


*A SHORT CONVERSATION ON*

# Fast<sup>H</sup>asting

*FOR BEGINNERS LIKE ME*

DAVE CLAYTON





**E**ven now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all of your  
heart, with fasting and weeping and  
mourning. Rend your heart and not your  
garments. Return to the Lord your God  
for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love.

JOEL 2:12-13



*f my people, who are called  
by my name, will humble  
themselves and pray and seek my face  
and turn from their wicked ways, then i  
will hear from heaven, and I will forgive  
their sin and will heal their land.*

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

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PART ZERO

# Here We Go

— AN INTRODUCTION OF SORTS —

**S**everal years ago, Sydney and I began to notice that the Holy Spirit was gently and persistently inviting us to explore some deeper waters regarding life with God. We began to realize that in many ways we were like little kids playing on the deck of our father's sailboat as it was tethered safely to the dock inside the peaceful harbor. Over time, we gained the courage to acknowledge that although it was fun to play on the sailboat, playing on the sailboat didn't mean we were sailing — and it certainly didn't mean we were sailors.

I am convinced that life in the kingdom of God is often quite similar. If we aren't careful, we can confuse information with transformation. We can easily develop the habit of consuming spiritual goods (i.e. sermons, podcasts, books, conferences, events, etc) without ever stopping to examine if the things we are learning are shaping the way we are living. It is one thing to read stories about people that took great risks with God, but it is something entirely different to taste the sweetness of that kind of living for ourselves. It's quite possible to know the fun of playing on the deck of your father's boat, without ever knowing the thrill of the open water.

I don't know about you, but I want to be a person who lives on the open water.

I think we were made for that. I think that is what Jesus came to offer.

But that sort of life comes at a cost. It requires the untethering of our lives.

Over the last several years, our Heavenly Father has used a variety of things to untie our family's boat from the dock and draw us into open waters. The purpose of this short conversation is not to discuss each of those things (and there will be much more "untethering" to come for sure). The goal is to simply share how God has used the combination of prayer and fasting to untie our lives in some beautiful ways.

I believe Jesus' words when he tells us that those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" will be filled.

I also believe that most of us will never hunger and thirst for righteousness because we have been trained to feast on the junk food of the age. Is it even possible to hunger for Jesus if our souls are currently satisfied with far lesser things?

This is why I want us to spend a few moments discussing prayer and fasting.

I believe your joy depends on it. I believe the joy of those around you depends on it. And ultimately, I believe the full revelation of God's glory in our culture depends on it. In other words, I believe this really matters.

This conversation is not meant to be an all-encompassing discussion on prayer and fasting. In fact, for the sake of brevity, the majority of my attention will be turned towards fasting because for most of us it is the least familiar of the two. And since I believe you can pray without fasting, but you certainly cannot fast without praying — by default we will end up dealing with both.

As we embark on this journey, my prayer is that this conversation will serve as a tool for you. A tool to help you move from learning to living. A tool designed to get you off of the dock and into the open water. If this discussion only leads you to think about praying and fasting, then it has failed. My prayer is that by the end of our time together, you will commit to taking your (not mine, not your spouse's, not your parent's, not your friend's, but your) next bold step towards God in regards to prayer and fasting.

So without further adieu, let's jump in.



1

*PART ONE*

# From Burden To Blessing

*— RECAPTURING A BIBLICAL VISION OF FASTING —*



*asting is a perfect quieting of all our impulses, fleshly and spiritual. Fasting is not meant to drag us down, but to still us. It is not meant to distract us from the real, but rather to silence us so that we can hear things as they most truly are.*

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

**A**s we dive into our conversation about biblical fasting, let's begin with a simple definition. In his book, *Fasting*, Jentezen Franklin writes,

*“stated simply, biblical fasting is refraining from food (and/or drink) for a set time, and for a spiritual purpose.”*

**Now that we have that out of the way, let me start with a confession.**

For the majority of my life, fasting might as well have been a synonym for **misery**. In fact, the clarity of that above definition is why fasting seemed rather unappealing. I love food. More specifically, I love eating food. To be even clearer, I love to eat good food with the people I love. The majority of my days are often scheduled around when I am eating, where I am eating, and who I am eating with. In our culture, eating is not just about surviving — it's about socializing. And so fasting didn't just feel like an assault on my survival instincts, but maybe more significantly on my social instincts.

I would guess that on some level you can relate with that feeling.

There is a reason that American Christians tend to devour books focused on dating, marriage, parenting, and finances. These are all things that seem to bring about an obvious blessing. But finding a popular book on fasting is difficult, if not all together impossible.

I believe the reason is simple; most American Christians view fasting as a **burden** and not a **blessing**.

Fasting stands in bold opposition to everything we are conditioned to do naturally day in and day out. It feels unnatural at best, and irrelevant and pointless at worst.

If you want to shrink a church or silence a small group just try suggesting the idea of fasting together as a community. The only thing more awkward than talking about religion or politics, is suggesting to a group of Americans that they need to take a break from food for the purpose of connecting more deeply with God. If most were honest, not only is fasting not understood, for many it seems downright undesirable. And the truth is, if something doesn't seem desirable, then most will never bother trying to understand it.

