

The
Mystery
of the
Empty
Stomach

JOEY BONIFACIO

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To my son Joshua:
It was your childlike
faith that has inspired
me to write this book.

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Preface

This is a small book about fasting.

Its goal is to remove the mystery and the dread surrounding it.

In the end, you will find fasting both satisfying and enjoyable.

Its benefits and true value will pleasantly surprise you!

Foreword

We all know that as Christians, we are supposed to fast.
Jesus did not say, “If you fast . . .” He said,
“When you fast . . .”

Yet, most of us see fasting as a duty to be endured.
But why does God wants us to fast?
What is the mystery behind the empty stomach?

Joey Bonifacio takes a fresh look at fasting,
providing great insight into the underlying
motivation of Jesus revealed concerning this basic
Christian act of worship and obedience.

Joey’s treatment is biblically sound and brings
to life the amazing truth about this long-forgotten
and often neglected spiritual exercise.

After you read this book, you will never think
about fasting the same way again!

Bruce Fidler
Pastor, Every Nation Church Seattle

Chapter One

UNVEILING THE MYSTERY

Ah . . . Fasting! Its mere mention can bring to mind a variety of thoughts. The very notion of not eating can be daunting: “No coffee in the morning? Impossible! Skip breakfast, maybe—but no lunch and dinner? Hmm, I don’t know about that. Who thought of this thing, anyway?”

The first time I heard of the idea of fasting was as a young boy. The primary reason given to me was to cleanse oneself. After all, I was told, sin came into the world through eating. (Remember Adam and Eve?) I was taught that fasting was a way to get closer to God, a way to hear Him better.

As I grew older, I fasted because I saw it as a religious duty. I saw it as a way of depriving myself of so-called “worldly things” in order to starve the “flesh”, thus becoming a more spiritual person. I thought it was a way of purifying myself in order to get God to listen. Little did I know how narrow my understanding was.

The Christian Perspective

Fasting is somewhat of a mystery. Why do Christians do it? What is its true significance? To begin with, is it even necessary? In order to answer these questions biblically, we will focus on a set of verses that is repeated in three of the four Gospels.

In Luke 5:33, the crowd questioned Jesus:

They said to him, “John’s disciples **often fast** and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

The people were talking to Jesus about fasting and were puzzled as they contrasted and dutiful behavior of the Pharisees and the followers of John the Baptist with the seemingly closer, more relational behavior of Jesus’ disciples.

To further add to their confusion, although their question was about fasting, Jesus replied by talking about a wedding!

Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom **fast** while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.

Luke 5:34, 35

What was He saying? He was telling them that while others saw fasting as a religious duty, His disciples were going to see it another way. They would see it in light of a relationship—a relationship that starts out as guests of the bridegroom but eventually graduates into something deeper.

While others fast out of duty, His bride will do it because she delights in Him.

In John :28,29, John the Baptist explains to his disciples what the relationship was going to be. He said to them:

*“You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.’ **The bride belongs to the bridegroom.** The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”*

Jesus’ mysterious reply was, in fact, His way of unveiling the mystery behind fasting. Jesus knew that one day, His guests would become part of His Church—His bride. When He will be taken away from them, they will fast.

Jesus was telling them that while others fast out of duty, His bride will do it because she delights in Him. While others fast to deprive themselves of the flesh, she will do it because she desires Him, and while others fast out of desperation, she will fast because she is devoted to Him.

From duty to delight, from deprivation to desire, from desperation to devotion, the rest of this book is designed to help you appreciate and enjoy fasting just as a bride enjoys being with her bridegroom. Hopefully, it will unveil the mystery behind the empty stomach.

Personal Application

How have you perceived fasting in the past? Have you ever looked at it in light of a relationship with God as His precious bride?

Ask God to give you a brand-new revelation about fasting so you can appreciate it, discover its true benefits, and enjoy it.

For Further Study and Prayer

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

Psalm 63:1-5

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Matthew 4:3,4

Chapter Two

FROM DUTY TO DELIGHT

I have heard people complain that the Bible is too masculine. They say that the God of the Bible relates to people from a very male perspective and that He regularly refers to His people as sons, soldiers, farmers, or athletes.

But when Jesus talked about fasting, He gave a unique description of His people: as His bride. This is not applicable to women only. Jesus was referring to all His disciples, both male and female, as His beloved bride.

It is intriguing that God chose the relationship of a bride and a groom to describe His relationship with us.

Think about it. A bride and groom relationship is not just male and female relationship. The commitment level is much deeper than that.

For that matter, it is not even quite like the relationship of a husband and wife. Husband and wife relationships can grow stale. Spouses can even drift apart.

It is possible to be married to someone but not be delighted with the relationship. How many broken marriages have we heard of?

