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A black and white photograph of two hands clasped in prayer, with fingers interlaced and palms facing each other. The hands are the central focus of the cover, with the text overlaid on them.

PRAAYER *and* FASTING

Group Discussion Guide

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RENEW

RENEWING THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS
TO FUEL DISCIPLE MAKING



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PREFACE

God has radically changed our lives in so many ways, it gets harder and harder to keep track of everyday. Jesus has stepped in boldly, turned our marriage upside down, shaken our views of ourselves and the world and transformed our hearts in a way that looks to him for our sole foundation and strength. In the midst of life, he has given us great peace and joy and a renewed sense of purpose. Jesus of Nazareth, our king and Lord, has met us where we are and has given us a gift which allows us to see him more clearly and hear him more loudly. That gift is fasting and prayer. Our heart is that as many people as possible would come to know our king as their own king and learn to trust him fully by total surrender to his Lordship. Our desire is a church that is no longer lukewarm, but on fire for the living God! We long for an awakening of the Spirit in us and in others. We want to help ignite a church that is equipped to do its mission of making disciples of all nations and a church that learns that there is nothing it can do on its own; but only through reliance on God's power through his Holy Spirit. May the journey begin...

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV).

INTRODUCTION:

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, LAYING THE FOUNDATION - WHY, HOW, & WHEN?

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed, and its destruction was complete” (Luke 6:46-49, NIV).

Before we begin, I imagine you are reading this for one of two reasons; the first is that you are curious and want to be inspired. The second is that someone else who loves you has encouraged you to explore this topic so you can begin this journey together. The purpose of this introduction is simple. It is to give you the foundation that you need to begin this wonderful adventure into deeper spiritual formation.

I bet that if you are interested in prayer, that you are even more curious about fasting. You have probably heard about prayer all your life. You have heard long eloquent prayers said in church and have heard great prayers from famous people like Martin Luther King Jr. Also, you may have watched it on television & in movies in tasteful and not so tasteful ways. (Monty Python’s *The Holy Grail* or *Talladega Nights*’ baby Jesus prayer -- don’t get me wrong; I love both of those movies.) My point is that we know some things about prayer, but how much do we really know? Well, we know the Lord’s Prayer and can probably recite the King James Version that Jesus gave his disciples to pray. It is a wonderful, God-given gift of a prayer! Yet, when it comes down to it, prayer can be a challenging endeavor. I thought I knew how to pray until I took a masters level class taught by Tony Twist on the theology of prayer. In it we had to sit silently for hours on end, just loving and being loved by God...and I said to myself, “Wow, what have I been doing all this time?” Prayers in the car on the way to work are good...but real heartfelt prayers on your knees or sitting silently in prayer just listening to God, redefines the word “Awesome”! One of my favorite verses simply says: *“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 146:10)*. Mother Teresa was once asked in a famous television interview what she said to God and she said, *“I don’t say anything. I listen.”* The interviewer then asked what God said to her

when she prayed, and she said *“He doesn’t talk. He simply listens”* (Harrington, “Listening to God”). She is someone who can feel ultimate peace communicating with our creator! That brings me to the topic of fasting.

A few years ago, I took a class on Discipleship by David Roadcup at TCM and we were discussing spiritual disciplines. We read Richard Foster’s book *Celebration of Discipline*; it is a timeless classic. Being the overzealous student that I am, I decided to write on the topic I knew the least about, fasting. I hadn’t practiced it, nor did I know much, if anything, about it. I had not heard any sermons on it and it didn’t seem to be an important discipline in the church. I figured it was an old school sort of thing.

As I contemplated more about fasting, I assumed it was just for biblical superheroes. I knew that Jesus fasted for 40 days and I recalled that Moses had fasted, and Elijah had as well, but that was the extent of my knowledge. When I started searching through Scripture, I was amazed and soon became fascinated by this wonderful, almost forgotten discipline! I soon realized that fasting was practiced throughout the Old Testament and even the New testament. There was a long list of reasons I found why fasting is so important and why we are instructed by God to do it. And for those who want to geek out, in the appendix of this study guide there is a chapter dedicated to all of those reasons. I also encourage you to open your Bible and discover the reasons for yourself! Here is the summation of the entire study guide on the topic of fasting: *Fasting is not an “if” question, but a “when” statement.* To clarify, it was a given that the disciples would fast. Jesus didn’t give his disciples an opt-out clause about fasting and prayer. They go along together, which brings to light the question *why*. That is what this study guide is intended to do; to illuminate the *why*. Within the rest of this guide are embedded nuggets for personal growth, disciple making and practical tools. We hope you enjoy this guide to propel you into a sweet and intimate time with God.

Let’s be reminded first and foremost that Jesus, our master teacher, had a lot to say about fasting:

- | Fasting was an integral part of his ministry, closely linked with prayer for decision making.
- | Jesus emerged from fasting with renewed power and purpose.
- | It was never an “if” question, but a “when” statement.

Now, for the *what*. What is fasting, you ask? Well, the basic *biblical definition* is going without food for an extended period of time for a specific reason. It is intentional. It is purposeful and there is an end in mind. In the Bible we see time periods ranging from a day to 3 days to a few weeks and finally up to 40 days. For reasons discussed in the medical section (appendix 3), going without water is not recommended as the body cannot survive more than 3 days without it. On the other hand, the body can survive quite well for a long period of time without food. Our bodies are actually quite efficient at burning stored fat for fuel. In fact, let me just point out that a 155lb person has enough fat to last about—you guessed it, 40 days, without going into starvation mode. Are you telling me that the God of creation may know something we don't? This is referred to as a normal or a full fast. No food—period. Then there is a partial fast. Daniel gave us a perfect example of this where he and his companions ate only vegetables and drank water for 10 days in Daniel, chapter 1. They came out looking stronger than their counterparts! Later on, Daniel noted, "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips" (Dan. 10:2). So, a partial fast can be what you make it.

Other types of fasts would be fasting from something important to you other than food. This is for those with medical reasons who cannot participate in a normal fast. Intermittent fasting is skipping meals, like breakfast each day or breakfast plus lunch. In today's culture, it is interesting that a lot of people recently have started doing this for weight loss. The problem is that they miss out on the most important benefit of fasting—time spent listening to the Holy Spirit to reflect on God's purposes, time in God's Word, and time in prayer with the God of the universe!

TYPES OF FASTING

The traditional or biblical definition is fasting from food/drink. The following are types of fasts we can participate in:

| *Normal Fast:* All food discontinued except water. (Drink plenty of it!)

| *Partial Fast:* Certain specific foods withheld. Example: the "Daniel Fast." Daniel 10:3 says, "I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use an ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed."

Modified Normal Fast: For longer than 3 days, some people allow juices, broth, black coffee or tea to help with energy while at work but otherwise avoid everything else.

Absolute or Complete Fast: All food, liquids, and water discontinued for a time. Acts 9:9 and Esther 4:16 (*maximum 3 days—see appendix)

Other types of Fasting: Fasting from things such as social media (but traditionally the Bible speaks of food and water.)

