 people every minute.⁷
- On an average day, over 150,000 people die.⁸
- Approximately 32 percent of the world population identifies as Christian.⁹

- Very optimistically, we could hope that one-third of the people who die are saved.
- This means that over thirty-five million people (and that is conservatively speaking) will plunge into a Christ-less eternity this year! No wonder Isaiah says: “Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure” (5:14, KJV).
- And it is estimated that 28 percent of the world population remains unevangelized as of mid-2022.¹⁰

In the United States, the unchurched and unreached population continues to outgrow the church’s evangelistic effectiveness. This should help us realize that today’s church must find better ways to advance the cause of Christ in our generation. We need an efficient, effective way to reach our destination and outdistance the population growth of the world. We need God’s People Mover. During the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the world has witnessed exceptional growth of Spirit-empowered Christianity. In 1900, less than one million people around the world identified as Pentecostal or charismatic. By 2050, that number will top one billion or more.¹¹

From only a handful of “on-fire” believers at the turn of the last century, the greatest revival in history has brought the message of Spirit baptism around the world. The powerful, global movement energized by this message now numbers almost 650 million.¹² That means over one-half billion believers should be witnessing the greatest forward thrust of the gospel in history.

In many places around the world, believers are experiencing outpourings of the Holy Spirit, and God is moving His church forward into a bountiful harvest. However, in many other places, the church has stalled and

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fallen behind in the last several years. Stories of great harvest are heard from around the world, yet over thirty-five million people are still on their way to hell this year. This means a group equal to the population of four New York cities will plunge into eternal darkness and torment in the next 365 days. If we could only hear their cries, see their faces, and feel some of their sufferings, surely we would find a way to make a difference in greater measure.

The Holy Spirit is ready to work through today's church in fresh, dramatic ways, bringing world harvest and advancing God's kingdom. He needs a church that will rely on Him and allow Him to carry us forward. Personally, I believe there is a dimension of Spirit activity that we have yet to enter, where the church will be propelled to turn the world upside down once again for Christ.

Experiencing Supernatural Acceleration

Having worked in evangelism for many years, I have studied Acts

8 numerous times, because it gives an account of the only man in the New Testament who is specifically called an evangelist—Philip. God shifts the ministry of Philip from waiting on tables in Jerusalem to evangelistic effectiveness among new people groups in the world. Because of persecution, the church was scattered, and Philip found himself in Samaria. According to Scripture, Philip was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5). God’s vehicle to reach the world moved Philip to preach Christ to this city outside Judea. As he ministered, God healed people, cast out devils, wrought miracles, and, later, baptized many with the Spirit.

The Spirit led Philip from the Samaritan breakthrough into the desert where, once again, God’s People Mover led him to witness to a man from Africa. From mass evangelism to personal evangelism, the Holy Spirit was moving Philip forward.

Following the water baptism of the Ethiopian convert, the Spirit directed Philip’s ministry supernaturally again: “Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (8:39).

The term “caught Philip away” is translated in other versions as “took Philip away” or “snatched Philip away.” The Greek word from which this phrase is translated, *harpazo*, means “to catch” and is the same word used for the rapture of the living saints in 1 Thessalonians

4:17, where Paul said, “We shall be caught up.” The verb conveys the idea of force suddenly exercised.¹³

God’s Word teaches that Philip was snatched, caught away, or suddenly taken from the Gaza desert by the Holy Spirit. The next verse says that Philip was found at Azotus (Acts 8:40). Azotus was around twenty miles from the desert road where the Ethiopian converted to Christ. God’s People Mover, the Holy Spirit, carried Philip to his next ministry destination in Azotus supernaturally, in a way more efficient than possible through human effort.

Philip’s supernatural transport by the Holy Spirit was an unusual case of God’s power on display and of God’s man flowing in obedience. Obviously, God will not accomplish all His work through the Holy Spirit’s catching us away and transporting us around the world, as He did Philip. Even so, witnessing the Spirit’s power in Philip’s ministry should reveal to us God’s desire to accelerate our fruitfulness in Christ supernaturally.

In many cases, we are so involved in our plans, programs, and personal initiatives that we fail to acknowledge our dependency on Him.¹⁴ Fasting physically confesses our inability to bear spiritual fruit through mere human means.

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When we are desperate for God's help, we can express our hunger for Him in a tangible way through fasting. Fasting helps us turn the emptiness of our hearts toward heaven.

Experiencing a New Dimension

The Plane Train/People Mover at Hartsfield International Airport *swooshes* because air is filling a vacuum. As the train rushes through the tunnel, air is compressed in front and then decompressed rapidly behind the train, filling the empty space. *Swoosh* is the noise of air rushing to fill a void created by displacement. Even so, fasting helps us displace our initiatives, desires, and plans to make room for His will. The Holy Spirit rushes to our expressed desperation and emptiness like air filling a vacuum. What we cannot do in our own strength, Jesus does by His.

The Holy Spirit *swoosh* moves us to supernatural fruitfulness and propels us forward. Human energy and its accompanying frustrations are traded for heavenly power and its accompanying delight. This exchange is why we fast. We need God's strength more than our own.