On the other hand, a bride and groom relationship is always fresh and new. It is full of delight and excitement. This is how Jesus wants our relationship with Him to be: a relationship that is both a commitment and a delight.

It's Exciting!

Delight is about excitement. Have you ever noticed a bride-to-be's disposition? She's always excited. She never considers all the preparation as work. She's just excited! She spends time poring over bridal magazines and talks on the phone for hours, announcing the good news to all her friends and well-wishers.

She goes over invitation samples and chooses the best paper. She proofreads the draft over and over, checking for imperfections. She meets with the florist, caterer, photographer, and musicians—leaving no detail unattended.

Then she schedules numerous fittings with her couturier, examining every inch, pleat, bead, and button of her gown.

At each point, she can't stop talking to everyone about her fiancé. Before she knows it, the hours have flown by and she hasn't eaten a single meal! She was just too excited. She did not even know she was fasting.

That's the type of relationship God is looking for—that we will have such an eagerness to spend time with Him and to fill our hearts with His Word. When was the last time we got so excited and consumed about our relationship with Jesus that we forgot to eat? Now that's Jesus idea of a fast.

It's Fascinating!

Delight is about fascination. What does it mean to be fascinated? It is being captivated, enthralled, spellbound. Can't eat, can't sleep, can't think . . . I just want to be with Him all the time.

All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves. I looked for him but did not find him.

Song of Songs 3:1

Fascination is far from duty. A bride-to-be skips her meals not because she has to, but simply because she's fascinated. She'd rather be on the phone conversing with her lover than munching on a donut.

She skips the appetizers, cuts the gravy, and leaves out the dessert all because she wants to fit perfectly into her gown. What she really desires is to look good for her groom.

It's Craving!

Delight is about craving.

To crave is to miss and want something so badly. A bride willingly misses her meals because she craves the one she loves more. She can't eat. She can't sleep. She's in love. She misses him.

A bride and groom relationship is always fresh and new.

Remember the good old days with God? Do you miss Him? Are you craving for His presence? Can you get Him out of your mind? Do you still devour His Word and His promises today or have they become dusty memories?

All too often, Jesus, our Bridegroom, is overridden by a craving for food. The act of fasting makes us remember how precious God's presence truly is and what a privilege it is for us to even have a relationship with Him.

Jesus was telling His listeners that while the Pharisees saw fasting as a duty, His bride will see it as a delight. They saw it as a discipline, she will see it as fascinating. They considered it an obligation, she will see it as a craving.

Personal Application

List three things that fascinate you about God.

Are they each worth skipping a meal for?

If you answered yes, you are on your way to fasting for at least one day.

For Further Study and Prayer

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalm 1:1-3

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

Chapter Three

FROM DEPRIVATION TO DESIRE

The Pharisees' idea of fasting was to deprive the flesh in order to strengthen the spirit. They were focusing on the wrong thing. Jesus was telling them that fasting was not about depriving yourself. Rather, it's about desiring the Bridegroom more.

A bride and groom relationship is about desire. It focuses on wanting someone so much you don't even think about the cost.

A young man who desires his bride-to-be searches for the finest engagement ring he can buy simply because he desires her. His passion for her transcends the cost of the ring.

Imagine if after he gives her the ring, he says: "You need to understand something. In order to get you this ring, I had to deprive myself of thirty-eight meals, two vacations, a new set of golf clubs, and a suit. I hope you're happy now."

This is what we do when we focus on the deprivation of our flesh rather than on desiring to spend time with God.

The Wrong Focus

To think of fasting as “the meals I am giving up” is to focus on the wrong thing. The Groom focuses on the love of His life—His bride. The cost is of no consequence. Jesus did not buy you with a diamond ring, but with His own precious blood. That’s how much he wants you.

Jesus did not say, “Hey, I love you so much that deprived Myself of heaven just to be with you.” Instead, he says, “I love you so much. I died for you. I want you to marry Me. Be My bride.”

A bride never thinks she is deprived. People who are deprived look somber. They feel miserable and look it! Not so with the bride. She goes around with a glow on her cheeks, a twinkle in her eye, and a smile on her face. She exudes life and her appearance is well cared for.

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen, and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Matthew 6:17,18

The Right Focus

One of the keys to enjoying a fast is to focus on the right thing, just as a bride who focuses on what she is receiving and not on what she is giving up. She never thinks she is being deprived. She knows she is blessed. She is not saying, “I am depriving myself of my family, my freedom, and my friends.” Rather, she focuses on what she is gaining.

Jesus’ bride is very excited because she’s been told that His gift is indescribable.

*Thanks be to God for his **indescribable gift!***

2 Corinthians 9:15

Not only are her gifts indescribable, she’s been told they are perfect.