This was my thinking for much of my life.

And yet despite all of my reservations about fasting, the Bible seemed to be clear on the matter. Fasting is

mentioned explicitly in the Bible over 70 times, and it is mentioned implicitly even more.

All throughout the scriptures, faithful followers of God would submit themselves to God through times of prayer and fasting. Moses fasted for forty days before receiving the commands of God<sup>1</sup>. David fasted for 7 days as he prayed for his sick son<sup>2</sup>. Ezra fasted as he mourned the sin of his community<sup>3</sup>. Esther fasted for the safety of her people<sup>4</sup>, and Daniel fasted for 21 days as he sought clarity on a vision from God<sup>5</sup>.

The examples don't just stop with the faithful followers of God in the Old Testament. There are plenty of examples in the New Testament as well. In the New Testament, we see the apostle Paul fasting after his radical encounter with Jesus<sup>6</sup>. We also witness the leaders of the church in Antioch fasting before sending out missionaries<sup>7</sup>, and in Acts 14, the churches in Galatia pray and fast as they prepared to appoint new leaders<sup>8</sup>.

But the most important example to me comes from Jesus' life and teachings. Jesus spent the first 40 days of a rather short earthly ministry in prayer and fasting<sup>9</sup>. In one of his most famous sermons, he reminded his listeners that fasting was not something they "might do" but was something they "will do"<sup>10</sup>. Jesus taught

that fasting was not just a past reality but a future commitment for his followers<sup>11</sup>, and that some demonic forces could only be dealt with through prayer and fasting<sup>12</sup>.

After spending some time in God's word, I couldn't help but ask myself...

***If fasting was such a big deal to God's people and to God's Son, then why was it not a big deal to me?***

And so I began to wrestle with the role of fasting in my life as a believer.

## Requirement or Reward?

I began to realize that if fasting was going to become a significant part of my walk with God, the first question I had to tackle was, "Is fasting about me fulfilling a requirement or receiving a reward?"

To be clear, living into the requirements of God is a key aspect of life with Jesus. In fact, one of the most frequent messages of the Bible and Jesus' ministry is the message of obedience. Jesus clearly believed that

our love for him is seen most visibly in our willingness to obey his teachings<sup>13</sup>.

But as I studied the scriptures, fasting seemed to be less about the requirement and more about the reward. Now before you write me off as a “health and wealth heretic,” listen to the words of Jesus himself from his most famous sermon — the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6:16–18, Jesus says:

***“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 our Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”***

I love this moment in Jesus’ teaching ministry. To paraphrase his teaching: he essentially tells his listeners, “Hey if you want the earthly reward of people thinking you are super spiritual, then just let them know you are fasting, because people will always think you are spiritual if you fast. But if you want a reward far greater than a pat on the back from the people around you, then commit yourself to God through fasting”

I believe Jesus knew that fasting is not about us somehow getting God's attention. Fasting is about God getting all of our attention. And it is there in the secret places of our lives, when God has our undivided attention, that the reward of fasting comes to the surface of our lives in such beautiful way.

## *SOMETIMES* **Seeing Helps Our Believing**

Nearly a year ago, Sydney and I began a friendship with Muriithi and Carol Wanjau and their three amazing children. I wish I had more time and space to talk about this incredible family, but for the sake of time and space you will just have to trust me on this one. The Wanjau's have been positioned by God in Nairobi, Kenya, and they lead one of the most amazing movements of churches I have ever seen. In February of this past year, our family got to spend several weeks with the Wanjau's and many of their global leaders who had gathered in Nairobi for several weeks of training and fellowship.

Sydney and I were blown away by what we saw in our time with our Kenyan brothers and sisters. Their love for God, their passion for reaching the lost, and their



commitment to living lives that were holy and counter cultural were just a few of the things that blessed our hearts and challenged our thinking in ways we never expected. To top it off, the prayer lives of our Kenyan brothers and sisters impacted me in ways I am still trying to process.

One day as Sydney and I were riding to the store with Carol, we were picking her brain trying to find out why the Christians in their circle seemed to be so alive for Jesus. She was quick to remind us that there are no “silver bullets” when it comes to spiritual development, but I will never forget what she did say. She told us,

*“Dave and Sydney, much of what you see is the simple result of prayer and fasting. We consistently practice the communal act of self denial (fasting) so we will have the strength and clarity that is needed to live faithfully for Jesus in a culture that is obsessed with self gratification.”*

That moment in the car with Carol is where many of the puzzle pieces began to click in our hearts regarding prayer and fasting. Little did we know, our family had arrived in Kenya on the last day of a 30 day fast that the Wanjau’s and their churches lean into every year during the month of January. In fact, their family and

their church spends nearly three months out of every year, devoting themselves to the Lord in prayer and fasting. Young and old, male and female, rich and poor, children and adults — all who are willing and able commit themselves to the full throttled pursuit of God above everything else — will enter into a 30 day fast together.

The result of that devotion is inspiring to say the least. I remember leaving Kenya thinking to myself, “If that is the kind of faith that prayer and fasting can produce, then I am all in!”

