

Praise for *Fasting Forward*

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

Andy Byrd
YWAM Kona and The Send

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

Christine Caine
Founder, A21 and Propel Women

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

Rick Warren
Author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

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

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

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

Russell Evans

Global Senior Pastor, Planetshakers Church

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

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

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

Rob Hoskins
President, OneHope, Inc.

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

Nathan Morris
Founder and President, Shake the Nations Ministries

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

Daniel Kolenda
President and CEO, Christ for all Nations

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

Ps. Dr. Niko Njotorahardjo
Senior Pastor, Gereja Bethal Indonesia

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

Brian Alarid
President, World Prays
Chairman, Pray For All

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

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

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

Personally, during critical times in my ministry as well as for sustained strength for daily living, prayer and fasting have continued to be a reliable friend. So, it is with great assurance that I sincerely recommend this book for first-time reading as well as for repeated reference through your own spiritual development.”

Tony D. Stewart
Assistant General Overseer, Church of God, Cleveland, TN
Lead Pastor, City Life Church, Tampa, FL

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

Jean-Luc Trachsel
President, Jean-Luc Trachsel Ministries, the International Association of Healing Ministries (IAHM)
Founder, Europe Shall Be Saved (ESBS)

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

David Wells
General Superintendent, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

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

Tim Hill
Church Presiding Bishop and General Overseer, Cleveland, TN

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

Cindy Jacobs
Founder, Generals International

“With *Fasting Forward*, my friend and mentor, Dr. Billy Wilson, offers a biblical prescription for unleashing Heaven on Earth. In this book, we discover that via the conduit of this

transformative Christ-endorsed discipline, we stand poised to advance God’s Kingdom agenda with clarity and conviction.”

Samuel Rodriguez

President and CEO, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

“In a world filled with endless distractions and instant gratifications, Dr. Wilson’s book, *Fasting Forward*, offers a compelling invitation to rediscover fasting as a pathway to deeper communion with God. This book doesn't just inform; it inspires and equips believers to embrace fasting as a vital discipline for spiritual growth and renewal. With profound insights and practical guidance, *Fasting Forward* demystifies the practice of fasting, making it accessible and relevant for today's believers. Prepare to be challenged and changed as you embark on this journey of faith, surrender, and spiritual breakthrough.”

Daniela Freidzon-McCabe

Pastor and speaker, King of Kings Church

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

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

Reggie Dabbs

The Youth Alliance

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

Dr. Mike Rakes

President, Evangel University

Fasting Forward

Advancing Your Spiritual Life Through Fasting

Other Titles by Billy Wilson

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

Fasting Forward: Advancing Your Spiritual Life Through Fasting

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

Generation Z: Born for the Storm

The Power of One

Fasting Forward
Advancing Your Spiritual Life Through Fasting

Dr. Billy Wilson



Empowered Books
An imprint of ORU Press

Tulsa, OK USA

Copyright © 2024 Oral Roberts University

oru.edu/orupress

ORU Press (Oral Roberts University Press) is the book-and-journal-publishing division of Oral Roberts University. Empowered Books, an imprint of ORU Press, is a registered trademark of ORU Press.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any way whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles and reviews. For more information, contact ORU Press, 7777 S. Lewis Ave., Tulsa, OK 74171 USA

Fasting Forward: Advancing Your Spiritual Life Through Fasting, Revised and Updated Edition

Hardcover: ISBN: 978-1-950971-31-2

Jacket & interior design and composition: Hampton Creative, Tulsa, OK
Copy editor, revised edition: Mark E. Roberts

All scripture quotations unless marked otherwise are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version. Public Domain.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Disclaimer

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

Acknowledgments and Dedication

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

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

The production of any book requires a host of individuals who serve to bring the written words to a published form. Many have been those who have assisted with this volume. I want to express my gratitude to a few of them here: Kay Horner, who served as my associate pastor and lead intercessor for several years, worked tirelessly in the initial editing of every sentence and word. Pathway Press believed in me and this project as they helped release it for the first time.

Alyssa Sanders has spent countless hours revising and refining the original manuscript for this new release, Dr. Mark E. Roberts edited this revised text, and Johnie Hampton and his team at Hampton Creative designed a fantastic new cover and layout. The Oral Roberts University Board of Trustees has supported me in carving out the time needed for this revision, and my entire office team has cheered me on to get this book back into print. A special thank you to my friend Mart Green for writing the Foreword. Mart and I have fasted together many times throughout our journey serving at ORU and Empowered21 and have watched God come through.