*Every **good and perfect gift** is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

James 1:17

What priceless gifts has our Bridegroom given us?

The Gift of Eternal Life

*For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 6:23

Eternal life will not begin when I die. It began on the day I saw it, the day He asked me to marry Him. It is a gift only He can give.

The Gift of Righteousness

*. . . how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the **gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

Romans 5:17

The bride tells herself, "What a gift! He gives me abundant provision that allows me to reign in life."

The Ultimate Gift

And after she has delighted in the gifts He brings, she realizes, her true gift and desire is Him!

"Why not, there's no one like Him. He is faithful. He is gentle. He is patient. He is kind. He is capable and dependable. He is experienced and accomplished. He is wise and full of surprises . . .

“On top of all these, He owns the universe. He is rich. He’s simply wonderful. Actually, he’s perfect. But most of all, He loves me! How privileged I am to be His bride!”

The bride’s true gift and desire is her Bridegroom!

He is her focus.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17

Personal Application

List down three (or more) gifts God has given you.

Compare the value of these gifts with fried chicken, pasta and your favorite dessert. How do they compare? Are God's gifts worth giving up food for, even for just one day?

For Further Study and Prayer

I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

Psalm 40:8

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73:25

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

Chapter Four

FROM DESPERATION TO DEVOTION

Throughout the Old Testament, we find fasting as a response to a desperate situation.

Judges 20:26 tells us a story of how the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They **fasted** that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD.

They were fasting because their enemies had killed 40,000 of their troops in two days. They were desperate.

In 2 Samuel 12:16, David pleaded with God for the child. He **fasted** and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.

King David fasted because his son was ill to the point of death. He, too, was desperate.

In 1 Kings 21, King Ahab was told that God would judge him and destroy his entire family and descendants.

Verse 27 states, *When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and **fasted** . . .*

He fasted because of the impending doom.

Nehemiah fasted when he heard reports that Jerusalem had been broken down and its gates had been burned with fire. He was told that the exiles who returned to the city were in great danger. Nehemiah 1:4 records, *When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and **fasted** and prayed before the God of heaven.*

He was desperate.

Esther and Mordecai, together with all the Jews who were threatened with annihilation, fasted. Esther 4:3 recounts, *In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was a great mourning among the Jews, with **fasting**, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

They were in big trouble.

Undoubtedly, fasting is associated with desperate situations. Through the centuries, people fasted mostly when they found themselves in tight spots.

Jesus, on the other hand, was espousing a new and higher motivation to fast—not one borne of desperation, but out of devotion.

Our devotion expressed through fasting deepens our passion for the Bridegroom. It allows us to continually grow and mature in our relationship with Him. And as we do, we become secure in His love—so secure that we are able to be the bride He has destined us to be.

She Knows Who She Is

Once again, let us go back to the bride. She is relaxed and excited, calm and enchanted, full of hope and looking forward to the future. She is fearless.

She is not desperate. She knows who she is not. She is not a giggly girlfriend who is insecure of her situation. She is not a “one night stand” who knows her paltry position. Neither is she a mistress who is forever desperate for attention, nor a disheartened concubine who needs recognition. Most of all, she is not a prostitute who is unsure of her worth.

She is by no means desperate. She is his bride. Desired. Assured. Engaged. Betrothed. She is special, secure, spoken for, and satisfied. She is without fear.

We fast not so
He will hear us,
but for us to
hear Him.

We fast not to twist God's arm so he will pay attention to us. We already have His undivided attention. We don't fast in order to make ourselves worthy of His acceptance. We already have His unconditional love.

We fast not so He will hear us, but for us to hear Him. Not for Him to focus on us, but for us to focus on Him. To train our soul and flesh to be still and to know that above all, He is God and the Lover of our souls.

Desperate people fast to get a breakthrough in their circumstances. Jesus' bride fasts because He is her breakthrough.

She is given entirely to Him. She says in her heart, "I will be faithful, I will wait, I will remain pure. I am his bride." Not only is she delighted, not only is she desirous—she is devoted.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Revelation 19:7

Personal Application

Think of two or more situations in your life, whether past or present, that you consider desperate. Write them in the space below.

God uses desperate situations to draw us into a life of devotion to Him. How can you turn these situations into opportunities for devotion to God?

For Further Study and Prayer

“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.’”

Jeremiah 2:2

*Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in you're
your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear
your name.*

Psalm 86:11

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear,
because fear has to do with punishment. The one who
fears is not made perfect in love.*

1 John 4:18

Chapter Five

FROM DISORDER TO DESIGN

Jesus's discussion about fasting did not end with a short question and answer. After he had shown that fasting was about a relationship between a bride and a groom, He proceeded with this parable:

"No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins . . ."