There are times when God will use someone else’s life to ignite something wonderful and new inside of you. Like a match in the hand of God, their life becomes the catalyst for igniting a new season of wonder and growth in you. I thank the Lord often for our friends in Kenya, and the way He used them to fundamentally shift the way our family approaches prayer and fasting.

## Not An Isolated Event

As I look back over the scope of Christian history, I realize what we saw in Kenya was not an exception to

the rule. In fact, more often it is the rule. You would be hard pressed to find any significant movement of God in human history that was not first preceded by a group of faithful men and women who had committed themselves to the Lord in prayer and fasting for an extended period of time. **Prayer and fasting have often paved the way for the glory of God to come barreling into a church or community.**

**1** *If this is the case, then what would keep us from devoting ourselves to God in such a way?*

**2** *And what might we expect to see if we were to humble ourselves before the Lord in prayer and fasting?*

In the next part of our conversation, I will attempt to tackle both of these questions.

# End Notes From Part 1

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 9:9-18

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 12:16

<sup>3</sup> Ezra 10:6

<sup>4</sup> Esther 4:15-17

<sup>5</sup> Daniel 10:1-3

<sup>6</sup> Acts 9:9

<sup>7</sup> Acts 13:2

<sup>8</sup> Acts 14:21-23

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:16-18

<sup>11</sup> Luke 5:35

<sup>12</sup> Certain Versions of Mark 9:29

<sup>13</sup> John 14

2

PART TWO

# Barriers & Breakthroughs

— LEARNING TO SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE —



*The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things.*

OLE HALLESBY

**S**ubmit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up

JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS  
JAMES 4:7-10



If we are going to make significant progress in our lives with God in the areas of prayer and fasting, it is important for us to have a clear view of both the potential barriers and break throughs that await us on the journey ahead.

If we only can see the potential break throughs, we will often be frustrated and disappointed by our inability to live into that which we desire. Like a person who has fallen short on their New Year's Resolution year after year after year, we will feel like a failure if we don't first assess the potential barriers between where we are and where we want to be with God.

As you have probably learned in nearly every area of your life, desire alone is rarely a strong enough motivator to bring you into your preferred future.

In the same manner, if we only assess the barriers but never dream about the break throughs, we will not have the motivation needed to push past the initial discomfort. After all, it is that vision of what you desire to look like on your wedding day that motivates you to make the difficult choice of saying no to that dessert or waking up early to go to the gym in the months leading up to your wedding day.



It is the same in our walk with God. Unless we have a clear view of both the barriers and the break throughs we will find ourselves merely learning about prayer and fasting but not living into the beautiful reality of prayer and fasting. And remember, the goal of this whole conversation is to get us off of the deck and out into the open water.

So let's think about just a few of the barriers and break throughs regarding fasting in particular.

## 6 POTENTIAL

# Barriers in Fasting

Although there are countless barriers that can come between you and your ability to humble yourself before the Lord in prayer and fasting, there are a few common barriers that often come up as we seek to begin this journey.

## 1

### PURSUIT OF SELF SUFFICIENCY

The first barrier to Biblical fasting is often the pursuit of self sufficiency. Many of us are trained from a young age to do whatever it takes to become self sufficient. Our whole

lives are marked quite literally by our ability to attain various levels of independence. In many ways, this desire is marked with God-honoring qualities. But when this desire is not held in check, it can actually work against us regarding our relationship with God. Although the Bible teaches us the importance of responsibility, it also teaches us that God has created us to be fully dependent upon Him. Fasting will often initially feel as though it is combatting everything you have ever been taught. Fasting forces us to admit that we are not self sufficient. It reminds us that every fiber of our being needs our maker. Our human thinking will go to war with our spiritual desire in this area of our lives. Until we address the strong undercurrent of our desire to be self sufficient, we will struggle mightily to submit ourselves to God in prayer and fasting.

## 2

### **HUNGER FOR WORLDLY PLEASURES**

Another barrier to a life of prayer and fasting is a hunger for worldly pleasures. If we have cultivated the tastebuds of our hearts for the riches and pleasures of this world, then we will never find any time or use for fasting.

Fasting is designed to loosen our heart's grip on the temporary things of the world. Fasting helps us recalibrate the "palette" of our souls for the heavenly feast. Until we acknowledge what our souls are truly hungry for, we will struggle to see the need for fasting.

# 3

## **HABITUAL SELF GRATIFICATION**

A third potential barrier to prayer and fasting is our habitual tendency for self gratification. We live in a culture that consistently bombards us with the message that "we can have what we want, when we want it." Fasting cuts against the grain of this cultural tendency. Fasting is not about self gratification, but more importantly self denial. We are following a savior, who in Mark chapter 8, reminds us that anyone who seeks to be his disciple must deny themselves and follow him. Our habitual tendency to gratify ourselves will go to war with our souls as we seek to deny ourselves through prayer and fasting.