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

Finally, I give thanks for my dear wife, Lisa, to whom I have been married for over forty-five years, which means she has been with me through every major and minor time of fasting in my life. She has supported me, helped me take care of my body, and prayed with me for God's blessing as we sought His face together. God's perfect design for me has been to have Lisa by my side through it all. She is an amazing wife, a fantastic mother, and the best (and prettiest!) grandmother on planet Earth. Thank you, Lisa, for your consistent, daily encouragement. I will always love you.

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

Contents

Foreword by Mart Green

Introduction

Chapter 1 Do What? Sharing Reflections of Fasting

Chapter 2 Give Me One Good Reason to Fast (How About Six?)

Chapter 3 Going Vertical: Reclaiming the Priority of Fasting

Chapter 4 A Hunger Strike Against Hell: Changing the Perception of Fasting

Chapter 5 Fasting 101: Learning the Principles of Fasting

Chapter 6 Fasting Hurts! Solving the Problems of Fasting

Chapter 7 Dying For Your Destiny: Releasing the Potential of Fasting

Chapter 8 Fasting Forward: Experiencing the Power of Fasting

Conclusion

Notes

Additional Reading on Fasting

Foreword

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

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

In *Fasting Forward*, Dr. Wilson takes his readers on a journey of understanding the biblical foundations and practical aspects of fasting. In this book, you will dive deep into scripture as he shares the purposes of fasting, which include repentance, readiness, revelation,

release, restoration, and reward. He also shares about “heroes of the faith” from the Bible and throughout Christian history who have embraced this discipline.

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

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

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

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

— Mart Green

Ministry Investment Officer, Hobby Lobby

Introduction

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

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

The days surrounding my first writing of this book were filled with spiritual warfare and significant ministry intensity. God was positioning my heart and life for a new phase in my journey, and the Lord used fasting to shape and mold me. Now, after twenty years, I feel my need for God's grace is greater than it has ever been, and fasting continues to help me position my heart to hear His voice. Out of all the spiritual disciplines, fasting has probably changed my life the most. It has also been the most difficult to practice. The lessons in this book have been updated with several new insights that I've gained over the years. I pray these principles and my life journey will bless and strengthen you as you advance spiritually by *Fasting Forward*.

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

— Evangelist Charles F. Finney

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

— Luke 5:34–35

Chapter 1

Do What?

Sharing Reflections of Fasting

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

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

A Call to Fast

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

As I reflect on my first attempts at expressing my hunger for God by experiencing human hunger, I realize that starting this discipline is never easy. Seemingly, every time I prepared to

fast, something would interfere. My schedule would change. Family demands would increase. A crisis would happen, or some interruption would convince me that this was not the time to stop eating for a while. When I finally did settle on a time, the pain I experienced in my body caused me to recoil.

My first attempts at fasting were pitiful. Self-discovery is always one of the by-products of this spiritual discipline. One of the first things I discovered about myself was that I was addicted to food! From the moment I would declare or start a fast, my hunger would crescendo in waves of craving, which many times would drown my spiritual desire and result in another failed attempt at obedience. In other words, I would break my fast prematurely. My flesh was weaker than I thought.

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

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

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

2. *Fasting would position my heart to receive additional grace from the Lord, so a failure in fasting could rob me of the grace I needed.* Over time, I discovered (and am still discovering) that when the Holy Spirit pressed me to fast, He was trying to prepare me for what was ahead. If I won the victory of obedience to Him during the fast, I would witness the victory He desired for me later. This concept is illustrated when the Holy Spirit led or pressed Jesus into the wilderness for a forty-day period of fasting. Jesus was already anointed, He was prepared for ministry, but the victory over His flesh and Satan obtained in the wilderness would move Jesus into a new dimension of public ministry. Triumph in the private battle would mean blessing in the public arena. The same is true for us.
3. *Fasting is a spiritual exercise, and I would become stronger with each attempt.* Each fast would bring new difficulties, unexpected challenges, and new opportunities to learn from the Holy Spirit. Learning this discipline was part of my discipleship journey. More important than learning about the discipline of fasting was learning more about the object of my spiritual hunger and His relationship with me.
4. *Thousands of other Christians had walked this path before me.* Many powerful, anointed men of God paid the price by consistently participating in the discipline of fasting.
- » Savonarola, a Florentine monk and preacher in the fifteenth century, fasted regularly, and
people filled cathedrals to hear him denounce the sins of his day.²
 - » Martin Luther, the great reformer of the sixteenth century, fasted for days at a time while
translating the Bible.³
 - » John Wesley, the father of Methodism, fasted two days each week—Wednesday and

Friday.⁴

» Jonathan Edwards, a powerful leader of the First Great Awakening in America, fasted. He did not eat or sleep three days before his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” It was so powerful that people clung to the backs of the pews for fear of falling into hell. During this time, he cried out many times, “God, give me New England.”⁵

» The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once announced, "Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory."⁶

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

Spirit-Empowerment and Fasting

Leaders of early Pentecostalism were given to this discipline. Fasting was one of the catalysts for the Azusa Street revival and outpouring of Pentecostal power, which took place in Los Angeles in 1906. Azusa became one the greatest revivals in Christian history and is ranked by some as the most significant religious event in the world since the Reformation.⁷ People from around the world visited the revival, which was held in a former livery stable in Los Angeles. Services took place throughout the day with hundreds of people experiencing supernatural power and Holy Spirit baptism.