Now that we have talked about the basics of *what*, we can explore the question *when?* This is, of course, between you and God. The place to start is with your motives. In the book of Acts, we see that the Pharisees fasted twice a week, but they did it for show. It was “legalistic.” Jesus rebuked them and taught his disciples otherwise. He gave them these instructions:

“When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don’t make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity, but it won’t make you a saint. If you ‘go into training’ inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn’t require attention-getting devices. He won’t overlook what you are doing; he’ll reward you well” (Matt. 6:16-18 MSG).

Please keep in mind the main reason why you are choosing to fast. It is not to show others how religious you are. It is not to gain favor with God. We are saved by grace through faith. It is not from ourselves but a gift from God! It is not by works, so we cannot boast (Eph. 2:8-9 NIV). So fasting is not to lose weight and fit into those clothes you want to wear. It is not to get something or even win favor from God. It is simply obedience-based discipleship at its best, to position yourself before the living God in an intimate way to know him and his will better. If prayers are answered, then halleluiah and praise God! I can guarantee you this: If you learn to fast and pray for the right reasons, just wait and God will do some amazing things in your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ! He will bless you on a deeper level than you can imagine or comprehend.

DURATION OF FASTS

The traditional or biblical definition is fasting from food/drink. The following are types of fasts we can participate in:

- | *Partial Meal Fasts*: skipping a meal or two (for example, sunrise to sunset).
- | *24 Hour Fast*: A full 24-hour period (skipping breakfast, lunch, and dinner).
- | *3 Day Fast*: Paul and Esther are examples, going into deeper reliance on God.
 - | *Recommend only water
- | *Longer Fasts*: 10 days, 21 days, 40 days (Daniel, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah).

Practically, we begin with a time period in mind. Often, we are led by God for a specific duration due to a burden on our heart. It could be a day, or it could be 40 days or anywhere in between. Once this has been decided, the next step is to mentally, emotionally, and spiritually prepare to commit our heart and mind to this time period no matter what.

By word of caution, do not to bite off too big of a chunk of time if you have not successfully fasted before. I cannot just decide one day to run a marathon if I have never run before; there must be training involved. I have to work my way up to the event. I have to see what works and what doesn't work for me. Perhaps I start with a 5K and then progress by adding milage each week. Fasting is a lifelong adventure, so pace yourself. We suggest if you haven't ever participated in a fast, consider skipping 1 meal. Once you see that you have survived, go for 2 meals; then try a 24-hour period. You'll find it may be hard at first, but trust me, it gets easier as you stop thinking so much about food and learn to lean into God. That is the purpose, after all! Once you have mastered a full day, consider doing 3 days! It just goes on from there. Physically, the hardest periods are the first few days and then the hunger starts to dissipate as the body adapts, but this may take 4 or 5 days for prolonged fasts.

So far, I have been discussing going without food entirely. The other option is to do intermittent fasts each and every day for a prolonged period of time. For example, skip one or two meals each day for 3 weeks or longer. If you are doing a group fast with friends, a home group or your church, there may be a set time period for the fast. Again, commit to that time period and have accountability. Group fasting can be wonderful because you are doing it together, united for one purpose and goal. There are plenty of examples in the Bible, such as when Queen Esther called her people to fast and pray for 3 days to save the Jewish people. God heard those prayers big time! It is perfectly okay for us to encourage other believers when fasting. This is quite different than bragging to my co-workers or neighbors about my religious fast. Can you see the difference?

GROUP FASTING IS POWERFUL

“The group fast can be a wonderful and powerful experience provided there is a prepared people who are of one mind in these matters. Serious problems in churches or other groups can be dealt with and relationships healed through unified group prayer and fasting.”

Richard Foster – Celebration of Discipline

*For the practical know-how, please see **Appendix 2**, which gives you the basics, practical advice, temptations, and a summary of conclusions on what to expect and how to do it.

Here are five fasts to which people will be committing for 21 days during this study (check one box):

The Normal Fast

- Abstain from all food but drinking water

The Partial Fast – abstain from specific food/meals

- Skip two meals per day (sunrise to sunset)
- Skip one meal per day
- Eat only vegetables and drink water (Daniel fast – Dan. 1:12)
- Avoid any snacking or indulgences

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR GROUP FAST USING THIS STUDY GUIDE:

Week 0: Preface & Introduction

Week 1: Chapter 1 – Prepare mentally for fast

Week 2: Chapter 2 – Begin 21 day fast

Week 3: Chapter 3

Week 4: Chapter 4

Week 5: Chapter 5 – Celebration & break fast

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTAL READING:

David Roadcup and Michael Eagle, *Prayer and Fasting: Moving with the Spirit to Renew Our Minds, Bodies, and Churches* (this guide you are reading is designed to complement this book).

Dave Clayton, *Revival Start Here: A Short Conversation on Prayer, Fasting, and Revival for Beginners Like Me.*

CHAPTER 1:

THE GOLDEN CALF: FOOD IDOLATRY VS LIVING WATER - REFRESHING THE SOUL BY FASTING

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (Ex. 32:1-4 NIV).

The Israelites were known as stiff-necked people, but so are we. Think about it. If you are living in the United States and reading this book, you are probably living in a house or an apartment. You most likely have central air-conditioning or heating and running water. You may even be reading this on a device like an iPad® or Kindle®. My point is that you are living in plenty. You have everything you need and most of what you want. The problem with this is that wealth can create idols.

Often idolatry is ingrained into our psyche from an early age. As a child, I was taught that I needed a minimum of three-square meals a day and that breakfast was the most important. I grew up eating in a fast-food society. There were McDonalds French fries, takeout Chinese, neighborhood pizza and Carvel® Ice Cream. If we were not eating out, then there was the quick microwavable Swanson’s® TV dinner to eat while watching TV shows. For in-between snacks, the grocery stores were packed with all sorts of my favorite chips: Doritos®, Fritos®, nacho chips, and pretzels, to name a few. There were all my favorite cereal selections such as Captain Crunch®, Sugar Pops®, Cocoa Puffs®, and the “healthy stuff” like Raisin Bran® and Cheerios®. There was gallon-sized ice cream in any flavor...I think you get my point. It was ingrained in me from an early age to constantly feed my cravings.

Well, unfortunately this pattern continued into my adult life and then some. Without knowing it, I had formed a metaphorical golden calf idol out of food. When I was feeling hungry, I ate. When I was feeling sad, I ate. When I was feeling lonely, I ate. When I was happy, I ate. I craved the serotonin neurotransmitter release from my brain saying, "Pleasure! Give me more!" The fundamental thing I was missing out on was the one thing that would fill all those holes perfectly: Jesus. There is a great book on food idolatry by Lysa TerKeurst titled *Made to Crave*, where she drives home the point that we all are ultimately made to crave our Creator!

1 John 2:15-16 states, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world."

TerKeurst brilliantly concludes that "the cravings of the sinful man are misplaced physical desires - issues with our food or sex outside of marriage. In other words, trying to get our physical needs met outside the will of God. The lust of the eyes is being enamored by material things. The New Living Translation actually equates the lust of the eyes as "a craving for everything we see." And lastly, the boasting of what one has or does describes the actions of someone chasing what she (or he) thinks will make her (or him) feel significant" (TerKeurst, 2010, p. 21). When we break this down, we soon realize that we humans are prone to make our own golden calves and then rely on them for our sustenance rather than the Word of God and a personal, intimate relationship with him.