This truth is why Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, called a fast. Jehoshaphat led his nation into spiritual renewal. It tore down places of pagan worship, the people returned to Jehovah, and justice was being restored. Amid this revival, Judah's enemies came against them in great force. The Moabites and Ammonites combined their

armies to march into the land of Judah from near the Dead Sea. This invading-axis army was very strong. Judah's forces were weak in comparison. The odds against Jehoshaphat were huge, and with no allies to call on for help, defeat seemed imminent. Jehoshaphat was afraid, and in desperation he called a fast:

“And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So, Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:3–4).

Jehoshaphat realized that Judah needed something beyond human ability and initiative to defeat the Moabite/Ammonite multitude. God's people from across the nation pushed their plates back, packed up their plans, and headed for Jerusalem to join in Jehoshaphat's desperate prayer of dependence. The king moved from his throne to the temple and from human authority to divine, humbly asking God for His help. Jehoshaphat concluded his prayer by saying: “O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (v. 12).

The scene was poignant as all of Judah, including wives and children, stood in crowded Jerusalem to pray with the king. With their heads bowed and stomachs growling, an entire nation pleaded for supernatural assistance. God heard their cry and sent His Spirit among them. (They may have even heard a *swoosh*.) The Spirit came

upon a Levite named Jahaziel who prophesied God's message to the people. The Lord began the message through Jahaziel by saying, "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's" (v.15, NIV).

After revealing to Judah where their enemy could be found, the Spirit continued to speak through Jahaziel: "You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!" Jahaziel continued, "Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you" (v. 17).

Instantly, Jehoshaphat and the people fell on their faces before the Lord. The entire nation lay prostrate by God's power, expressing their gratitude for His visitation. Stomachs were still growling, but no one seemed to mind; God's Spirit was at work among them. The next morning, Jehoshaphat encouraged Judah to believe God's prophets and the word he had given them.

After consultation, the king appointed singers who would go before the army of God saying: "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever" (v. 21). When the people marched from Jerusalem toward the invading army, they started singing and praising the Lord. The Holy Spirit was moving them into a new dimension of warfare beyond their human ability. While Judah worshiped, the Lord sent a supernatural ambush against their enemies. Ultimately, the

Moabites, Ammonites, and inhabitants of Mount Seir destroyed one another without Judah's army ever raising their swords.

Like Judah, today's church faces huge odds. The call to reach our generation, the present situation within many churches, and the forces of evil we are encountering, all leave us in need of supernatural assistance. Human initiative will not take us where God is calling us to go. We need more than the walkways and sidewalks of great ideas—we need a new dimension!

Jehoshaphat moved into a new dimension of warfare through prayer and fasting. God's power whisked Judah to a swifter victory than anyone could have imagined. The people enjoyed an accelerated advancement because they slowed down to seek God.

Experiencing the Fast-Forward

The church has always accelerated forward when it has heard from heaven and obeyed. One moment of obeying God's directive advances God's people more than millions of actions otherwise. We see an example of this when God spoke to a rock-solid apostle at Joppa, and the church moved forward in a dramatic way.

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Peter heard from God while praying privately at noon on the rooftop of Simon, the tanner. Peter was in a temporary, forced fast—waiting for lunch. The smell of Simon’s animal tanning operation and the smell of food on the stove filled Peter’s senses with a unique, bittersweet aroma. While praying in the Mediterranean sunshine, the hungry preacher fell into a trance. Was this the result of too much sun, too many hours without food, exhaustion, or the Holy Spirit? Whatever the cause of Peter’s state, he saw a vision that would change not only his life but church history forever.

A large sheet, like a giant picnic tablecloth, descended from heaven containing several different species of animals. This living smorgasbord contained animals that were restricted by Jewish dietary law. God’s command to Peter for him to rise, kill, and eat (Acts 10:13) must have been a huge shock to his Jewish beliefs. The apostle refused heaven’s invitation by stating that he had never eaten anything that was common or unclean. God spoke to him again, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (v. 15).

The visual lesson was reiterated three times, and then the sheet was received back into heaven. Peter reflected: *What could this vision mean? What was God saying? What should I do now? What about lunch?* Never mind.

While the Holy Spirit had Peter’s attention, He told the former fisherman that three men were seeking him, and he was to go with them without doubting. Simultaneously, three men from the house of

a centurion named Cornelius knocked on Simon's door. Peter came down to meet them and, after an overnight stay in Joppa, joined the men on the journey back to Caesarea. Cornelius and his Gentile family were waiting.

Quantum leaps forward in the Spirit are born in quiet moments, but we must slow down usually to go forward.

Peter entered the home, preached the gospel, and witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on these new believers. Uncircumcised Gentiles had received the gospel and the Holy Spirit! God's People Mover carried Peter right out of his comfort zone and connected the Gentiles to the church . . . all in one trip. This Spirit-led journey from Joppa brought God's people to an entirely new threshold of effectiveness.

