

FAST FORWARD

THE UNTAPPED CATALYST TO
SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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THE BIBLE SAYS God shares insights and secrets with those who fear Him (Ps. 25:14). Since this book is all about changing your focus from what you look like to what you see, it is only fitting that I discuss the ways you can sharpen your spiritual sight. Prayer and fasting are important ways to do this.

You may or may not be in a position to fast food. In fact, if you are taking medications of any kind (or you have been struggling with any symptoms of an eating disorder, which you can find listed at the end of this book), I strongly advise you *not* to make any changes to your eating habits without consulting a health-care professional. However, even if you are unable to fast *food*, everyone is in a position to fast *something*. It may be TV, social media, magazines, sports, shopping, or a hobby. All of us have areas in which we hide ourselves or waste time. I challenge you to go before our Father and ask Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to expose any areas that could be fasted.

Every believer should fast periodically. It is an act of separation to our Father. If you're struggling with your weight, body image, an eating disorder, materialism, or insecurity, you need to fast all the images that have driven you to such abuse or deception.

Jesus gave us invaluable insight on fasting:

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure

their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.
Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

—MATTHEW 6:16, NKJV

You must fast with the right motivation. If you fast only to bring attention to yourself, or only for the physical results you hope to achieve, it has become nothing more than another idol in your life.

You must choose between the reward of man and the reward of God. A fast that is focused on self is rewarded by man, but a broken and contrite heart is rewarded by God.

You may be reading this and thinking, “Sounds great, but who has the time?” I do believe we all need to take stock and see if there are ways we can simplify our lives. You may have too much on your plate and this is your wake-up call to set some boundaries. But the point I’m making is that if you reserve fasting only for the times when you can physically leave or lock yourself away, you will not fast.

I’ve raised four sons. I understand the very real season of life when your children have legitimate demands on your time. When I was in the middle of that season God didn’t tell me to check into a hotel room. He probably knew I would pass out and sleep the whole time! He wanted me to develop the ability to fast within my home and lifestyle.

God wants to be an integral part of your life every day, not just when you are on the mountain spiritually or when everything in your life is calm and quiet. You have to develop a listening ear, one that can hear amid the din and

noise of a full household or a hectic schedule. I learned to listen while I took a shower, washed the dishes, and sorted laundry.

This may surprise you, but most of my time on my knees is spent emptying my heart and repenting. Once this is done, I can usually hear God's voice whenever He desires to speak to me. When I prepare to speak at a conference or event, I study and make pages of notes. Often I never use them. I make notes for my sake, to put my mind at ease. The real preparation comes when I confess and cleanse my heart before the Lord.

This time of cleansing allows the Holy Spirit to flow through me. It separates the precious and holy (God's Word and anointing) from the vile (my agenda or prejudice). I separate myself physically for whatever time it takes until I sense this separation has taken place spiritually.

DIETING VS. FASTING

In the weeks leading up to my wedding God told me *not to diet*—then He told me *to fast*. This would seem a contradiction; both are a restriction of food. The difference lies in the purpose or motive that inspires them. A diet is designed to help you lose or gain weight. A change of diet may also be initiated to improve or correct health problems. Dieting is a natural physical application that alters our physical well-being, weight, or health. It changes the way we *look* or *feel*.

Fasting is not for weight gain or loss. Nor is it limited to natural healing. It is not designed to change the way you

look and feel but to change the way you *perceive and live*. *A diet may change the way you look, but a fast will change the way you live*. A diet may change your appearance, but a fast will change the way you see; it will alter your inner perspective. The world has perverted and reduced the fast, diminishing it to a diet. As such, it is not a spiritual renewal but a physical one. The deepest transformations are wrought from the inside out.

Before my confrontation with truth, I'd only fasted to lose weight. Granted, I might have done a combination fast and diet, using reasoning such as this: "I need to lose weight, and I need direction, so I'll fast and accomplish both." But on this type of fast, food and weight are still the focus. I have searched the Scriptures and found no reference in God's Word to a fast prescribed for weight loss. Your focus or motive on a fast will be your reward. If God isn't the center, it will be reduced to merely a time of denial.