# 4

## **SECULAR SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

A fourth potential barrier is the effects of secular self righteousness. Religious self

righteousness is seen when we attempt to do good things to earn the approval of God. Secular self righteousness is seen when our view of self is so high and our view of God is so low that we don't believe He is worth the effort or discipline. In this view, we don't see ourselves as sinners in need of God. We see ourselves as self made people in need of a divine life coach. If we succumb to this way of thinking, any spiritual discipline that comes at a cost is immediately ignored. In this view as well, any spiritual discipline that reminds us of our need for God is seen as out of date and oppressive. Fasting, by its vary nature, will often bring us into a deep awareness of both our sinfulness and God's holiness. Fasting has a way of reseting the cosmic order of our hearts. If we fail to recognize our tendency to embrace our culture's secularized self righteousness, we will miss out on many of the blessings that come through prayer and fasting.

# 5

## UNDISCIPLINED LIVING

A fifth potential barrier is quite simply the result of undisciplined living. I have found that discipline tends to breed discipline, and un-

discipline tends to lead to more un-discipline. Often our failure to step into a life of prayer and fasting is not so much a reflection of our lack of desire, but more typically a lack of discipline. Embracing a life of fasting is not just about us battling the spiritual forces of good and evil, but sometimes just as significantly us battling the practical forces of commitment and follow through.

# 6

## LACK OF VISION

Finally, a sixth potential barrier between you and a more fulfilling life of prayer and fasting is a lack of Biblical vision. The Bible tells us that where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint (Proverbs 29:18). In other words, where there is no view of the breakthrough, there is no willingness to overcome the barriers.

In the next section, I will attempt to give us some tangible pictures of the breakthroughs.

7 POTENTIAL

# Breakthroughs in Fasting

Just as it is important to recognize the potential barriers that will keep us from stepping into a life of prayer and fasting, it is equally important to recognize some of the areas of potential break through.

To be clear, prayer and fasting are not formulaic endeavors. There is no guarantee that because we pray and fast we will experience the break through we anticipated. I do believe however, that in prayer and fasting we will always experience the break through that God desires. Therefore it is important to train ourselves to recognize the way God often works in seasons of prayer and fasting.

1

## DEVELOPS A DEEPER FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD (PSALM 42)

First and foremost, is a deeper friendship with God. The ultimate aim of any spiritual discipline or practice must always be an increased friendship with God. God is never a means to an end. He is the end. As followers of Jesus we pursue God passionately not because we think He is useful, but because we think He is wonderful. We don't fast in

order to get God to do something for us or through us. We fast because we long to remove anything that might distract us from the unequalled pleasure of knowing and loving God personally. Fasting is not about us getting God's attention, but about God getting all of ours. The depths of David's friendship with God as written about in the midst of his fasting in Psalm 42 is ultimately a picture of how fasting can bring us into the reward of God's presence.

## 2

### **RENEWS HUNGER FOR HEAVENLY THINGS (JOHN 6:27)**

A second potential breakthrough is in regards to our spiritual hunger. As I mentioned in our discussion on potential barriers, many of us have cultivated an appetite for the things of the world. Biblical fasting has a way of not only loosening our grip on the world, but maybe more significantly loosening the world's grip on us. It is difficult to long for the things of Heaven, when all of the things of Earth keep us completely satisfied. As we empty our stomachs for a season, we often become more aware of the emptiness that is pervasive in many of our souls. As we begin

to pay attention to the hunger pains of our stomachs, the Lord often awakens us to the true hunger pains of our hearts as well. It is here in this space, that we often begin to experience the rearranging of our spiritual appetites by the gracious hand of God. As we enter into seasons of fasting, our Heavenly Father will often begin to recalibrate the tastebuds of our hearts to crave eternal things.

# 3

## **TRAINS THE SOUL IN THE REALM OF SELF DENIAL (MARK 8:34)**

A third potential break through comes in the area of self denial. In a world that is constantly inviting us to fulfill ourselves, Jesus is inviting us to deny ourselves. Fasting is one of the most helpful disciplines for training our souls to live into this cornerstone of discipleship. By saying no to the cravings of our bodies for a season, we are training our souls to say yes to the apparent upside down ways of the Kingdom of God that Jesus invites us to embrace. Self Denial is not about being miserable for the sake of God. Self denial is about making space for more of God. Self denial is the natural response of our heart



when we begin to believe that only Jesus knows what is truly best for us in this life and the next. Fasting is a valuable practice for helping us step into this way of thinking and living.

# 4

## **INTIMACY, SECURITY, & STRENGTH (LUKE 4:1-14)**

A fourth potential break through is often seen in the connection between intimacy, security, and strength against temptation. Throughout the New Testament, there is a clear connection between intimacy with God, security in our identity, and the strength needed to live holy lives in the face of temptation. It was in the context of prayer and fasting in Luke chapter 4, that Jesus experienced intimacy with his Father, was secured in His identity as God's son, and began to walk in strength and power over the temptations of the enemy. Over the years, I have seen seasons of prayer and fasting strengthen and deliver believers from oppressive temptations as they've built intimacy and found security in their time with God.

# 5

## CLARITY IN PRAYER (DANIEL 10 & ISAIAH 58)

A fifth potential breakthrough can often come in the area of answered prayer. Just as Daniel in Daniel chapter 10 received an answer from the Lord in a season of fasting, we as well can experience levels of refreshment and clarity in seasons of prayer and fasting. This is what Isaiah declares in Isaiah 58:6-9 as well. There are many times that prayer and fasting will open our ears and our hearts more fully to God's answers to our prayers.