Luke 5:36, 37

It is important to point out that the verse above was Jesus' way of explaining to His audience about the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. However, we can take this truth and apply it to our discussion on fasting.

As disconnected as this parable may seem to the discussion, Jesus' listeners knew the connection well. He was referring to wedding elements that related to the conversation about the bride and the groom.

The people knew that no wedding would be complete without the proper garments and good wine. Matthew 22:11,12 reads:

*“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing **wedding clothes**. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without **wedding clothes**?’ The man was speechless.”*

Wedding clothes were very important in Jesus’ day. Jesus pointed out that even guests should wear the proper attire. How much more should the bride be clothed appropriately?

And then there was the matter of the wine. Remember the wedding at Cana, in Galilee?

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

John 2:9,10

Jesus’ illustration was well understood by His listeners. They knew exactly what He was talking about. Garments and wine were very much a part of weddings in the ancient Jewish culture.

In this chapter, we shall focus on the wedding clothes.

Patchwork Christianity

In Luke 5:36, 37, Jesus was narrating how unthinkable it would be to tear portions of a beautiful, new garment and sew it onto an old, threadbare one. Imagine a bride walking down the aisle wearing a gown with patches of new cloth sewed onto an old, moth-eaten, and stained gown. That would simply be ridiculous!

Yet, we find Christians everywhere taking portions of the new thing God wants to do in their lives and trying to sew it into their old lives. Not only does it look silly, it simply will not work.

A New Gown

Jesus is saying that if we are to become His bride, we can't wear the old life we used to wear. More importantly, we can't wear one that is patched up. Rather, if we are to become His bride, we must get rid of the old sin and the patchwork of compromise. Instead, we are to put on the new gown of His design.

Neither the old gown nor patchwork Christianity will work.

One will no longer fit you, and the other will tear. Both are not designed to contain the new you—Jesus' bride. The new design is made of a different fabric. It is, in fact, a new creation. There's nothing like it.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; **the old has gone, the new has come!***

2 Corinthians 5:17

Isaiah 61:10 tells us how delighted the bride is because of her new gown:

*I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has **clothed me with garments** of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

Despite her imperfections, her Lover has supplied her with a robe of righteousness, a gown that allows her to stand confidently beside her perfect Groom.

Put It On!

Ephesians 4:22, 24 tells us:

. . . to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

We find Christians everywhere taking portions of the new thing God wants to do in their lives and trying to sew it into their old lives.

In some interesting way, fasting is about putting it off some weight. It is the removing of things in our system that cause us to not fit into the new gown (life) our Bridegroom has intended for us.

If we are able to be His bride, we need to put off the old self and then put on the new self. Only when we put on His robe of true righteousness and holiness can we be the bride we are destined to be, the bride who can share eternity with Him!

*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a **bride beautifully dressed** for her husband.*

Revelation 21:2

Personal Application

Are there areas in your life that are lived in compromise? List them down.

As you fast and pray, ask God to:

- Give you a revelation of the righteousness we have in Christ that can only come by faith.
- Grant you the grace to walk in His righteousness— not in any compromise.

For Further Study and Prayer

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Romans 1:17

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4

Chapter Six

FROM DIET TO DEPOSIT

Whether it's watching our salt intake due to high blood pressure, regulating fat brought about by elevated cholesterol levels, curbing sugar consumption because of the threat of diabetes, or simply reducing what we eat, dieting seems to be the way to go.

More commonly, people's diets are motivated by a desire to stay slim and look good, borne of a need for identity and acceptance. From South Beach to Okinawan, fish to vegetables, Jenny Craig to Robert Atkins, Slim Fast to Lean Cuisine, diet plans abound.

By now, you must have it figured out. We have gone full circle. Unknowingly, we are still fasting today. We just use another word for it—dieting.

Like fasting, dieting is the voluntarily abstinence from food to change desperate situations. We diet because we drastically want to control factors that affect our health, identity, and even our acceptance by others.

Receive the Power

In the previous chapter, we saw how Jesus chose two elements commonly found in weddings of His day, wedding garments and new wine.

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”

Luke 5:37,38

In Acts 1 and 2, the early disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, which people mistakenly thought was caused by drinking too much wine.

*“But you will **receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you**; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 1:8

*Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much **wine**.”*

Acts 2:13

The new wine Jesus was speaking of was the Holy Spirit, who was poured out on all those who believed. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be the bride we are destined to be.

The Deposit is Our Guarantee

*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put **his Spirit** in our hearts as a **deposit**, guaranteeing what is to come.*

2 Corinthians 1:21, 22

God has given us to the Holy Spirit as a deposit to guarantee His ownership over us and that we will, in time, be wed with Christ.