The fast God led me to in the weeks prior to my wedding was not really about *food* at all—it was about *faith*. I previously placed my faith in my weight. During my fast I learned to transfer my dependency to God. I wanted to know Him; I wanted His truth in my innermost being. *I wanted transformation—not weight reduction*.

Some of you do not need to lose weight, but you do need to break the tethers of a weight that has a hold upon you. *You do not need to lose weight—you need to be loosed from the weight!*

For too long you've measured yourself by images of the

“ideal” person or lifestyle, allowing unhealthy comparisons to affect your moods and actions. You haven’t been Spirit-led—you’ve been weight-led, food-led, emotion-led, addiction-led, or comparison-led. You’ve been “idol-led.”

I was weighed down by weight. My fast was not the turning point for my weight loss; it was the turning point of my faith. I had trusted in myself, only to be disappointed. I needed a spiritual and emotional overhaul. When I saw my idolatry:

I wept and chastened my soul with fasting.

—PSALM 69:10, NKJV

It is your soul that gives an idol preeminence. My soul confused slim with success. My soul longed for my father’s approval and for the approval of men. My soul distorted my vision and perceptions until my physical size, shape, and weight dominated my thought life. I allowed my soul to lead me away from truth and moderation. My soul had to be chastened, and I had to be the one to do it. I had to rise up in the spirit and subject my soul to a chastening fast.

To *chasten* is to “discipline, purify, refine, clarify, and improve.” Discipline is training, and I had to be reprogrammed. Chastening was necessary to educate and cultivate a new me. This chastening by fasting began a purification and refinement of my soul and motives. This clarification brought insight so I could once again see clearly. Just as parents discipline their children to help

them grow and learn right from wrong, my soul had to be chastened so it could improve and become wiser.

This refinement of my soul worked its way out and overtook my natural body and appetites. It was refined and purified by denial. Once the cravings of my soul were mastered, the cravings of my flesh followed. I was no longer enflamed with a passion for food. My body was denied salt and sugar, and their use came back into balance.

When I could no longer comfort myself with food, I ran to God for comfort. I recovered the lost time and productivity I had lent to my obsession with food and weight. All the hours of research and study were redirected. I had been relieved of the relentless burden of worry and fear over my weight. I felt the lightness of a captive set free from a hard and unforgiving taskmaster. My efforts were never good enough before, and I was never thin enough.

My emotions tipped back into balance. They were no longer tied to the fragile and fickle red arrow of my scale.

Before, I had hated myself when I was fat and loved myself when I was thin. My whole self-image could be shattered with the slightest changing of the indicator on my scale. My sense of worth was dictated by the opinions or reactions of others to my physical shape. Even when I was thin I was tormented by fear. The obsession caused me to live on the edge of extreme elation or deep depression. I was at the mercy of the scale and public opinion.

Fasting changed my perception by changing my focus. This in turn caused me to change the way I lived. I didn't live for food or weight; I lived for God. I saw things differently.

Just as people experience increased clarity of eyesight during a physical fast, on my spiritual fast I had my spiritual eyes stripped of scales that had blinded them.

After the fast my eyes were illuminated by God's Word and truth. My eyes shifted off me and onto my Father God. I could see the right path on which to walk, and I recognized my former errors in judgment. Fasting gave me a new vision and a new direction for my life. Like David, when I humbled myself with fasting (Ps. 35:13) I brought my soul and, inevitably, my body under subjection to God's Word and truth. Before that I had been in submission to the cravings and appetites of my flesh and soul.

I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

—EZRA 8:21

Fasting positions you to acknowledge God's provision in your life. It communicates that He is your source. You deny yourself food and tell Him, "I only want You and what You provide." When you lay aside the daily routine of food, drink, pleasures, and leisure, you are able to reevaluate your priorities.