When Jesus traveled to Samaria, he visited Jacob's well and there he met a woman who was drawing out water. He asked her for a drink, and she replied in a puzzled & questioning way. This was because she was a Samaritan woman and Jews did not associate with them. Jesus answered her, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water" (Jn. 4:10, Tyndale). Jesus gave us great metaphorical illustrations that speak to our hearts. Do you ever think of him as your living water or your bread of life or as your great shepherd? If not, I challenge you to rethink his great "I Am" statements found in the book of John.

Water is important for many things, but especially to sustain life. There is a difference between tainted water with impurities and fresh clean pure water. It is often obvious. The lake house I lived at in college had a shallow well that had no filter system in place. The water smelt of Sulphur and came out of the faucet with an orange tint of iron. I certainly did not drink it, but

it could only be used for washing. This reminds me of what the world often gives us in contrast with what Christ offers us. Our broken world is contaminated by sin, but Jesus offers us something pure and eternal. When we fast, we begin to eliminate our reliance on the impurities of the world. It cleanses not only the body but the soul. It allows the Spirit of God to settle in and begin the cleansing process.

Whenever I fast from food and drink by only taking in water, I try to focus on my fast and purpose to connect to Jesus – the one who offers us living water. Every time I take a sip during the day, the connection is easily made. Jesus goes on in the story to say, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” In the book of Revelation, the one seated on the throne said: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Rev. 21:6 NIV).

Think of fasting as a purifying process. If we don’t work on purifying our minds, our bodies and our Spirits, we are left in conflict. Jesus said that we can’t serve two masters. He may have been talking of money (another idol) but I would challenge you to think of other idols such as food or anything else that has taken hold of your heart. Surrender it in humility during this time of fasting by submitting your will before the throne of God. James asked if both fresh water and salt water could flow from the same spring (Jm. 3:11). I’ll let you chew on that question as we end this chapter.

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*
- (Ps. 139:23 NIV)

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read *Exodus 32:1-4*. How and why did the Israelites disobey God?

2. Let's say you were talking to a young child about "*wants*" and "*needs*." How would you explain the ways in which they are different? When have you confused a want for a need?

3. Which foods are difficult for you to imagine going without?

4. Of the fast options discussed, which option do you think would likely be best for you as you think of making a commitment to the 21-day fast?

5. What are some examples of how God has become your *“living water”*?

6. What are some contaminants that you hope to eliminate through fasting and prayer?

7. Read *James 3:9-12*. How is it relevant to this discussion about fasting?

8. Read this prayer out loud and in unison: *“Lord, we pray that we would be purified while we pray and fast together. Amen.”* How will we commit to pray this for each member of our group?

CHAPTER 2:

ELECTRICITY: LEARNING TO PLUG INTO THE POWER SOURCE - THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAYER & FASTING

I really enjoy a good, robust cup of coffee in the morning. It is a great way to get my day started. I love the smell, the aroma, and the warmth of the mug as well as the taste. It awakens my brain and gets the synapses firing. I begin to think and contemplate, and the creative process gets going. I get excited about my day. Music becomes more intense and on my morning walks I notice the birds, the flowers, the sky and the sunrise.

Let's say I want to add the spiritual discipline of solitude to my life. I plan a nice retreat to a cabin in the mountains for a couple of days. I pack my stuff: a hammock, a comfortable jacket, my Bible, a good book, my favorite mug, my favorite coffee pods, and finally, my portable Keurig machine to make that perfect cup when I get there. I drive to the cabin after a long day at work. I lay down to sleep and in the morning I wake up as the sun rises. Then I unpack my Keurig and my favorite bold roast Keurig pod, pour in my distilled water and then realize something is not right. There is no electrical outlet! The cabin is a bare bones cabin with no plugs, and I am left in the middle of nowhere without my coffee.

As tragic as this situation sounds, I am sure I could get by. I would not be quite as alert or in tune with nature and I may even feel a little bit apathetic. If you are a coffee or tea drinker, you probably understand where I am coming from. In a similar way, sometimes when we pray, we can feel a dullness. It can be like going through the motions, not quite alive. It can seem like we are just checking the boxes, like our prayers lack flavor or pizzazz. I am sure I am not the only one who has experienced this. You may have guessed where I am headed. Billy Graham made an interesting observation that connects with this thought. He was quoted as saying:

“Science takes a Niagara River with its violent turbulence and transforms it into electrical energy to illuminate a million homes and to turn the productive wheels of industry. [God] does in the spiritual realm what science does in the physical realm” (Graham).

We are wired like the Keurig coffee maker. We need a power source to reach our full potential. All the ingredients can be there for the perfect cup of Joe but without plugging the appliance in, you will not receive the product. When we plug into that source, the Holy Spirit, through fasting and prayer combined, a spark happens. Our prayer life reaches new levels. We fill our mug with delicious, full-bodied bold roast!

Behind my home is a series of back country trails that go for several miles. At one part of the trail, it ascends a fairly steep hill. When you get to the top, there is a spectacular overlook with a great view of the countryside. I love that spot, but it takes work to get there. As I have aged and put on a few more pounds than I would have liked, I realized a simple physiological phenomenon in play. It's one that I often educate my orthopedic patients on. Physics tells us that for every pound of body weight we carry, our knee joints take 4 times the force with each step on those inclines or declines. This means that if I am just 10 lbs. overweight, it is like carrying a 40 lb. backpack every time I walk up that hill. It was a painful reality for me when I experienced this. So when I decided to work at shedding a few pounds, I began to notice a new freedom. I could get up that hill with a lot more ease and it became more enjoyable when I reached the summit.

Fasting is much like shedding those extra pounds, in a sense. When we shed the indulgences of life, we have more bandwidth to focus on the things of God because we have relinquished the added load of worldly wants and desires. It positions us to begin to climb in the realm of prayer with more power and purpose. Fasting is actually a symbiotic relationship with prayer. They are meant to go together. This is not always the case of course, but when they are combined, they work in unison beautifully. Jesus' instructions on fasting were "when you fast." Notice it was not an "if" statement but a "when". This is an important distinction.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matt. 6:16-18 NIV).

Of course, Jesus also tells us the heart behind fasting. We are fasting before the Father in obedience and taking all kinds of prayers and requests before the throne.

Just as Graham pointed out, that electrical force (generated by the ever-flowing, living water through the power of the Holy Spirit) brings prayer to life and illuminates our souls. Remember this as well: We are called to be light to a dark and sinful world and that light only gets its power directly from the source. We can use that light to shine into this dark world in many ways, especially fulfilling our mission to make disciples of Jesus.

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16 MSG).

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. As you have been praying about fasting, what is God showing you about your plan for the church-wide/group fast? What commitment are you making and why?