Second Corinthians 5:4,5 says it another way:

*For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be **unclothed but to be clothed** with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the **Spirit as a deposit**, guaranteeing what is to come.*

We can be secure in wearing our bridal gown even while on earth because we have the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing our ultimate destiny and position.

A New Power

A final point about the new power from the new wine is seen in an account from Jesus' own life.

*Jesus' **full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. **He ate nothing** during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

Luke 4:1,2

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led to the desert, where He fasted. After the fast, Jesus returned to Galilee in **the power of the Spirit**, and news about him spread through the whole countryside (Luke 4:14).

From simply being full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit **after He fasted**. Fasting is not about meals and diets—it is about the power our God wants to deposit in us.

Personal Application

Are there things you want to accomplish in life but have often felt like you don't have the power to attain them? What are they?

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with His power to be able to do what you have listed above. Pray that God will remove any fear and unbelief that will cause to limit you from accomplishing them.

For Further Study and Prayer

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Luke 1:35

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:13

Chapter Seven

FROM DRUNKENNESS TO DIVINE DISCONTENT

Ephesians 5:18 says, *Do not get **drunk on wine**, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be **filled with the Spirit**.*

I have been intrigued by this verse for years. Paul was contrasting drunkenness with wine to being filled with the Spirit. Have you ever wondered why, too?

Wine and Spirit

Paul was contrasting the power, euphoria, and excitement caused by drunkenness with that of being filled by the Holy Spirit. Isn't it interesting that even liquor stores advertise themselves as purveyors of wines and spirits?

There is a parallel between these two. Inside every person is a void waiting to be filled. We have a choice whether to fill our lives with the spirit of the world (which leads to debauchery) or to fill it with the Holy Spirit.

Worldly Addiction Versus Holy Addiction

What fills you is what you live for. What fills you ultimately dictates how you live your life.

We've seen alcoholics whose lives and schedules revolve around alcohol. We know of drug addicts whose main goal in life is simply to get high. Addiction is nothing more than being enslaved.

You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Romans 6:18

Paul's comparison brings to light that there is holy addiction that is from God. It was out there to cause us to totally yearn for Him, instead of being consumed by the desires of the flesh. He wants us to be addicted to Him! The person who earnestly seeks God will desire more and more of His Spirit. God's presence becomes his addiction. He can't live without it.

People who are addicted to alcohol or drugs don't see their behavior as a duty. They are devoted to their addiction.

Have you seen an addict? He willingly skips meals and deprives himself for days just to have his liquor or drugs. What else could that be, but a twisted form of fasting?

He endures sleepless nights, puts everything on the line, and allows himself to be abased for his vices. Doesn't that look like long-suffering?

An addict is unmindful of danger. He fearlessly travels to the deepest, darkest, and seediest places at the risk of life and limb to seek out his poison. His desire far outweighs the risk and the danger involved. Doesn't that sound like missions in a perverted way?

He gives all his money (not just a tithe) and sacrifices everything else because he loves his sin far more than his own body.

Then, with no money in hand, without food in his stomach, with no sleep to his eyes, he parties and dances the night away in wild abandon. Isn't that a misappropriated form of praise and worship? He so enjoys himself.

He is utterly convinced of the benefits of his addiction that without any prompting, he influences others and turns them into addicts just like himself. He does it so naturally and so contagiously. Isn't that the way evangelism works?

In contrast, Christ's bride is not addicted to her new wine, the Holy Spirit. She barely fasts because she is more addicted to food. Her love for Jesus has been supplanted by a large order of nachos smothered in salsa and cheese, washed down with a glass of bottomless iced tea. One peek in her refrigerator or one whiff of burgers on a grill is enough to weaken her resolve.

Undoubtedly, carnal man's ultimate addiction is the satisfaction of his flesh. It does not take much to see that therein lies his delight, desire, and devotion.

Unlike an addict who can't last a day without drugs, Christ's bride merely gives one day out of seven. On that Sunday, she says in her heart, "Darling Jesus, I can only stay ninety minutes for your party, so please don't take too long. Also, please do something about Your music."

She arrives late because she was distracted by late night TV, her mind wanders as she thinks of problems at work and at home, and eventually, she drops her head as she snoozes through His celebration.

Perhaps next time, she may even give an offering, when all the bills have been paid.

In the final analysis, could it be possible that a considerable number of sinners love their sin more than some Christians love their God? Could it be that Jesus' bride is unsure of her true delight, desire, and devotion? The world looks at her and says, "I'm not sure she loves her Jesus as much as I love my sin."

Is it any wonder she is unable to convince the world that He is worthy of their addiction?

Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.

Jeremiah 2:32

Fasting is beyond religious duty. It is about an addiction to the Spirit of God. It is about a divine discontent that yearns for God, which cannot be satisfied by food or anything on this earth.

