

Prior to 2024, I had never fasted and thought that fasting was intended for other people but not me.

As we moved through December 2023, I felt through a nudging of the Holy Spirit that I really needed to put God first in 2024, whatever that looked like for me.

Each year for the past several years, I have selected a word for the year, and this year's word that was revealed to me was "transfigure". The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines transfigure as "to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance to : transform outwardly and usually for the better". This word was exactly what I was seeking; I wanted to not just be transformed but in a spiritual way.

Inspired by YouTube messages from the Church of the Highlands and Pastor Chris Hodges, I decided that it was appropriate for me to fast for the first 21 days of 2024, in order to demonstrate that God was going to have first place in my life for this year.

One of the larger decisions around fasting is not only the duration but also the nature of the fast (i.e. what are you giving up?). I have always enjoyed soda and sugary treats, so I decided that I would start 2024 on a 21 day fast from those treats. I knew that this would not be easy for me, as my wife and son both have birthdays in that 21 day window, so I would need to forgo birthday cake at those celebrations. However, if I was going to be transfigured and open to what God has in store for me, I was going to need to increase my obedience, and this was a reasonable first step.

In addition to the fast, I also pledged to complete a Bible in a year reading plan, as I wanted to allow God to speak to me through His word.

During the 21 day fasting period in January, through a Bible study from Christine Caine, God led me to the story of Lot's wife, which can be found in Genesis 19, and the instructions of the angels to Lot to evacuate Sodom in verse 17 jumped off the page to me. "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Free to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

I felt that this situation applied to my corporate job, and my instructions were as follows:

- 1) Flee for your life – I want to save you by removing you from that situation
- 2) Don't look back – leaving will be difficult for you, but look ahead to what I have for you instead of reminiscing about or longing for the past
- 3) Go to where I lead you – I have a new thing planned for you (Isaiah 43:19); be obedient to where I am taking you

Coming out the 21 day fast, I knew that God was calling me to leave Nationwide, but I wasn't quite ready to take the leap. I was still clinging to the thought that my job was my source of provision and security.

To accomplish the task of getting my decision across the finish line, God spoke to me through a podcast episode from Christy Wright on January 29, 2024, entitled "What if God Doesn't Want You to Be Comfortable?" and a reminder of the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 to make it clear to me that the right timing to make a change was now.

On January 31, I announced to my boss and my team that my last day of Nationwide would be May 31. I didn't know what God had planned for me next; I only knew that it was time to put behind the things of the past and step into a new identity.

What came next was a period of waiting on God's timing through February, March and the first part of April. Although I was certain of what I was supposed to step away from, I didn't yet know what God was calling me towards.

Psalms 130, especially verse 5, was particularly meaningful during this phase, as I was clearly in a waiting season. "I will wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope".

During this period of seeking God's will, I completed the Bible in a year reading plan on March 17, well ahead of schedule. My approach was consistent with Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

It was very tempting for me to try to initiate something on my own to try to fill in the gap of the unknown, but I knew that my plan would be far inferior to God's. As it reads in Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

As we progressed through April, there didn't seem to be anything new for me on the horizon, but I felt the urge to consider another fasting period to better hear God's voice. Matthew 4:2 describes a period of fasting by Jesus for 40 days and 40 nights before he launched into his earthly ministry, so I decided to follow the example of Jesus and fast before launching into whatever God had for me next.

Thus, I counted back 40 days from the date that I announced as my last day at Nationwide (May 31) and would begin another fast from sugary treats and soda at the right time. Thus, on April 22, I began a 40 day fast to correspond to the last 40 days of my corporate career at Nationwide.

On the first day of the fast, God began to reveal aspects of His plan to me and how He had already set the wheels in motion to move me toward what he had prepared for me.

Shortly after the fast began, I had a leading of the Holy Spirit to check around at the websites of churches in the Columbus area in our fellowship to see if there were ministry or job openings nearby that would allow me to move toward my purpose, while at the same time allowing my wife to continue with the national women's ministry in our fellowship.

Coincidentally, God had ordained that a church administrator role would open at just the right time in a town less than 5 miles from where our son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter live and also where my wife could keep the teaching job that she loves.

This role had just opened in the prior couple of days, was only posted on their website, and they had plans to fill it quickly. Thus, I had needed to look for that spot at exactly the right time in the right place in order to get it. Not only that, but the person leaving that role had postponed her retirement by 6 months, in God's providence to get the timing of that decision aligned with the timing of what He was doing in me.

After finding the role on the church website, I applied that same day, and things began to come together rather quickly.

By April 28, the 7th day of the fast, I had an offer, and God had provided a role, in exactly the right location, at exactly the right time. He did more than we could have asked or imagined (Ephesians 3:20)!

God's plan was perfect, His timing was perfect, and what was required of me was obedience. Even though obedience was easy, it was right.

I successfully completed the 40 day fast on May 31. I didn't even eat cake at my granddaughter's first birthday or at my own retirement reception, which admittedly felt awkward to explain. However, the goal was obedience and not the approval of man.

Throughout the tail end of the 40 day fast, God revealed to me how to finish my corporate career strong, have the right words to say to those who had questions, and begin sharing my story to others. Many relationships were deepened because of what God had been doing in me and through me.

God is so good!

One cool ending to the story is that I broke the 40 day fast on June 1<sup>st</sup> with the men in my new church, in the place where God led me.

All praise and glory to God!