Quantum leaps forward in the Spirit are born in quiet moments, but we must slow down usually to go forward. During his forced-fast and noontime prayer meeting, Peter heard God's voice, which made all the difference.

When we hear the voice of the Spirit and obey Him, we step off the difficult walkway of human ingenuity, which requires great effort, and step onto a high-speed train of supernatural power, which requires great faith. Slowing down, pushing back your plate, opening your spiritual ears, and responding to the Spirit in a new dimension

of obedience can be scary. Walking feels safer than high-speed train travel. Yet that safe, in-control feeling may be keeping us from the greatest harvest in the history of the world.

The entryway to God's last days' rapid-transit system is still open. Like Jehoshaphat's singing army and Peter's diet-breaking smorgasbord, new methods of victory and new system-shattering visions will soon be revealed. Fasting will help you slow down to hear God's voice and experience a quantum leap forward.

Hopefully, you have realized by now that you will never make your last days' connections through simply exerting additional human effort.

So, get off the moving sidewalk of good ideas, lay down the carry-on baggage of past tradition, exit the corridor of humanly inspired initiative, step through the doorway of expressed desperation, and get on God's People Mover. The Holy Spirit is ready for us to go *Fasting Forward*. I think I hear a *swoosh!*

Chapter 8 Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever experienced supernatural acceleration by slowing down to seek God?
2. Why is it important to fast while in spiritual battle?
3. Are you currently in a season in which you need to rely more on God's strength? Is He perhaps calling you to fast during this time?
4. How might you approach your next fast differently than previous fasts?
5. Do you see God at work in your life? Whether the answer is "yes" or "no," it may be a good time to fast!





CONCLUSION

For years, scientists thought it could never be done, but on October 14, 1947, Chuck Yeager did it. He defied former scientific understanding and flew faster than the speed of sound in the Bell X-1 rocket plane.¹ The sonic boom confirmed that a breakthrough had occurred.

In earlier flight tests nearing the speed of sound, planes were shaken severely or even broken apart. Several pilots lost their lives. Most of those participating in the earlier flights were unprepared for the shock waves that would accompany the stress of supersonic speeds. Because of this, scientists believed that a Sonic Barrier existed, preventing man from ever flying faster than the speed of sound. It seemed that we would all have to be satisfied to fly at subsonic speeds—until Yeager’s breakthrough.

Yeager’s team and others learned a monumental lesson. When you are nearing a significant advancement, stress and pressure will increase greatly. However, as the record is broken, old structures collapse, new thinking is established, and latent potential is unleashed.

Living a life of fasting and prayer may seem impossible to you. Every time you approach spiritual breakthrough, things seem to fall apart. The obstacles before you are invisible, but they are real. Trust me, or better yet, trust God; your barriers can be broken. Once you experience victory in seeking the Lord through fasting, you will wonder how you ever lived without periodically participating in this discipline. Latent potential will be released, and you will find yourself

moving into new spiritual dimensions once believed impossible.

By 1953, six years after Chuck Yeager's famous breakthrough flight to shatter the invisible sound barrier, he set another record by flying two and a half times faster than the speed of sound. One breakthrough prepared him for greater breakthroughs in the future.

Fasting Forward is designed to be both inspirational and instructional. My desire has been to encourage as well as assist you in practical ways to break through spiritual barriers and defeat the kingdom of darkness. I have not attempted to write an exhaustive volume on fasting. The practical aspects of this spiritual discipline have only been quickly scanned in a few of the chapters. Much more information is available. Several excellent works on this subject are recommended in the additional reading on fasting list. Please continue reading about fasting as well as the other spiritual disciplines. May God use all of these to whet your appetite (no pun intended) for Him.

When writing a book like this, overstating certain points can be very easy. Undoubtedly, I have indulged in some of this. No, I don't believe that fasting will cure all the ills in today's church. Only Jesus, our Great Physician, can possibly do that. Nor do I believe that fasting is the only viable discipline for drawing us closer to the Lord. There are many important steps to intimate discipleship, including prayer, meditation, service, church attendance, Scripture reading, and participation in the sacraments, to name a few. I have focused on this subject because I am convinced that our lack of participation

in fasting is limiting our effectiveness in reaching this generation for Christ. Millions of Christians have also missed a wonderful, fulfilling part of their journey by excluding fasting from their spiritual diet.

As I mentioned earlier, you have been learning from a pupil and journeying with a fellow traveler. In my effort to be vulnerable and open, I have shared numerous personal experiences with you. These private incidents and insights are all subjectively flawed by my humanity. I trust you will receive them in this way.

Finally, my prayer is that something I have communicated will assist you in discovering a greater intimacy with Jesus than you have ever known. If you have never participated in a fast, I pray God gives you the courage to try. If you have sought the Lord in fasting, I pray the Holy Spirit will drive you to a new level of spiritual effectiveness.

The world is lost; the Lord is coming; the church needs deep revival, and our hearts remain hungry for His presence. Thank you for joining me on this continued journey of *Fasting Forward*.

—Dr. Billy Wilson

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