“These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel”: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons, and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’”

Acts 2:15-17

Personal Application

What do you delight in?

What do you desire for?

What are you devoted to?

Usually, God has nothing against the things we delight in, desire for, or are devoted to—He just wants to be above all of them. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the power to delight in, desire for, and be devoted to God more than any of the things you listed above.

For Further Study and Prayer

I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.”

Psalm 16:2

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit . . .

Romans 14:17

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16

Chapter Eight

FROM DISDAIN TO DISCOVERY

Back in Luke 5, Jesus ended His discussion on fasting with these words:

*“And no one pours new wine into the old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And **no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’**”*

Luke 5:37-39

Jesus was describing people who could not accept the new life He was offering because they preferred their old way of doing things.

They wanted the religious practices they were familiar with, teachings they were accustomed to. They wanted something predictable, something they could handle. Like old wine, they wanted something that was easier to swallow.

When people sometimes say, “The old is better,” what they are saying is, “I want what I’m used to,” even if it is devoid of any power to transform them.

Their rigid spirituality resulted in a denial of the new thing God wanted to do in their lives.

Old Wine versus New Wine

Traditional religion has a way of making us ignore the new things God is doing. The Pharisees were so engrossed with preserving their religious practices and beliefs that they could not see that Jesus was offering them a new life as His bride.

The Pharisees rejected Jesus because His teachings did not flow like the old wine they were used to. It was unsettling, sometimes disturbing, and too radical for their taste. Their disdain for the new resulted in their failure to discover the best.

The Pharisees had gone from dislike to hatred for Jesus. They belittled, despised and eventually murdered Him. In many ways, people often disdain what they cannot explain.

Removing the Cover

The word “discover” comes from two root words: “dis,” which is to remove, and “cover.” To “dis-cover,” then, is to remove the cover. Through the Holy spirit, God is removing the cover, the blinders, if you may, from our eyes so that we may see and discover the new.

A New Way

The prophet Isaiah exhorts us to:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”

Isaiah 43:18

Instead, he encourages us to discover.

*“See, I am doing a **new thing!** Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”*

Isaiah 43:19

In Mark 9, Jesus and His disciples encountered a boy with an evil spirit.

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered.

Mark 9:20,21

The boy had an evil spirit that continually tormented him since childhood.

People often
d disdain what they
cannot explain.

Jesus, having compassion on the boy, rebuked the evil spirit and freed him from his bondage (Mark 9:25-27). Prior to this, the disciples tried to drive out the demon from the child, but were unable to.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."

Mark 9:28,29

There are certain things in our spiritual lives that simply won't go away unless we pray and fast. When we choose to settle in our comfort zones, we become like the Pharisees reverting to that which gives us a false sense of security. All is well, predictable, familiar, smooth, and religious. Our declaration that "the old is better" is more convenient, even if it means being enslaved to ungodly spirits that war against our souls.

Fasting, on the other hand, takes faith. It goes against the daily routine we're used to. Our fleshly appetites rebel against this strange, uncomfortable activity. However, it may be the only way to discover the new things God has prepared for us.

If God Himself were to fast, here's why He would do it:
To set you and I free and to break every yoke that
oppresses us.

*“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?”*

Isaiah 58:6

Personal Application

Are there old issues in your life or in the lives of people you know (e.g. insecurity, selfishness, impatience, pride, lust, health, relational concerns) that you would like to see change? The first step to deliverance is acknowledging these issues.

As you fast, and pray that God would remove these issues from your life. Start declaring your freedom by faith. Don't give up easily. Breakthroughs usually happen to those who don't give up.

For Further Study and Prayer

Then your light will break forth like 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.

Isaiah 58:8

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:32

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

John 14:16,17

Chapter Nine

FROM DIVORCED TO DEAREST

It should be clear by now that fasting is about a relationship. Fasting is a way of expressing the extent of our delight, desire, and devotion to our God.

One story that captures the essence of this relationship is that of the Samaritan woman at the well. This story is about a woman who had been a bride many times. She tried to find satisfaction and fulfillment in relationships, but failed each and every time.

“I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

John 4:17,18

Her declaration that “I have no husband” is indicative of the failure of each of these relationships. As wonderful as human relationships are, they cannot constantly satisfy the deepest need of our souls.

Only a living, thriving, and vibrant relationship with God can fulfill us.

Nothing satisfies

Food may quell hunger pangs, but it will not satisfy life's more real appetites.

*All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is **never satisfied**.*

Ecclesiastes 6:7

*You will eat **but not be satisfied**; your stomach will still be empty . . .*

Micah 6:14

Many try to find their satisfaction in material wealth and find that it falls short of their true needs.

*Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is **never satisfied** with his income. This too is meaningless.*

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Still, there are those who will seek to find satisfaction in work, adventure, accomplishments, discoveries, and even hobbies. They, too, will be disappointed.