2. What are your concerns or reservations with fasting over a prolonged period?

3. What is the burden on your heart that you are lifting up during your time of fasting?

4. Describe a time in your life when you felt connected to God’s power source. How was it different from doing things on your own?

5. Mike described the difference it made to lighten his load as he went up the hill. How does prayer lighten your spiritual load? When have you experienced this in fasting?

6. Using 3 different translations (NIV, NLT, ESV, etc.), read Matthew 5:14-16. What does it mean to be the ‘light’ to the world? Specifically, what does this look like in your everyday life?

CHAPTER 3:

PRAYING WITH A MEGAPHONE: ADDING FASTING TO PRAYER - LEARNING TO TALK AGAIN THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER

Toward the end of my father's life, he suffered a stroke and became aphasic, meaning he could no longer speak. Since he could not communicate, it was very difficult to know what he was thinking or what he needed. He would look at us often with a frustrated look on his face as if he knew what he wanted to say but he just could not get the words out. This became his new reality for several years. He got by and could function in other ways, getting around in his wheelchair, but he had lost the ability to talk. I recall one day when my wife, Michelle, was pregnant with our first child, Courtney, we went to visit him. It was obvious that Michelle was carrying a baby as she was 7-months pregnant. While we were visiting and I was talking to my dad, I said to him, "Guess what, Dad? You are going to be a grand dad!" and I pointed to Michelle's belly. He sat up in bed with an astonished look on his face and said the clearest words I ever heard. He said, "I didn't know. I didn't know!" He had a proud look in his eyes, and it was a sweet moment. We were all astonished.

Sometimes we forget how to talk to God. We become aphasic. We go through life and get distracted by busyness. We work and we play, and God gets put on the back burner. We may say customary prayers to bless our food at dinner or we may pray at church, but we get in a routine that puts prayer as something we just do. Like an athlete who does not train, we become deconditioned and forget the feeling of being in really good shape. We make excuses not to exercise our prayer time. Sleep or distractions like TV eat our time. Sometimes, without even realizing it, life creeps in and we have lost our way much like the Israelites lost their way in the desert. We are distracted by idols and forget that we have direct access to the Creator of the universe. There comes a time in which we must repent and turn back and gaze into the face of God through prayer.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he calls for prayer and fasting in repentance. He writes, "*As soon as a Christian recognizes that he has failed in his service, that his readiness has become feeble, and that he has sinned against another's life and become guilty of another's guilt, that all his joy in God has vanished and that his capacity for prayer has quite gone, it is high time for him to launch an assault upon the flesh, and prepare for better service by fasting and prayer*" (Bonhoeffer).

There comes a time that we need a splash of water on the face and need to press Alt-Control-Delete and reboot our prayer life. Well, fasting does this for us. It reboots our internal hard drive (our head, our heart) to be receptive to prayer once again. Periodically we need an awakening of the Holy Spirit. I believe we are filled by the Holy Spirit when we repent, confess that Jesus is Lord and are baptized (Acts 2), yet there are many "fillings" of the Holy Spirit in our lifetimes. When we feel stale and in need of a fresh reboot, I know of no other spiritual discipline better than fasting.

My friend, Chad Harrington, recently taught a class on Spiritual Formation in our church. He used a visual picture of a sky filled with water that had spouts running down occasionally, filled with the Holy Spirit's presence. Our job is to go over to the spouts and fill our hearts regularly. It is always available to us, but we have to make the move to fill up. The spiritual disciplines, especially prayer and fasting, are the most effective ways to do this.

Jesus modeled this for us. Before he started his public ministry, he fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. It is there that he endured temptation from the devil, and he relied on the Word of God for his food. He combated the devil in the spiritual realm with the eternal Word. Before he chose his 12 disciples, he went up to a lonely mountain to pray all night. Jesus often retreated to plug into that power source we talked about in the last chapter.

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Lk. 16 NIV) I can only imagine that when Jesus retreated this way, he was in intimate connection with his Father. *He prayed with a megaphone.* His prayers ascended to heaven with power. He then would return with a renewed sense of purpose and the spiritual power to do his mission work by healing and spreading the good news of the kingdom of God which had come near. He disciplined those he chose to follow his lead.

Jesus gave us a great guide when his disciples asked him to teach them to pray. He said,

*“Pray like this:
Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don’t let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one”
(Matt. 6:9-13 NLT).*

If we start our fast and prayer days with this prayer, it puts everything we need in perspective. We submit to God as Lord and acknowledge that Jesus will return to usher in the kingdom. We submit to his will and not our own. We learn to show gratitude and thanksgiving for our daily needs. The prayer gets to the heart of loving others and then finally we learn to rely on his power to protect us. It is a fantastic and beautiful prayer that is taken to a new level when we add fasting for perspective. Trust me on this. This prayer will take on new meaning. Sit in it and allow it to change your prayer life through fasting.

Often when we fast and pray, we do so to take our deep, heartfelt concerns before God. We remember his fatherly love and that he wants the best for his children. David took his honest, heartfelt prayers before God in the Psalms and we should do likewise. After all, Jesus said in regard to our desire to have more of the Holy Spirit: *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:11 NIV)*

The Holy Spirit can then work in our lives to give us the peace of God which transcends all understanding, and which guards our hearts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7) We are given clarity and understanding. "When we take our heart to God by fasting and prayer, we can speak loudly and boldly." C. S. Lewis. When we experience pain in life and we all go through pain, I know of no other way to navigate life than by fasting and prayer. C.S. Lewis says "But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his *megaphone* to rouse a deaf world" (Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, emphasis added). Let us be a people who turn our megaphone towards our Father who loves us!

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. Did you come into this year's fast with a lot of fasting experience or is this a new spiritual discipline? If this is new for you, what were your concerns before you began?

2. How has your fast gone this week? What have you noticed as easy and what has been more difficult? Is this different from what you expected?

3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being non-existent and 10 being completely in tune with God 24/7), what was your prayer life before this fast? How has it changed?

4. If applicable, describe a time in your life when your prayers were vibrant. How did that make you feel towards spending more time in prayer?

5. Chad Harrington used the analogy of a sky filled with water that had spouts running down as an example of the Holy Spirit's presence. Does this resonate with you? Do you have your own analogy for being filled with the Holy Spirit? What is it?

6. The Lord's Prayer is often prayed by individuals and congregations. Do you use it regularly in your prayer life? If applicable, explain how specific elements of the prayer have stood out to you at different times in your life. What stands out to you today?

7. As a group, close with the Lord's Prayer.

CHAPTER 4:

PURPOSE FOR POWER: SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION - THE NEEDED KICK TO FUEL DISCIPLE MAKING

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18 NIV).

