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"'EVEN 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

"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."

—2 CHRONICLES 7:14

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INTRODUCTION

Here We Go

Several years ago my wife, Sydney, and I began to notice the Holy Spirit gently and persistently inviting us to explore some deeper waters of life with God. This invitation from God came at what seemed to be an unusual time in our lives.

Just a few years earlier, we had launched a new church called Ethos Church with a small group of friends. By nearly all measures, things had gone better than we had even hoped. Not only was the church growing, it was multiplying, and we were having more fun than we thought was possible for such a challenging task. As the church rapidly grew, my family began to multiply, as well. Like clockwork, Sydney would give birth to a little boy every two years or so. Our three boys filled our house with joy, laughter, and even some chaos, as we learned to navigate these new seasons of life.

Life was wild and full.

We had a young, growing church.

We had an even younger, growing family.

Marriage was good. Parenting was good. Church was good.

Life was good.

And yet despite all of the joy, we had a deep yearning for more. We longed to see God move among us in the powerful ways we had only read about in Scripture and revival history. We wanted to experience this kind of life with God for ourselves.



It was during this crazy season that the gentle voice of the Spirit began calling us to push into deeper waters—to believe God for more. We began to realize that in many ways, despite our “success” in ministry, we were still like little kids playing on the deck of our father’s sailboat as it was tied safely to the dock inside a 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.

God began using this imagery of a boat, a harbor, and the open waters to illuminate what was a new way for us of understanding life in the kingdom. We discovered that if we weren’t careful, we could become so comfortable in the safety of the harbor that we would never stop to ask whether or not we were actually sailing.

I believe it is possible—dare I say common—for many Christians to spend their entire life “believing in God” without ever attempting anything in life that actually requires them to exercise their faith. It is one thing to read stories about people who took great risks with God, but it’s something entirely different to taste the sweetness of that kind of life on a personal level.

This temptation to play it safe, especially in the realm of faith, is still a real struggle for Sydney and me at times. Even though we have experienced the deep reward that comes on the other side of risk-taking faith, the gravitational pull toward comfort and certainty can still feel crippling.

Over the years, we have seen God move in astounding ways. Yet despite God’s flawless track record, we still have moments in which we are slow to trust him, slow to launch out in faith again, and slow to set sail toward the open waters.

I don’t know about you, but I want to be the kind of person who keeps pushing out toward the open waters with God.

I think I was made for that.

I think you were made for that.

And I believe that is precisely what Jesus came to offer.



It was that persistent call to explore the open waters of faith that led us to a moment God used to forever shift the trajectory of our life and our ministry.

God used the unexpected combination of

a passing conversation
with a new friend halfway around the world
about an often-ignored spiritual discipline,

...to ignite a desire to once again believe God for the impossible in our city and far beyond.

Let me try to explain.

SOMETIMES SEEING HELPS OUR BELIEVING

In February 2016, Sydney and I began a friendship with a couple named Muriithi and Carol Wanjau and their three amazing children. I could fill an entire book with stories about this incredible family, but for the sake of time and space, I'll share just one. The Wanjaus have been positioned by God in Nairobi, Kenya, and they lead one of the most amazing networks of churches I have ever seen. Our friendship with this family began that year when we got to spend several weeks with them 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 during our time there with our Kenyan brothers and sisters. Their love for God, their passion for reaching the lost, and their commitment to living holy, counter-cultural lives 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 life of our Kenyan brothers and sisters impacted me in a profound way.

One day, as Sydney and I were riding to the store with Carol, we were picking her brain about the spiritual vibrancy of their church network. We wanted to know 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 she went on to share an important

spiritual rhythm that has transformed their churches and community for the better. I will never forget what she said:

"DAVE AND SYDNEY, MUCH OF WHAT YOU SEE HERE 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 when many of the puzzle pieces began to click in our hearts. Little did we know that our family had arrived in Kenya on the last day of a month-long fast that the Wanjaus and their churches lean into every January. In fact, they spend nearly three months out of every year devoted 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 a full-throttled pursuit of God above everything else through prayer and fasting.

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 help produce, then why have I given such little attention to this particular dimension of life with God?*

I'm convinced there are times when God will use someone else's life to ignite something wonderful and new inside us. Like a match in the hand of God, their life becomes the spark for igniting a new season of wonder and growth deep within us. I often thank God for

If that is the kind of faith that prayer and fasting can help produce, then why have I given such little attention to this particular dimension of life with God?

our friends in Kenya and the way he used them to ignite a hunger for prayer and fasting in our family and church.

NOT AN ISOLATED EVENT

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

In fact, more often than not, it is the rule.

You would be hard-pressed to find any significant movement of God across human history that was not first preceded by a group of faithful men and women who were committed to the Lord in prayer and fasting.

I believe Jesus' words that those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" will be filled.¹

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 our age. I wonder if it is even possible to truly hunger for Jesus if our souls are currently satisfied with far lesser things.

This is why I want to spend a few moments with you talking about 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 churches and 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 bulk of my attention will focus on fasting because most of us are less familiar with this discipline. 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.

I chose to call this book a "conversation" because that's what I pray this will become—not just between you and me, but more importantly, between you and the people in your life with whom you will sail toward the open waters.

As we embark on this journey, my prayer is that this conversation will help you move from *learning* to *living*. I hope it will help you to get off 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 feel equipped and ready to take *your* next bold step toward God through prayer and fasting.

So without further ado, let's go.