# 6

## HUMILITY NEEDED FOR REVIVAL (2 CHRONICLES 7:14)

A sixth potential breakthrough in the area of prayer and fasting is in the area of humility — especially in connection with spiritual revival. Fasting has a way of bringing our sin and deep need for God into clear view. Only when we have been humbled by our sin do we become desperate for God. Only when we are desperate for God are we suitable vessels for revival. Prayer and fasting often work to properly position us before God in such a way that God can trust us to handle the manifestation of his glory in us and through

us. I believe this is the reason you will be hard pressed to find any revivals in human history where there was not first a deep commitment to prayer and fasting.



## **FREEDOM FROM DEMONIC STRONGHOLDS (MARK 9:9)**

Finally, in the context of prayer and fasting many people will begin to experience the freedom from demonic strongholds. There is a beautiful moment in Mark chapter 9 where the disciples struggle to understand why they cannot cast out a demon that has plagued the life of a young child. Remember, at this point, Jesus had already given them the authority to drive out demons. The disciples are confused by their inability to live into the commands of Jesus in this moment. It is here that Jesus says, “this kind of demon only comes out by prayer and fasting.” Jesus lets them know that there are times where the spiritual battle requires the children of God to come into deeper fellowship with the Father before entering the battle. Prayer and fasting can often bring us into this place of spiritual break through.

# Preparation & Expectation

It is important to understand that preparation always reveals expectation. For example, when you spend the whole morning preparing a huge feast on Thanksgiving Day, your preparation reveals the expectation that there will soon be a hungry crowd ready to eat the feast you have prepared.

Preparation reveals expectation.

How you prepare for both the potential barriers and break throughs of a life of prayer and fasting will ultimately reveal what you expect to experience in the days ahead. In the next part of our conversation, we will explore some practical ways to prepare well and expect much.

# 3

*PART THREE*

# Ready. Set. Go.

*— MOVING FROM LEARNING TO LIVING —*

y

*ou don't have to be  
great to start, but  
you do have to start  
to be great.*

ZIG ZIGLER



*Therefore everyone who  
hears these words of mine  
and puts them into practice is  
like a wise man...*

JESUS  
MATTHEW 7:24

**A**s I mentioned in the beginning of our time together, the purpose of this conversation has been one thing — to help you take your next step into a deeper life of prayer and fasting.

For some of you that will mean fasting for the very first time. For others, that will mean fasting with a new level of intensity and intentionality like never before. Regardless of where you are starting, my prayer is that you will be committed to stepping.

Jesus made it clear that information without application is not very helpful. Only when the words and realities of scripture are applied to our lives will we begin to see the world of the scriptures come to life in us. I am convinced that God longs to do more than any of us could ever ask or imagine both in us and through us; but that sort of life will not come about simply because we are more educated on the blessing of prayer and fasting.

We must step into these blessings together for God's glory, our joy, and the good of those around us.



# Description vs. Prescription

As we begin to get really practical, it is important to note that these suggestions are simply my suggestions. Although the Bible often describes how people in the Bible would fast, the Bible does not prescribe how we as Jesus' followers should fast specifically. Jesus deals with our motives, but He does not address the mechanics of fasting.

What I am getting ready to share is not a prescription for how you should fast. It is simply a description of several things that could help you step into a season of prayer and fasting more faithfully and effectively.

Now that we have that out of the way, let's look at a few practical things.

## 4 PRIMARY Ways To Fast

Generally speaking, there are 4 common ways that many Christians choose to fast.

# 1

## MAJOR FAST

A major fast is when you abstain from food or drink for 24 consecutive hours or more. A major fast requires a certain level of physical health, and it is recommended that you check with your doctor if doing a major fast that lasts more than a few days in a row. A few examples from scripture of a major fast are seen in; Matthew 4:2, Acts 9:9, and Esther 4:15-16 to name a few.

# 2

## MINOR FAST

A minor fast is where you choose to abstain from food for a certain period of time each day (i.e. 6am-3pm or Sunup to Sundown). This fast is also referred to at times as a Jewish fast. In a minor fast, most people will drink liquids during the day, and will have one small meal after sundown each evening.

# 3

## PARTIAL FAST

A partial fast is where you give up only certain foods or certain meals during the course of your fast. A partial fast is seen most clearly in the book of Daniel chapter 1.

# 4

## SOUL FAST

Technically speaking, in the Bible, fasting only refers to abstaining from food and/or drink for a spiritual purpose. However, some people due to health reasons, choose to fast from things other than food. Some people will give up television, social media, or other activities for a Soul Fast to focus on prayer. Each of these can be a very valuable way of connecting with God more deeply. If you are physically able though, I would encourage you to prayerfully consider one of the first three fasts listed above.

### 6 STEPS FOR

## Getting Started

Now that we have discussed various types of fasts, let's look at some practical suggestions for getting started well.