Who doesn’t want to be free? The good news is that we have this freedom in Christ, and we can claim it with confidence. Yet, freedom often comes with a price. Christ paid the price for us and as his disciples, it is time to act in obedience, motivated by love. Dallas Willard said, “Spiritual transformation into Christ-likeness is not going to happen unless we act.... What transforms us is the will to obey Jesus Christ.”(Willard, 2006)

When Moses met with The Lord on Mt. Sinai, he came back with his face glowing. He had to put a veil over it as it was so radiant. (Ex. 34) Something happens to us when we enter into the presence of God through prayer and fasting. We are actually being transformed. We are undergoing a metamorphosis. Scripture tells us that when we become Christians, we are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). In our lifelong journey of sanctification, we are constantly being made into the image of Christ. Our lives should reflect that. Have you ever known a true Christ follower whom you admire and respect? Have you asked yourself why you respect that person of faith? I bet it is because Jesus is reflected in their lives. They are like a projection of Christ. They are spiritual fruit producers with things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23 NIV). Who does not desire these in their life? I have not met a Christ follower or seeker who does not genuinely want these fruits in their life. This in turn naturally flows to others. If you desire this as well, then focus your attention on fasting and prayer.

Here is a word of caution: When you start to regularly fast, your heart's motivations and true self start to come out. Sometimes it is good, sometimes bad, and it can even be just plain ugly. There have been times when I have been fasting but have gotten distracted by life or work and gotten quite irritable with the people around me. I lost my Christ-centered purpose. When I realized what I was doing (because the Holy Spirit always seems to remind me), I humbled myself, repented, and asked for forgiveness. I believe fasting shows us chinks in our armor and reveals places in our lives where we need to surrender and be transformed. I have to ask myself, *Am I reflecting Jesus? Am I doing his will? Am I living in his power?* If I am not, then it is time to refocus, offer necessary amends and get back to the task at hand which is prayer and listening to the voice of God. God has done a couple of important things in those moments. He has humbled me and changed my heart. In the same moment, he has reminded me of my identity which is rooted in him and that I am called to Love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and that I am to love my neighbor as myself (Lk. 10:27). Once this settles in, the veil begins to lift! My prayer life becomes more real and thus more effective and I become thankful once again.

The year 2020 will go down in history as a rough year. There has been fear, anger, uncertainty, and anxiety. God tells us in his Word not to be anxious about anything, but in everything, we are to petition and pray with thanksgiving. Guess what happens when we do this? We are given great peace which transcends human understanding. It guards our hearts and our minds, and is rooted in our Lord Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-8 NIV). When we fast, this peace comes into our lives if we surrender to God's power. Trust God and enter his peace!

Getting back to Dallas Willard's point: "Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness is not going to happen unless we act." The spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting (among others) are given to position us for success. It is much like the child who has a school project due and has no idea how to proceed. After some time, that child goes to their parent and asks for help. The parent then gladly accepts the challenge and with the vast life experience and knowledge that the parent has along with their resources, they lay out a plan to help their child succeed. They are motivated out of love for their child. The parent and child spend valuable time together and produce a stellar project that they both can be proud of. It is the same with our heavenly Father. He loves us and wants the best for us. He wants to help us, especially when we align our will with his.

This is what God's word says about effective prayer: "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So, if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him (Matt. 6:7-11 NLT). When we just do it and act, we start to see the hand of God work in areas of our life like we've never seen before.

Now if we start getting the idea that if we position ourselves in this way, and God's ear is toward us, the question becomes what is our motivation and purpose behind it all? Well, this can take different shapes and forms. In the Bible, we see many reasons why people fasted and prayed. We see it practiced when God's help was needed, or to avert his wrath, when asking for protection, requesting deliverance, seeking his will, asking for power to drive out demons, during times of distress and when seeking his blessings. We also see that fasting and prayer were used when appointing elders/leaders and when the disciples were chosen. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave us the great commission in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations. He said not only to baptize them but to teach them to obey all that he commanded. He said he would always be with us and give us his Holy Spirit to help us. This is the mission of church! We are to be disciples who make disciples who, in turn, go and make more disciples, spreading the good news of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Here is the kicker. We cannot do it on our own power. We will fail and be ineffective. We will be spinning our wheels. Jesus himself went off alone to pray all night to choose his disciples. We should do the same. We can ask God how we can partner with him and be used to bring him and the Lord Jesus great honor and glory. When we tap into the Spirit through prayer and fasting, we are given clarity. We are given courage. We are given resolve.

I have always liked the prayer of Jabez found in the Bible and the insight by Wilkerson in his book on this prayer (Wilkinson & Kopp, 2000). "There was a man named Jabez who was more honorable than any of his brothers... He was the one who prayed to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and expand my territory! Please be with me in all that I do and keep me from all trouble and pain!' And God granted him his request" (1 Chron. 9-10 NIV). We do not

read anything else about Jabez in the Bible. All we know is that God granted his request. We can pray that God would bring us disciples (expand our territory), and that he would bless our efforts. I know that when we are earnest, he will grant our requests. He has in mind the perfect person(s) for you to invest in and do life with while making much of Jesus together. If you are contemplating on praying this prayer, just do it! I double dog dare you!

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. How has your fast been going so far? What are your successes? Your greatest challenge?

2. Read *2 Corinthians 3:17-18*. What do you think having complete freedom in Christ would look like in your life?

3. What is God revealing to you about your spiritual transformation during this time of prayer and fasting?

4. Is there a time when God gave you more than you ever deserved? How has that shaped your faithfulness?

5. What things are you focused on praying for during this time of prayer and fasting?

6. Jabez prayed for his territory to be expanded. Is that a prayer you want to pray? What would need to change in your life in order for that to happen?

CHAPTER 5:

DIVING IN THE DEEP END: INTERCESSORY PRAYERS - REAPING THE HARVEST, DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION

In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster makes the important case for intercessory prayer. He states: "We must never wait until we feel like praying before we pray for others. Prayer is like any other work; we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working. In the same way, our prayer muscles need to be limbered up a bit and once the flood-flow of intercession begins, we will find that we feel like praying." (Foster, 1998, p. 39-40) As we think of our brothers and sisters, we need to take the intentional first move to bring their case before our Father. We are their ambassadors and advocates as well as their friends. We do this for each other as part of a royal priesthood of believers. We have been given authority to pray for our friends and loved ones with all kinds of requests.

Often when I fast, something happens I cannot explain fully, but I am going to try. When I fast, I first feel hungry or empty and then start filling myself with the things of God. This often includes just listening. I like to take walks with my dog. I take in God's creation around me and then I simply put up my antenna and wait. That's when it begins to happen. It is not a loud voice, but more of a whisper. The thoughts begin to flow. I know they are thoughts from the Holy Spirit as most of the thoughts are intercessory requests. These are thoughts about others that I need to pray for. I am reminded to pray for this person or that person or for a particular situation. I am often prompted to reach out to someone, and I try to be obedient in doing so. Fasting is different for everyone but all I know is that when I align myself with the will of God, usually starting with the Lord's prayer or the ACTS prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), things start to come alive in new ways.

When I am depressed, I ask God to help and the fog begins to lift! After Paul tells us about how to put on the armor of God in the book of Ephesians, he reminds us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Eph. 6:18 NIV). Let us suit up and go to battle for our friends and our church leaders!