Fasting is not about food; it is about separation. This separation represents a consecration to the Lord, a change in our relationship with Him. God posed this question to Israel:

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing

one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to *loose* the *chains* of injustice and *untie* the *cords* of the yoke, to *set* the oppressed *free* and break every yoke? Is it not to *share* your food with the *hungry* and to *provide* the poor wanderer with *shelter*—when you see the *naked*, to *clothe* him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your *light* will break forth like the dawn, and your *healing* will quickly appear; then your *righteousness* will go before you, and the *glory of the Lord* will be your rear *guard*. Then you will call, and the LORD will *answer*; you will cry for *help*, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you *spend yourselves* in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed... Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

—ISAIAH 58:5–11,
emphasis added

The Israelites' fast had been reduced to religious motions and the denial of food. God was saying that they had reduced it to a one-day happening; they had lost the

substance behind the fast. They had lost contact with God's heart on the matter. God imparts His outlook by outlining the fast that pleases Him.

The fast God chooses loosens chains, unties cords, sets free, breaks every yoke, puts you in a position to share and provide for others, and turns your heart toward the needs of your own flesh and blood. God did not want a single day set aside occasionally to honor Him. He wanted a radical and profound change in lifestyle.

If you aren't careful, you can fast for the wrong reasons. Fasting without pure intentions can become an idol. You must know *why* you are fasting. The Israelites were experts in the law but not in love. They turned from the poor and from doing good. God told His people that if they would reach out beyond themselves, everything they had tried to get for themselves would be provided to them. You can dare to reach out beyond yourself because He promises to bring His light to your darkness, to heal you, and to make you righteous. His glory will guard you, and He will answer your prayers and help you in your time of need.

God wants you to do away with the yoke of oppression. In my case, an eating disorder was the yoke. Such yokes are always oppressive—to those who bear them and to those around them. Likewise, addictions are a yoke of oppression, and so are out-of-control emotions such as anger, anxiety, and fear.

God is admonishing us to get our eyes off ourselves, to stop comparing and contrasting ourselves with others—whether we feel superior or inferior by comparison. For

too long we have spent all our time and energy on the needs of ourselves, but God wants us to spend ourselves on the needs of others, to lift those who are oppressed.

If you'll commit to a time of fasting, God can make it a turning point. He wants your focus to shift permanently from yourself to others. This means a departure from the realm of self-consciousness to an existence free from selfish motives, thus grasping God's heart.

ROOM FOR MORE

How can you be sure fasting food is the right decision? Ask yourself:

- ☞ *In the past, how have I viewed fasting?*
- ☞ *How often do I diet? Do I see fasting as a way of dieting?*
- ☞ *Have my previous fasts been done with the desire for a turning point or answers?*
- ☞ *While reading this chapter, did I feel a desire to fast?*

If your answers were positive, then I believe the Holy Spirit is calling you to enter a deeper level in your walk with God. Separate yourself to Him. Ask God to reveal the influences and areas that stand as hindrances between you and a deeper relationship with Him. Write down some of your motives and prayer requests before you begin your fast.

Even if denying yourself food is a painful process, you will soon discover you have an appetite for something better. If you remain full, even the honey of God's wisdom will seem unappetizing (Prov. 27:7). Just like a second round of dessert after you have already eaten a Thanksgiving banquet, what looked so good at the beginning of the meal now causes you to groan in discomfort just looking at it.

I believe you are hungry, and that is why you are giving the gift of your time in order to read this book. I believe you want more than what you've had and are therefore willing to give more of yourself to God.

Fasting is not a burden but a privilege. It is intimate and private. It originated in the secret place between you and God. He waits in the secret place for you to join Him. After you visit with Him in secret, He will reward you openly.

God wants to restore order where there has been disorder. He wants us to fast so we can be transformed. *Inward transformation brings about outward anointing, blessing, and provision.* Inward transformation positions you for the promotion of the Lord. Even in the midst of opposition, if you fast as an act of separation from the world and unto God, He will reward you.

To learn more on fasting on seeing yourself the way God sees you, check out Lisa's book
It's Not How You Look, It's What You See.