# 1

## SET YOUR OBJECTIVE

Begin by asking God to help you understand why you are fasting. Are you fasting for:

- Spiritual Renewal
- Guidance from God
- Discernment in a certain area of prayer
- Physical Healing
- Revival of the Church
- Salvation of the Lost
- All of the Above

As we humble ourselves in fasting and prayer before God, the Holy Spirit will often move us to pray for awakening in our churches, healing in our land, and revival in our country and beyond. Allow the Lord to align your objectives with His objectives as you prepare to fast.

## 2

### CHOOSE YOUR FAST

Secondly, you need to make a few decisions:

*What kind of fast will you do?*

- Major Fast
- Minor Fast

- Partial Fast

### *How long will you be fasting?*

- 1 meal a day
- 1 day a week
- Sunup - Sundown for 30 straight days
- Other

### *Who will you fast with?*

- Family / Roommates
- House Church / Small Group
- Friends
- Other

# 3

## **PREPARE YOURSELF**

Third, you need to give your mind, body, heart, and community the adequate time needed to prepare for your fast.

### ***YOUR MIND***

You need to prepare your mind. Fasting is just as much a mental exercise as it is a physical

exercise. Begin asking the Lord to prepare your mindset for the journey you are about to take.

### ***YOUR BODY***

Prepare your body. No matter what kind of fast you are getting ready to do, it will require some adjustments for your body. I'd encourage you to drink plenty of water in the days leading up to your fast. It is also important that you avoid the urge of overeating in the days leading up to your fast — this will actually make things more difficult as you enter into your fast.

### ***YOUR HEART***

You need to prepare your heart. Remember, fasting is about your commitment to the Lord. I find it helpful to spend time in confession and repentance before entering into a fast. I will often spend several days leading up to the fast asking God to forgive me of my sins, making sure I am in good standing with my brothers and sisters, and asking God to purify my motives as I enter into this time with the Lord.

## *YOUR COMMUNITY*

Finally, you will want to prepare your community. I have found this to be deeply important, especially if you have people in your family or household who will not be fasting with you. Remember, fasting is about you taking a break from food, not from people. There have been many times when I have been fasting, but our children have not been. It is important for me to prepare them for what we are doing in such a way that it doesn't disrupt their lives. I want them to view fasting as a blessing from God, and not a terrible thing their parents endure from time to time. This takes intentional preparation on our part.

# 4

## **MAKE A PLAN**

Fourth, you need to make a plan. Make a plan to use the times usually given to eating as a time of prayer, worship, and Bible study. When our family fasts, we use this time to pray, worship, and read the scriptures together. When I am fasting, but my family is not — I use our family meal times as a time to share what God is doing in my heart as the family eats. Either way, making a plan for

how you will repurpose your meal times is very important.

## **5** **START IT & STICK WITH IT**

Fifth, you will need quite simply to start it and stick with it. Chances are, especially if this is your first fast, you might not make it as long as you had intended. When you are hungry, pray. If you break down and give in to hunger, pray. Either way, get back up and keep moving forward. Fasting is an exercise in grace — so make sure you give yourself some. When my boys were learning to walk, there was a lot of walking, wobbling, and falling. Never once did we as parents ridicule them when they would fall. We would cheer them on, help them up, and watch them go again. The same is true with the Lord. As we are learning to walk in new disciplines, the kindness of our Father is what will lift us up in both our struggles and our successes.

## **6** **SHARE WITH OTHERS**

Finally, share the burden and the blessing of fasting with a small community. The Bible is clear that fasting is not something we do for the attention of other people. Therefore we



must be careful that we don't let everyone around us know that we are fasting because this is where pride will often creep in. I do however believe it is important to fast in community. I have often found the fasts that have come with the most success have been the ones I did with a small group of trusted believers. We were able to help one another push through the times of burden, and we were able to daily share in the blessings that come from pursuing God more deeply together.

***Although these steps are certainly not a formula for fasting well — I do pray that they will provide you with a helpful framework for taking your next bold step towards God in prayer and fasting.***

4

PART FOUR

# From Fasting To Feasting

— WHY THIS MATTERS NOW —



W

*Whoever comes to me  
will never go hungry, and whoever  
believes in me will never be thirsty.*

JESUS  
JOHN 6:35

A large, stylized, black drop cap letter 'P' with a decorative flourish at the top left.

*Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive, but the evidence that he is alive.*

OSWALD CHAMBERS

**m**

*an shall not live by  
bread alone, but on every word that  
comes from the mouth of God.*

JESUS  
MATTHEW 4:4

**R**ecently, a good friend asked me an important question that will serve as the conclusion to our conversation on prayer and fasting. In fact, it is quite possible, that the question we are ending with is the question we should have started with.

My friend asked me,

*“Dave, what has brought about your sudden hunger for prayer and fasting?”*

It was a great question. It was a question that caused me to do some real soul searching. As I searched my heart, I discovered that the answer was found smack dab in the middle of two very real pressure points in my life.

**The first pressure point arose as a reaction to our current predicament.**

**The second pressure point arose as a hope for our future promise.**

In other words, in this process of searching my soul I discovered that half of my newfound urgency regarding prayer and fasting was connected to a **reaction** to the

present, and the other half was connected to a **vision** for the future.