While we all need food, money, and success, none of these can satisfy our spiritual hunger. The closest thing to finding fulfillment in life is a close human relationship.

As we saw earlier in the case of the Samaritan woman, even that failed to satisfy her. Only Jesus can.

Food We Know Nothing About

As Jesus' disciples arrived at the well where Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, they found Him speaking with her and they realized He had not eaten anything. If we define fasting as not having a meal, it is safe to say that Jesus was fasting at this time.

John 4:31 shows their concern:

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

Jesus had an interesting response to their prodding.

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 4:32-34

What satisfied Jesus' hunger for food was doing the will of the Father. The will of the Father was for the Samaritan woman to know the true God and have a relationship with Him.

May I paraphrase? Jesus was telling them, "Listen, guys. Food's great but obeying My Father gives Me more satisfaction. At this point, more than eating, the Father wants Me to reach out to this lost woman."

Only a living, thriving,
and vibrant
relationship with God
can fulfill us.

The exciting thing about fasting is it gives us the opportunity to partner with God to fulfill His desires instead of ours. Because of Jesus's sensitivity to the Father, a rejected woman who was divorced five times

found hope as she met Christ—from divorced to dearest in His eyes. Jesus loved her much more than food.

When we fast, we can focus on feeding our spirits with the Word of God. He will impress upon us a compassion for others who have not had an opportunity to know Him. He puts in us a desire to intercede for specific people.

Also, just as Jesus fasted to concentrate His love on the Samaritan woman, fasting allows us to reciprocate His love for us and focus on Him. As we fast, we declare that: “Nothing else satisfies. You alone are Dearest to me!”

Personal Application

Name three or more people whom you are believing for to have a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

While you are fasting, pray that God will grant these people the gift of salvation. Pray further that they will become effective disciples of our Lord.

For Further Study and Prayer

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

Acts 16:31

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Titus 2:11

And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:10

Chapter Ten

THE MYSTERY UNVEILED

At the beginning of this book, we dealt with the fundamental difference between the Pharisees' idea of fasting versus Jesus'. To the Pharisees, fasting was all about religious duty. To Jesus, it was about a relationship between a bride and a bridegroom.

A Profound Mystery

The Bible calls this relationship a profound mystery.

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is **a profound mystery**—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Ephesians 5:31,32

The profound mystery is why Jesus would leave His favored position in heaven to be united with us. It is a mystery so mind-boggling that the only way to comprehend it is through the picture of a bridegroom's intense love for his bride.

Isaiah 62:5 shows that God loves us just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

*“As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons will marry you; **as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.**”*

From the beginning of this book, we have talked about the delight, desire, and devotion of the bride, but we made little reference to the Bridegroom and His passion for His bride. It is time we did.

“Lovestruck” Bridegroom

As we have seen in earlier chapters, our relationship with God has ben likened to a bride and groom relationship. The book of Song of Songs in the Old Testament gives us a taste of the intense passion that God, our Bridegroom, has for His people, His bride.

For centuries, theologians and everyday Christians alike have drawn lessons and insights from the pages of the Song of Songs. They have found comfort in the love relationship between God and His people, the Israelites in the Old Testament and the Church in the New.

Song of Songs 4:9 says:

You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

It tells us of how God's heart has been stolen, how He was "love-struck." With one glance, He has fallen for her, His bride. You could call it love at first sight.

How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!

Song of Songs 4:10

His heart is full of delight for her. So pure is His love for her that He calls her both sister and bride. Yet, like the doting lover, the Bridegroom is drawn by her fragrance and has found pleasure in her love more than wine.

Further along, He expresses the reservoir of pleasure as a fountain that His bride is to Him.

You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

Song of Songs 4:12

He expects her to be "locked up" and sealed exclusively for Him.

I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."

Song of Songs 5:2

The intensity and the passion of the Song of Songs is an eternal encouragement of God's never-ending love for us, His people. It is also about our devotion to God as His chosen bride.

The Bridegroom's Jealousy

God, our Bridegroom, expects nothing less than absolute loyalty and devotion. He wants our delight reserved only for Him. Time and time again, He has warned us not to arouse His jealousy:

*"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; **for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me . . ."*

Exodus 20:5

Jealousy is an ugly emotion. It is anxious feeling that comes when one is afraid that the affections of a loved one might be lost to a rival. Jealousy is rooted in insecurity and wanting to control, rather than to love. Jealousy is a sin of the flesh.

However, there is another side of jealousy that is absolutely right, the kind that only God, our perfect Bridegroom, can have. Simply put, it is His refusal to allow anyone to have what is rightfully His.