There is a great hope that we have as Christ followers. We have a unique perspective and an eternal hope. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...(and) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"(Rom. 15:5,13). If you are *moved by the Holy Spirit for revival*, I like the way our Renew brother/pastor Dave Clayton puts it. He says:

"As followers of Jesus, we don't live under the cloud of uncertainty that plagues so many within our culture. The Bible is clear that the story of human history is working its way toward a beautiful and triumphant climax at the return of Jesus –a time in which men and women from every nation will gather to feast with God face-to-face in the new Heaven and the new Earth. It will be a time when the grace and power of King Jesus will eradicate all pain, suffering, sickness, and sin. I believe it is time for the people of God to begin living with a clear vision of the way our glorious story will end" (Clayton, p. 17).

Let us continually pray for a revival. It is a wonderful thing to have this hope, but the question then becomes, *What do we do with it?* This, of course, takes intentionality and practice. We need to have a plan and a routine.

I remember when my daughter, Courtney, was young, we enrolled her in swimming lessons at the local pool. For graduation, my little girl had to climb up the ladder to the top high dive platform and then jump off into the deep end. It took tremendous courage and faith, but she did it! I was so proud of her. In the same way, we need to take a leap of faith and dive into the deep end of prayer for our loved ones. We are not called as disciples of Jesus to stay in the shallow end where it is safe and easy. We are called to go deep, and this can only come through sacrificial surrender and fasting.

We are also called as disciples. Think back to our purpose from Matthew 28 of all the people that may not know Jesus as their Lord, or perhaps are on the fringe. Have you thought of how God wants to specifically use you to reach them? Do you have neighbors or co-workers or friends in this situation? I believe we all do. We ourselves were once lost and in darkness and then we were rescued and redeemed. A lifeline was given to us and we were ushered into the kingdom of light.

When Jesus sent out the 72 disciples, he said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2 NIV). We are called to be workers and to partner with the Lord in his work. How can we know what to do and where to go and what to say? It can be intimidating. Yet, God says he will give us the words to say and the task to do if we are simply obedient and remain in him. Some of us live in plenty. Some of us live in want, yet we are called to be content in all circumstances and certainly, we can do all things through his strength (Phil 4:13)! It comes by first going to him in prayer and relying on his strength and not our own power. I know of no better way to be so dependent on God than by fasting.

When we follow the teachings and model of Jesus, when we learn to lean into his method, when we begin to rely on his strength and to make disciples, it is important to show those disciples the same things which we have learned.

I am going to brag on my wife, Michelle. She is by far the best “disciple-r” I know. We have both learned what works and what doesn’t work so well over the years and we are still learning. Yet, what I do know is that she has a heart of gold because of her intimate relationship with Christ. And she certainly does not just hold onto what she has learned. She gives it away freely to as many people who are seeking. As disciples, we often seek others who God shows us to be faithful, available, reliable, and teachable. Some people call this *being a person of peace*. I will give just one example of this to help illustrate.

Maggie is a woman that my wife has had a friendship with for years now. I recall Maggie being unsure of herself praying out loud for others, despite her love for Jesus and her tremendous God-given gift of encouragement. Well, my wife was blessed to be asked by Maggie to disciple her in prayer and fasting. There was an intentional process and a time for experience and courage to grow. All I know is that 10 years later, it is like Michelle helped create a prayer warrior of the highest degree. Maggie is a prayer champion and would hold a black belt in prayer, if it were a thing. She invests and disciples many women herself and prays over numerous people, including teachers at the school where she works. She is known for this, in fact. This all started with one woman discipling another in the value of fasting and prayer and God is using this to produce fruit for his Kingdom! He desires this for all of us. We need to pay it forward and pass the baton to others. They need to have coaches in their corner to teach and encourage them in this spiritual discipline. This is our calling, to be disciples who make disciples and teach them to obey all that Christ commanded!

In the Bible, we see a beautiful balance. Not only are there times of fasting, but there are times of feasting! As discussed earlier, the Jewish people had a long tradition of regular fasting and fasted during specific times of need, but they also often celebrated to end a fast and to remember God's promises. For example, they feasted at the Passover meal, then after this came the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the third day after Passover is the celebration Feast of First Fruits. The Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) comes 7 weeks after that. There is also the Feast of the Trumpets and finally, after the Day of Atonement, there is the Feast of Tabernacles. That is a lot of celebrating! One day, Christ will return and usher in the greatest celebration ever for those that trust and follow him! "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9 NLT).

This now brings us to a time of reflection and celebration as we end our 21 day fast. Through every time of fasting, God has surely done something in our lives and in the lives of those around us. He has walked with us through our time of trial. He may have revealed something personal to us. He may have begun a seriously needed overhaul of our heart. There may have been a breakthrough, a healing, a deliverance or perhaps a modern-day miracle. This time may have been a time to grow deeper in our faith and reliance on him which is an awesome thing itself!

When I was asked to consider being an elder at Harpeth Christian Church, I was not sure if I was the right man for the job. I had questions and soul searching to do. I spent a lot of time in prayer and wise counsel and, after a year, I knew that I was called to take on this role. I was honored and humbled to do so. One week before I was to go before the church and elders on my knees to be appointed into this role and have hands in prayer laid upon me, I felt led to fast. When those 7 days were up and the time came, I knew with certainty that God would bless me and provide all that I needed to serve him and our flock through his strength. I felt that overwhelming sense of peace, joy and purpose, as I was ordained and appointed as an elder. After the service, there was a great celebration that the other elders and their wives put together. We celebrated and feasted together! That day will always be a special day to me. For me, there was no walking on water moment, but there was a supreme clarity of purpose! That is what I sought from God. He answered that question and I knew he had big plans ahead for me.

I do not know exactly what it is that you will celebrate at the end of your time of fasting and prayer, but I can promise you one thing: If you really and truly put your heart and soul into it, you will grow close to God and he will be pleased with you. I believe he will bless you in ways you did not anticipate and the church body will be blessed because of it.

There is one more thing: After this time of celebration, we would like to encourage you to consider adding a weekly time of fasting and prayer this year! After all, you have survived and developed a great spiritual habit. Now, keep it up! One day we will all hopefully all look forward to hearing our Lord and master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

HOME GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. What did God show you during this fast?

2. What does celebration look like to you after this time of fasting?

3. What has been your take-away from your time of fasting?

4. How can you celebrate in prayer?

5. Where and when do you feel God's presence the most? Does that change whether you are praying a lament or a celebration?