Some historians believe that William Seymour and Edward Lee were about three days into a ten-day fast when Lee received the baptism of the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in

tongues. When Lee gave his testimony at a prayer meeting the very night of his experience, seven other people began speaking in a “heavenly language,” and the revival fire was ignited. Seymour himself received the gift of the Holy Ghost during those same ten days.

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

Another participant and eyewitness of the Azusa Street revival said, “They just waited on the Lord in fastings, prayer and the unity of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit spoke and moved, they moved. The Holy Spirit was their leader, and when the Spirit anointed, then that person spoke. The Holy Spirit was there in operation, and this was brought about through intense closeness and communion with God by everyone forgetting about food and their cares. We just drank at the Fountain of the Spirit.”⁹

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

During the last almost 120 years since the Azusa Street outpouring, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have experienced surges of emphasis on the discipline of fasting. The twenty-first century has especially been marked by an increased emphasis on the discipline of

fasting. Churches across the globe have participated in and initiated corporate fasts for seven, ten, twenty-one, and even forty days. Every year, thousands of congregations start the new year with a season of seeking God that includes fasting. Large stadium events have focused not only on prayer but also on fasting as a way to change history. I remember years ago lying on my face on the Mall in Washington, DC, in fasting and prayer during a Call event led by Lou Engle. Thousands of young people gathered in prayer and fasting for revival and to shift the nation spiritually. One of our focus points for the fast was to see the Roe vs. Wade decision legalizing abortion reversed in our nation. Although it took many years, God heard the cry of thousands of fasting and praying people in our generation, and the Supreme Court overturned Roe vs. Wade on June 24, 2022, in a 6–3 decision.¹¹

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

A Season of Fasting

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

I went to North Hollywood, to the big tent almost within sight of the Universal Pictures Studio. I had been on the platform shouting and dancing in the Spirit; the next thing I knew I was off the big platform with my hands on a sick person who

was in a wheelchair, and the Lord healed her. This was on my 52nd day of the fast. How I got there I do not know. I was told that I had more energy and was more active than any one that was eating.

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

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

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

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

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

What If . . . ?

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

Ever since that first full year of ministry, I have been challenged to pursue the Lord by fasting. Over forty years after that retreat, I can personally testify that fasting is one of the most powerful, life-changing things I have ever attempted. During these years, I have fasted in a variety of ways—one-day, three-day, seven-day, ten-day, fourteen-day, twenty-one-day fasts, and several different forty-day fasts. This discipline has brought me beauty and brokenness, pain and power, cleansing and closeness, deliverance and distress, hurt and hope. Most of all, the answer to my "Do what?" question has drawn me nearer to Jesus, and that has made it all worthwhile.

Chapter 1 Reflection Questions

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

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Finney, C. G. (2006). *The original memoirs of Charles G. Finney* (H. Wessel, Ed.). Bethany House. (Original work published 1876)
2. Duewel, W. L. (1995). *Revival fire*. Zondervan.
3. Hall, F. (1954). *The fasting prayer*. Franklin Hall Publisher.
4. Chatham, R. D. (1987). *Fasting: A biblical historical study*. Bridge Publishing Inc.
5. Chatham, R. D. (1987). *Fasting: A biblical historical study*. Bridge Publishing Inc.
6. Foster, R.J. (1978). *Celebration of discipline*. Harper & Row.
7. Friedman, R. (Ed.). (1998). *The LIFE millennium: The 100 most important events and people of the past 1,000 years*. Little, Brown & Company.
8. Hall, F. (1954). *The fasting prayer*. Franklin Hall Publisher.
9. Hall, F. (1954). *The fasting prayer*. Franklin Hall Publisher.
10. Roberts, O. (1948). *How to receive and keep your healing*. Healing Waters.
11. Liptak, A. (2022, June 24). In 6-to-3 ruling, Supreme Court ends nearly 50 years of abortion rights. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-overturned-supreme-court.html>
12. Hall, F. (1954). *The fasting prayer*. Franklin Hall Publisher.