Let me try to explain...

## Our Current Reality

The first pressure point began to arise deep within me as I assessed the current state of our American culture and the American church. By virtually all measures, most would say that both have seen better days.

### AMERICAN CULTURE

In many ways, our culture is more divided and broken than it ever has been. Our country is drowning in the mire of racial tension, physical violence, political division, selfish ambition, sexual confusion, and spiritual disorientation. By all accounts, Americans have more money, more mobility, and more liberties than we have ever had in recent memory — yet the fruit of “our excess” is proving to be rotten at best. In the midst of our so called progress our culture appears to be “losing” in virtually every important sphere of human flourishing.

## AMERICAN CHURCH

But its not just our culture that is suffering. In many ways, the state of the American Church is just as concerning. In his first letter to the Corinthian Church, the Apostle Paul told the church to not be so concerned when the world acts like the world. In fact that is to be expected. He went on to say in that same letter, however, that we should be quite concerned when the church begins to act like the world. This is where we currently find ourselves.

I believe the Church in America has lost much of her “saltiness” as Jesus would say, and the results have been devastating. We have traded in holiness for the pursuit of relevance only to discover that we have now been left with a version of “church” that is still unappealing to the culture but more significantly is now also displeasing to God.

In large part, many self professed Christians are living lives that look no different from the lives of their non-Christian friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

Millions of self professed Christians rarely pray, rarely read their Bibles, rarely give of their resources, rarely serve the poor, rarely share their faith with the lost and even worse many seem to rarely care or even notice.



Many have baptized a form of humanism and deemed it Christianity only to discover that it is devoid of power and stripped of its godliness. We have attempted to turn prayer into a cosmic lasso in hopes we can wrangle the blessings of Heaven for the sake of securing pleasures on earth. In turn we act like children pouting when God doesn't leverage the resources of Heaven to give us our every fleshly desire.

In Matthew 7, Jesus warns us "that we will know a tree by its fruit." Over the last several years the fruit on the tree of American Christianity has often been less than desirable to say the least.

## Our Future Hope

Although our current reality has certainly driven me to my knees in prayer and fasting, it is the hope of God's future promises that has kept me on my knees in prayer and fasting. The times may be uncertain, but God has reminded us that our future is not.

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 towards a beautiful and triumphant climax in the return of Jesus Christ — a time in which men and women from every nation will gather to feast with God face to face in the New Heaven and New Earth. It will be a time when all pain, suffering, sickness, and sin will be eradicated by the grace and power of Jesus the King. I believe it is time for the people of God to begin living as though we know the way this glorious story is going to end.

One of my favorite moments in the Bible is an obscure scene in Ezekiel 47.

*In his vision, the prophet Ezekiel sees a trickle of water spilling out from under the threshold of the temple. As Ezekiel follows the trickle of water running off of the temple steps, the water continues to get deeper and deeper. At first it is ankle deep. Then it is knee deep. Then it is waist deep, and then it is too deep to cross.*

*The vision ends with the trickle from the temple becoming a raging river that brings life and redemption to everything it touches.*

I believe the water is bubbling up under the doorway of American Christianity, and I don't know about you but I want to see where the trickle of God's Spirit will lead us together.

*FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE*

## *We Were Meant To Be*

So the question remains, how do we get from where we are to where we were meant to be? How do we move from our current predicament into God's future promises? In seasons like this, the words of Psalm 11:3 ring true in my heart as David asks, "when the foundations are being destroyed what are the righteous to do?"

As I listen to the words of David and look at the state of our culture and church, that question resonates in my heart. In times like this, what are the people of God to do?

I want to be like the men of Issachar from 1 Chronicles 12:32 who "understood the times and knew what Israel needed to do."

I don't know about you, but I don't want to merely make an assessment. I want to take action.

# From Fasting To Feasting

The longer I live in the tension of our current predicament and God's future promises, the more confident I become regarding the action God is inviting us to take. I've come to believe that prayer and fasting is **not only a way, but the way** for the American church to faithfully step into the future with God.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God says:

*“If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

I'm convinced that the future revival we were created for is something we cannot acquire through strategic planning, relevant programs, or clever preaching. The revival we long for can only be acquired through sacrificial praying.

And not just casual, half hearted, “pray when its convenient” praying that so many of us have grown

accustomed to.

The kind of praying that often only comes as we humble ourselves through fasting.

This kind of future is only realized when the people of God become so collectively homesick for the Kingdom of Heaven that we will exchange our time, our comforts, our lives, and even our eating for more time in the presence of God.

This is why fasting is so important.

Fasting begins when the people of God realize our current state of spiritual famine. It begins with an admittance that there must be “more of God for people like us.” The longing to fast is conceived when we can declare that our lives with God are not as they ought to be, and thus we refuse to settle for the status quo.

Fasting begins with an acknowledgement of our spiritual famine — but it never ends there.

Because fasting is not ultimately about **what we let go of**. Fasting is about **who we will let take hold of us**.

Fasting is a physical declaration regarding a spiritual longing. It is a moment where we raise our white flag and surrender the notion that the fleeting pleasures

of the world are an adequate substitute for the infinite goodness of God.