6. What do you think your next step is in your transformation into a disciple maker?

7. Read Luke 10:2. What is *your* responsibility in the harvest? How can you work together with God in this endeavor?

APPENDIX 1

SEVENTEEN REASONS TO FAST FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO DIG DEEP

1. Against spiritual warfare: *2 Corinthians 10:4*
2. Averting God's wrath: *Judges 20:24-28, Jonah 3:6-10*
3. Being obedient to God: *Acts 10:30-32*
4. Calling on God's power & driving out demons: *Mark 9:28-29*
5. Corporate fellowship calling on God's power: *Acts 13:1-2*
6. During times of severe emotional distress: *1 Samuel 1:10-11, 1 Samuel 20:34, Acts 27:21-33, Psalm 35:13-14, Psalm 69:10*
7. Humbling oneself before the Lord: *2 Chronicles 7:14-15*
8. Imitating the faith of those who have gone before us: – *Hebrews 13:7*
9. National Days dedicated to God: *Leviticus 16:29, 1 Samuel 7:5-6*
10. Needing help from God: *2 Samuel 12:15-23*
11. Receiving God's Blessings: *Daniel 6:8, 12, 17; Matthew 5:4, Luke 2:37-38, Hebrews 11:6*
12. Seeking God's deliverance: *Esther 4:16*
13. Seeking God's pardon: *Psalm 35:13, Joel 2:12*
14. Seeking God's protection: *Ezra 8:21*
15. Seeking the Lord's will: *Daniel 9:2-3, 21-22*
16. Setting apart leaders in the church: *Acts 13:1-3, 14:23*
17. Times of Worship: *Luke 2:36-37, Acts 13:2, Acts 14:23*

Who's Who List of Fasting:

Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Paul, Jesus (lawgiver, king, prophet, queen, seer, prophetess, apostle, Son of God) and many more...

APPENDIX 2

TRAIL MIX: NUTS AND BOLTS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

THE “HOW TO” GUIDE TO FASTING

“Although the physical aspects of fasting intrigue us, we must never forget that the major work of Scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit. What goes on spiritually is much more important than what is happening bodily” (Foster).

Through prayer, decide the following:

- | Decide on the purpose (specific reason) of your fast.
- | Decide on the length of your fast.
- | Decide on the type of your fast.
- | Begin by a prayer of confession and repentance, praying that the Lord will be pleased with your sacrifice and desire to draw close to him.
- | Remember, the purpose is to draw close to God, so pray continuously and fervently.
- | Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and leadings.
- | Set aside times of silence and meditate on Scripture.
- | Even for a short fast, you can experience a mild headache.
- | Yet, if you choose a longer fast:
 - Physical symptoms like fatigue, headache, and mild dizziness are normal. In long-term fasting, symptoms can last up to 5 days as the body rids itself of toxins. Hunger usually lasts up to 2-3 days and then disappears.
 - Increased cognition (thinking), improved mood and feeling of well-being can be seen after 3 to 5 days.
 - Stay well hydrated with water! Purified water is better.
- | Remember thanksgiving with the Lord when ending your fast.
- | Break an extended fast by easing back into a light diet – soup, juice, small meals.

TEMPATIONS TO KEEP IN CHECK WHEN FASTING

Distractions – Fasting takes focus and resolve. Don't neglect prayer and the Word.

Motives – This a private time for you and the Lord. Watch your motives!

Endurance and Perseverance – You will be tempted to break your fast early.

Spiritual Warfare – Expect a full assault from the enemy. Put on the Armor of God (Eph. 6). See more here on Attack (David Roadcup and Michael Eagle, n.d., p. 16).

Slipping into Sin – Our sinful hearts will be highlighted. Use this time to continually repent and as an opportunity for heart-level change and refinement.

Apathy – There may be times of apathy or depression. This is okay and a time to lean into God.

The unexpected – business, life's events including people, places and things can interrupt prayer time when fasting. Solution: Be flexible and intentional!

FASTING IN A NUTSHELL

Fasting is a lost discipline not practiced enough today. We are called as disciples to fast and pray!

The discipline of fasting is usually the last thing we want to start but is often where we should begin.

Scripture is clear on fasting – not an “if” but a “when” statement.

Deliverance and decisions should always rely on prayer and fasting.

Humility is the heart behind fasting.

Fasting brings us closer to God and is actually a gift to us.

Fasting is safe when done properly and can be bring health benefits.

APPENDIX 3

“Who are you that is so wise in the way of science?”

– Monte Python and the Holy Grail

- THE MEDICAL SCIENCE BEHIND FASTING

Medical aspects of fasting show that it has *favorable results on the body and mind*. Now that we have explored a comprehensive list of biblical reasons to fast, it is important for us to look at some of the science behind fasting. There is a misconception in the general population that fasting is dangerous and not good for people physically. What I discovered is that contrary to popular opinion, fasting is actually quite safe and a very healthy practice.

In his book, *The Obesity Code*, Dr. Jason Fung notes: “Fasting is one of the oldest remedies in human history and has been part of virtually every culture and religion on earth”(Fung, 2016, p. 236).

The Greek physician, Hippocrates, living in 400 B.C., is known as “the father of modern medicine.” He “believed fasting was very healthy for the body” (Franklin, 2014, p. 14).

When we look at the medical side of fasting, it is important to understand that fasting can be done safely and wisely. Richard Foster, in his book on spiritual disciplines, comments on those who claim that fasting is dangerous. He says, “All of this, of course, is utter nonsense based upon prejudice. While the human body can survive only a short time without air or water, it can go for many days before starvation begins. ... It is not an exaggeration to say that, when done correctly, fasting can have beneficial physical effects” (Foster, p. 48).

For practical reasons, let me mention the following caution. *Water* is vital to human life and should not be withheld for long periods of time (greater than 24 hours). Water is necessary to maintain hydration, basic cellular mechanisms, and proper organ function. Personally, during fasts, I like to allow water and fluids like coffee or tea without additives such as sugar or creamer. This helps one avoid headaches from caffeine withdrawal. We also have discovered

that it helps to add some *electrolytes* to your water for extended time periods of fasting. We like to use ¼ teaspoon of Celtic Sea Salt® per 32-ounce bottle of water. There are other formulations one can use such as Smart Water®, Encore® and other store items.

According to Dr. Don Colbert in his book on detoxification, he believes the single most effective remedy to over-nourishment and disease is fasting. He says: “fasting is a dynamic key to cleansing your body from a lifetime collection of toxins, reversing inflammation, over-nourishment and the diseases they bring, and ensuring a wonderful future of renewed energy, vitality, longevity, and blessed health.”(Colbert, 2012, p. 44) There are many misconceptions as to what happens in the human body during fasting. From talking to many people, I have found they are fearful they will begin to starve or lose muscle mass or even get sick.

Dr. Fung notes that several things happen in the body during fasting. He says research shows that fasting reduces insulin levels, improves insulin sensitivity, lowers the body of excess salt, increases growth hormone, increases the body’s utilization of fats for fuel, and increases adrenaline. He states that this “answers the two unspoken questions. Is it unhealthy? The answer is no. Scientific studies conclude that fasting carries significant health benefits. Metabolism increases, energy increases, and blood sugars decrease. The only remaining questions is this. Can you do it? ... Absolutely 100% yes. In fact, fasting has been a part of human culture since the dawn of our species” (Fung, 2016, p. 248).

In his research, he goes on to say that electrolytes (such as magnesium, calcium and phosphorus) stay stable. A simple daily multivitamin can and will provide the recommended daily allowance of micronutrients needed. He debunks myths about fasting such as the idea that fasting causes muscle loss/protein loss and the myth that fasting puts a person into starvation mode and lowers basal metabolism. It is also a myth that fasting causes hypoglycemia (the lack of glucose which the brain needs to function). The body is an amazing creation. It successfully adapts to alternative fuel sources such as breaking down fatty acids for the necessary energy our body needs during a fast. The only time it appears to be unhealthy is if one’s body fat percent is dangerously low to begin with.