Needless to say, God is not insecure, controlling, or unloving. Unlike the jealousy of man, which is based on suspicion, mistrust, and a perverted imagination, God alone knows the deepest truths of every person's heart.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:13

Unlike man's jealousy that is motivated by selfishness, God is motivated by the purest of love. As such, He alone can be jealous and righteous at the same time. That's why the Bible clearly tells us that He is a jealous God.

*Do not worship any other god, **for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.***

Exodus 34:14

He insists on exclusivity, that our delight, desire, and devotion is given to no one other than our Bridegroom.

*For the LORD your God is **a consuming fire, a jealous God.***

Deuteronomy 4:24

It is the same jealousy that has caused our God to be consumed with a desire to save us from that which has drawn us away from Him. Jesus, our Bridegroom, will not accept the sharing of our passion, affection for, or even a hint of interest on another.

The Apostle Paul identifies with this righteous jealousy as he writes to the church in Corinth:

*I am **jealous for you with a godly jealousy.** I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

2 Corinthians 11:2

He admits to being jealous on behalf of the Bridegroom and calls it a godly jealousy. He further explains the source of his jealousy:

*But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, **your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.***

2 Corinthians 11:3

He is concerned that something or someone may lead you and I away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ, our Bridegroom. Paul explains how Eve, the very first bride, entertained another and was eventually enticed.

Genesis 3:6 recounts the deception that led Eve astray:

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was **good** for food and **pleasing** to the eye, and also **desirable** for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Three words stand out in the verse above: good, pleasing, and desirable. Bear in mind that Satan, Eve's new admirer, was offering something God gave first.

*And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—**trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food**. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the **tree of knowledge of good and evil**.*

Genesis 2:9

The real issue was whether God would remain as Eve's foremost desire. The only way to do that was to fast from the "food" Satan offered.

Fasting is simply the willingness to turn away from what seems good, pleasurable, and desirable because of our devotion to God.

Herein lies the answer to the mystery of the empty stomach. Fasting is simply the willingness to turn away from what seems good, pleasurable, and desirable because of our devotion to God.

At times, I have wondered what life would have been like if Adam and Eve had not partaken from the forbidden tree. How beautiful life could have been if mankind never left God's presence in the garden of Eden! All it would have taken was a fast—to delight, desire for, and be devoted to God more than anything or anyone.

The next time you wonder about fasting, think of how this simple act could have changed the history and destiny of all mankind! More importantly, think of a how you can change your destiny and that of your descendants with a simple act of fasting!

Personal Application

God loves you! He paid the ultimate price to have you by sacrificing His own life. What steps can you take in response to His advances?

Pray that you will not only appreciate fasting, but that you would enjoy being with the Bridegroom.

Inquire of God about your life's goal. Ask Him to give you an undivided heart. Believe that He will uphold you and allow you to fulfill your life's purpose and destiny. Pray for your descendants, that they, too, will live for God's honor and glory.

For Further Study and Prayer

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

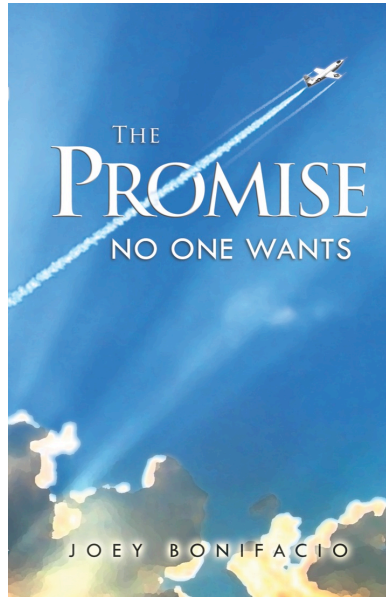
Jude 24,25

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:57

Also by **Joey Bonifacio**

The Promise No One Wants



There is a promise from God for virtually every area of life. It has been said that the Bible contains over 6,000 promises. These often quoted promises range from God's faithfulness and spiritual blessings to physical wellbeing and divine favor.

However, there is a promise that is seldom mentioned and very rarely claimed, one that holds the key to seeing our destinies fulfilled. It is The Promise No One Wants. This little book will help you understand and receive this precious promise.

Does fasting have any real value?
How can an empty stomach be of
any advantage to you?

Fasting is an ancient practice that has enormous benefits but is often misunderstood. Shrouded in mystery, it has even been mistaken for dieting. In reality, fasting is so much more than depriving oneself of a few meals.

The Mystery of the Empty Stomach will help you discover, understand, appreciate, benefit from, and enjoy this ancient practice.

Joey Bonifacio serves as a pastor of Victory Christian Fellowship in the Philippines. A businessman for many years, Joey has been walking with God for more than two decades. He is also the author of *The Promise No One Wants*. He and his wife, Marie, have three sons.

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