It is a declaration that what we really need is not of this world, and that we will not settle for less when God promises us immeasurably more.

Because fasting is about our feasting and not just our famine. It is about us learning to trust the words of Jesus from John 6, when Jesus declares, “whoever comes to me will never go hungry.” Or to trust his words in Matthew 4, when he says, “man cannot live by bread alone.”

Fasting may begin with a longing for that which we’ve given up, but it often ends with the deep satisfaction of that which we’ve found — total satisfaction of body, mind, and spirit by Jesus himself.

I’m convinced that when the church begins to feast more fully on Jesus, the trickle from the temple will become the river that will redeem the nations.

# Will You Join Me?

So will you join me? Will you untie your boats, push away from the dock, and head towards the open waters?

Will join me in prayer for our church, our nation, and our world?

Will you join me in humbling ourselves before God on behalf of the sins of our culture and our church?

Will you join me in praying that God would tear open Heaven and pour out His presence on our church and our country?

Will you join me in praying that God will raise up workers for the spiritual harvest?

Will you join me in believing that our Heavenly Father is exceedingly good, and that He longs to do more than we could ever ask or imagine if only we would come to Him with humble hearts according to His terms and the grace of Jesus Christ?

In the words of the famous preacher, Andrew Murray, may we come to believe that,

*“In the mystery of prayer and fasting, God has entrusted us with a force that can move the heavenly world, and bring its power down to earth.”*

So enough with the talking.

Time to start fasting.

Time to start praying — for God’s glory, our joy, and the good of all people.

**Who’s with me?**





A

APPENDIX

# Practical Ideas

— IDEAS FOR APPLYING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED —

# A Day Of Fasting

A common question for many people as they fast for the first time is, “besides abstaining from food — what else should I do during the day(s) that I fast?” Below are a few suggestions of things that might help you connect more deeply with God as you pray and fast.

## MORNING SUGGESTIONS

I have found the way I begin my day will often set the tone for the rest of my day. This is especially true during seasons of fasting. I would encourage you to:

- Begin your day in praise & worship
- Read & mediate on God’s word
- Invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart and life
- Invite God to use you to influence your family, workplace, neighborhood, & world
- Ask God to give you His vision for your life
- Ask God to empower you to do His will

## MIDDAY SUGGESTIONS

Another significant time of day is the lunch hour. With a little bit of intentionality, the lunch hour can become something you look forward to, and not merely something you survive during your fast. I would encourage you to dedicate your lunch time to the Lord by:

- Returning to God in prayer & scripture
- Taking a short prayer walk
- Spending a few moments in silence reflecting on God's goodness
- Praying through the daily prayer focus in the Ethos Church Prayer Calendar

## EVENING SUGGESTIONS

Finally, the way you end your day will set the tone for your next day. In the Old Testament, each day began around dinner time. The Hebrew people viewed the evening as a time of preparation for the hours ahead. With that in mind, I would encourage you to:

- Spend some unhurried time with God without the pressures or constraints of work/school

- Meet up or FACETIME with others who are fasting for a time of prayer and encouragement
- Avoid or limit outside distractions such as television or social media
- Spend some time on your knees in prayer with your spouse, children, and/or roommates

# Fasting With Your Kids

Fasting can be an incredible way of experiencing God's presence in the life of your family. During our time in Kenya, we were blown away by the way in which entire families would devote themselves to God through prayer and fasting. In the last year, our family has experienced both some successes and challenges when fasting with our 3 young boys. Here are a few things you might find helpful when fasting with your kids.

## START BY TALKING ABOUT IT

- Explain to your kids what fasting is, why you are doing it, and for how long you will be doing it.
- We found meal times to be an easy opportunity to share what God was doing in our hearts because our kids noticed we were not eating.
- Share the blessings you are experiencing & not simply the burdens you might be feeling.

## PREPARE AHEAD

- One of the most challenging aspects of fasting as a family, is that often the parents must still prepare meals for the kids who are eating — even if the parents are fasting.
- You can eliminate some of the struggle of food prep by planning ahead, or at the very least sharing the load as a couple to avoid both the temptation of eating and the time constraints that come with preparing a meal for others.

## INVITE THEM IN

- Invite your kids to pray about whether or not they would like to fast with you.
- We have discovered that when our kids see us fasting and hear about the blessings we are experiencing with the Lord, they will often ask to join us in the fast.

## START SMALL

- Have your kids commit to fasting from 1 meal time or snack time as a starting point.

## **CHANGE THE SCENERY**

- When your kids are fasting with you, get out of the house during meal times. Go for a walk. Play at the park. Pray for your friends and family members. Whatever you do, I would suggest changing up the setting during key meal times.

## **GIVE THEM GRACE**

- If your kids are hungry and struggling to keep their fast — stop right there and pray with them that God would satisfy their hunger. If they need to eat, give them grace and let them eat. Remember you don't want them to forfeit a lifelong discipline because of an overly legalistic experience when they are young.

## **CELEBRATE TOGETHER**

- Take time to share the joys of what God is doing in your life as a family. Celebrating where God is at work is a wonderful reward and motivator for kids who are learning to fast.