Here is a question and observation: Is it true that perhaps fasting is an ancient secret? In today’s culture and most recently, something called intermittent fasting has become the rage.

Yet, Fung notes this has been observed for a long time in many cultures. We see patterns of fasting and then celebration. Thus, perhaps we can conclude that fasting is both normal and good. In fact, “religion has always reminded us that we must balance our feasting with periods of fasting – ‘atonement’, ‘repentance’ or ‘cleansing’. These ideas are ancient and time-tested” (Fung, p. 248). Does this sound somewhat familiar as we look to the Word of God, then? It has been shown that these ancient principles can lead to health benefits and even weight loss. As most of the American culture seems to be overweight or obese, perhaps a few pounds lost is not a bad thing after all. Yet my caution is that this in and of itself should not be our motivation but rather viewed as a secondary benefit. The primary motivation is to connect spiritually with God.

The Film Documentary, *The Science of Fasting*, helped demonstrate valuable medical research conducted on fasting over several continents. The film investigated Russian, German, and U.S. research. There are actually medical treatment facilities where fasting in a controlled setting is the primary method used for treatment. In Russia, Dr. Natalia Bataeva—chief physician of the Goriachinsk Sanatorium—talks about the benefits of fasting. She says, “fasting is a universal method that can be effective against several diseases.” (Sylvie Gilman & Thierry de Lestrade, 2011, n. Documentary 2011) At her clinic, most patients spend an average of 12 days for supervised medical fasting. She notes that during the fast, “there is no real nutrient deficiency. One can observe a decrease in Vitamin C, E and D but those losses are not critical.” (Sylvie Gilman & Thierry de Lestrade, 2011) In a 15 years period, they treated over 10,000 patients with fasting for various diseases and nearly two thirds have seen symptoms disappear without other medical treatments. This fact is an interesting observation regarding the human body’s ability for healing. A lot of things start to make common sense, such as decreased blood pressure and a positive response to diabetes without the extra sugar and salt in the body.

In these treatment centers for fasting, *normal physiologic changes* were seen. Hunger in varying subjectivity was seen. Well, this certainly makes sense. However, this usually disappeared in 2 or 3 days. Other observations noted were often a feeling of weakness, nausea, and headache for a period up to 5 days as the body ridded itself of toxins. This phase normally passed in 24 to 36 hours. After this, patients then improved physically and mentally with more energy, a positive mood and clearer thinking. In the documentary, patients were interviewed, and they noted an improvement with a “feeling of well-being”, improved appearance of their skin, and decreased pain. They noted their senses were sharpened and a sense of euphoria set in.

Positive physical and mental changes occur. Doctors in the Russian studies found physical ailments improved such as rheumatism, diabetes, hypertension, pulmonary disorders (asthma), eczema, and allergic states. However, there was a surprise. Not only did the physical symptoms improve, but they noted psychological and cognitive improvements. In Germany, another researcher, Dr. Michalsen, measured hormonal levels of his patients and noted increases in serotonin with an improvement of mood, decreased pain, and increased sensitivity to insulin receptors. (Most anti-depressant medications today are designed to increase serotonin levels.)

Most people wonder if fasting can be dangerous. Researchers tried to answer this very question of whether fasting was dangerous to the body. As in most scientific studies, the effect on animals was investigated. One study was done on emperor penguins. In this social Antarctic bird, the male Emperor Penguin willfully fasts for up to 4 months without food while he sits on an egg. What researchers determined was that the body adapted to the primary use of fat for fuel and used 96% fat, as opposed to only 4% protein for energy. This study showed that critical protein was spared. Once the fast was over, the penguins would feed again to regain body fat and mass. This type of research was duplicated with rats, and the same adaptive pattern was also seen. (Another example I think of is how a bear hibernates in winter.) The conclusion was that the body adapts normally to fasting, and therefore it presents no danger to animals in general.

Here is *an interesting fact*. The average human male weighing 70 kg (154 lbs.) has 15 kg of fat, which will last for 40 days while fasting. This means a person with normal body fat could safely fast for this time period. We live in a historical anomaly with the constant availability of food every day. Humans are genetically designed to fast periodically in nature. (This scientific information supports what is well recorded in the Bible dating back over 2000 years.) I can therefore conclude that if I am a few pounds over this weight, perhaps I have some room (extra fat) to spare! At the University of Florida where I attended PA school, we learned this simple fact about fat. Fats may be the slowest source of energy, but they are the most energy-efficient form. Each gram supplies the body with 9 calories of energy which is more than twice that supplied by carbohydrates or protein. Because fat is so efficient, our bodies tend to store it in places of reserve, like our bellies, under our skin, and unfortunately within our organs such as blood vessels and other organs.

Can fasting actually be beneficial for diseases such as cancer? Other fascinating research in the U.S. was performed at the USC (California) by Dr. Valter Longo, a gerontologist/biologist who studies aging. He tested mice with cancer and tried a fasting experiment. He injected 2 groups of mice with 3 to 5x the normal dose of chemotherapy. One group of mice fasted for 48 hours and the other group was fed. The results surprised the medical community as the mice who were well-fed died. However, the mice who fasted reacted favorably. This research was repeated and confirmed. Other oncologists, who were looking at the genetic code and DNA directing gene expression, found that normal cells were directed to go into a state of protection due to the stress of fasting. Interestingly, the cancer cells (which had mutated due to cancer) then became more susceptible to chemotherapy. Fasting has promising potential in this area of study.

It is important to not miss the main goal of fasting. Foster concludes, "Although the physical aspects of fasting intrigue us, we must never forget that the major work of scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit. What goes on spiritually is much more important than what is happening bodily. You will be engaging in spiritual warfare that will necessitate using all the weapons of Ephesians 6... Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way" (Foster, p. 60).

POSTLUDE: OUR CONCLUSION REGARDING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

The almost forgotten discipline of fasting is not practiced enough today. We live in a society of abundance, and fasting is not a priority. It is clear from Scripture that fasting was not intended as an “if,” but rather as a “when.” Scripture shows that every major decision, deliverance, or blessing from God came after prayer combined with fasting. It must be done with the right mind and heart, with a foundation of humility. Fasting positions us for a process of continual communication with the Father through prayer. Our perspective needs to change on fasting, because what could be more fulfilling than having a constant deep commune with the living God? Jesus modeled this for us. The prophets understood this, and the early apostles understood this as well. Fasting was given to us by God as a gift and needed tool to help us focus on his providence and glory.

Medically, it appears fasting helps us rather than hurts us. There are numerous health benefits from fasting. Feasting and fasting can be kept in balance. In our personal experience with fasting, we have discovered a more intimate and wonderful connection with the Father as well as many answered prayers! This is definitely a spiritual discipline we plan to continue in our journeys of sanctification, and we hope you will, too. We pray that you will be encouraged to begin a weekly day of prayer and fasting this next year, and for God’s blessings as he begins to produce wonderful fruit in your life through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Mike and Michelle Eagle

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