

Jentezen Franklin: Restore Your Passion for God

How a short season of self-denial will restore lasting passion for God in your life

One Sunday morning before our church service, I received a text from a passionate man of God who used to be our youth pastor at Free Chapel in Georgia. He had since relocated to Kentucky to pastor a church that was in rapid decline. He was texting to tell me what a huge difference fasting had made in his church's turnaround.

He and his wife had rebuilt and reinvented the identity of that struggling Kentucky congregation. They'd grown it in a few years from 600 people to 3,000, while also winning more than 4,000 to Christ. Fasting—a spiritual commitment he once tried to avoid—had changed both his life and thousands of others in his community.

In his text, he recounted how this happened:

"Ten years ago I walked into your office and said, 'Pastor, this fasting thing isn't for me.'

"You replied jokingly: 'You are on staff. You're fasting.'

"So, after some encouragement I joined the fast. Fourteen days later, I cracked—and destroyed a Whopper burger! I thought I was done. I confessed to you, and you said: 'You did your best. You made it 14 days; that's not bad.'

"I want you to know that this January marks my 10th annual fast, and it is our church's sixth annual 21-day fast."

Even though this young man's first fast was "forced," God raised him up and led him into deeper places of worship, brokenness and power through fasting. He and I still laugh

about his Whopper mauling. And I still rejoice in how the fast God gave him the tools to sharpen his anointing and regain his passion for God. In short, it gave him back his spiritual edge.

How about you—have you lost your edge? Has your worship grown dull? Are people still coming to Christ because of you? On Sunday mornings are you like the dead in Christ, lifelessly taking your seat in the pew, waiting for “the grave” of a dry church service to “give you up” at noon?

If so, then you don’t need me to tell you that you’ve lost your edge.

What you do need to hear, though, is this: It’s time for you to declare a fast and pray—because God wants to supernaturally change you. His plan for you hasn’t changed: He still wants to make you the son or daughter in Him you are meant to be.

God Restores the Edge

How does fasting help to accomplish this? I have been asked that question more times than I can remember. My answer is always the same: “Fasting and prayer bring you closer to God.”

That brief answer is by no means simplistic. Because whenever you begin a spiritual fast, you are choosing to break away from your life routines to draw closer to God, and amazing things happen as a result.

I chose to develop a lifestyle of prayer and fasting more than 25 years ago, and nothing has been more powerful in my Christian life. I am convinced that fasting is a gateway through which God releases His supernatural power into our lives. The choice is ours, though. We can either open that gateway or ignore it and stay in our routines.

At Free Chapel church for the last 12 years our members have undertaken a 21-day fast each January. With every year I

become more certain this annual fast to honor God is part of His design and calling.

I've witnessed profound miracles in this church and through this ministry—things that could not have come about from our own strength or effort. I was amazed to learn that nearly a million people visited our fasting website over a two-day period during our most recent annual fast.

So many people have lost the edge in their lives; they've lost their homes, their marriages, their commitment to the Lord. We stand in church and sing the songs and lift our hands, but there is no edge to our worship. There is no edge to the preaching. It all has become just dull routine and ritual.

Fasting can change all that. It's a short season of self-denial, but it releases long-term rewards.

Taking the time to fast is like taking the time to sharpen an ax before you cut down a tree. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, "If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength." Sure, you can cut with a dull ax, powering along in your own strength until your energy runs out. But the writer of Ecclesiastes is saying, "There's a better way."

Dull "axes" is the problem for so many people and churches today. Fasting restores your sharp edge. God uses fasting to give you the power to do far more than you could possibly do in your own strength.

When a young man in 2 Kings 6 lost his edge (literally), God gave him the miracle he needed to get it back. He was part of the so-called Sons of the Prophet, followers eager to be mentored by Elisha. The group had outgrown their living quarters, so they headed to the banks of the Jordan River to cut trees and make beams for a new lodge.

As he worked, this young man didn't notice that with each

swing against the tree the head on his ax was working loose. Suddenly the piece of iron slipped off the handle and flew into the muddy river. He stood on the bank, ax handle in hand, devastated and powerless to change what had just happened. He was eager to do something great for God, but now he couldn't even help chop wood.

He'd lost his edge—literally!

Maybe you know how that feels. You had an edge once. You sensed the Lord's anointing on your life. You were going for it. Your life was consecrated to God. You had a deep passion for spiritual things. Then something slipped, and you lost your edge. Now the enemy has convinced you that it's out of sight, out of reach, buried, stuck at the bottom where you can never get it back.

The young man did the only thing he knew to do. He cried out for help from Elisha. He knew God had used Elisha. The seasoned prophet made the water of Jericho drinkable again. He made oil multiply in a widow's house. He raised a young boy from the dead. He even healed a man's leprosy. If anyone had the faith to see God do what seemed impossible, it was Elisha.

Second Kings 6:6-7 tells us what happened next:

"So the man of God said, 'Where did it fall?' And he showed him the place. So [Elisha] cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float. Therefore he said, 'Pick it up for yourself.' So he reached out his hand and took it."

Have you bought the lie that your anointing, your purpose, your dream, your family, your lost children all are gone forever? Are you facing dire circumstances; have you lost a job, a home, or even respect and hope? I want to encourage you right now, God still can make iron float. Like He did for the young prophet, He can return the edge you lost.

You Have a Part Too

Just like the young man had to reach out and take the iron from the water, there are a few steps you too will need to take to regain your edge.

The first step is: Make up your mind that you are going to get your edge back. It's the starting point for fasting to regain your edge.

Think about the young prophet-in-training: There he stood at the edge of the Jordan, not prophesying for anyone, not speaking forth any great oracles of God to the nations; just a person who had been stopped cold. The word in his heart said he would be a prophet, but his world said he was a woodcutter without an ax. He easily could have tossed the handle aside and given up.

You may be in a season when your word doesn't match your world. Faith is trusting God no matter how impossible the odds are. Sometimes God allows the odds to be stacked against us so we can experience a miracle.

Let me remind you that as a born-again believer you serve the same God Elisha served! He is the God of the impossible. Now is the time to make up your mind that you will believe Him for what seems to you to be impossible and stop believing the lies of the enemy, who wants to see you defeated.

The second step is: Confess that you have lost your edge. The young man did not keep silent. He immediately sought help from God's prophet to regain what he lost.

You will not get anything accomplished by remaining in denial about your situation. Going through religious motions day after day is no way to live. It is not what God has called you to.

If you have lost your passion, if you have lost your edge, be swift to confess it to someone who can pray with you and help you find your way back.

The third step is: Take action while the opportunity exists. Elisha did not grab the ax head and put it back on the handle. The young man had to do that for himself.

God will not do for you what you can do for yourself. You'd think that if the miracle could cause the piece of iron to float, it also could have reattached it to the handle! But God intends for you to do your part in regaining the edge.

When you declare a fast and set aside time for prayer, you are reaching into the river and picking up the sharp edge that God has provided in order for you to be effective.

I challenge you to do your part. Declare a fast while you are reading this article. I'm in agreement that sharp ideas are going to come to you. Sharp relationships with new people are going to add significantly to your life. Cutting-edge creativity is going to flow your way as you begin to hunger and thirst for more.

Let the crisis drive you to your knees in a season of prayer and fasting. Go back to the place where the edge was lost.

Where did you lose it? Was it due to life's batterings and disappointments suffered along the way? Was it through sin that you need to confess? Go back to that place and get it under the blood of Jesus. The altar is a place to get free from the thing that weighs you down and drowns out your fiery passion for God. The altar is a place to *alter* your direction and get back on the right track with God.

Holy Surprises Will Come

You'll find that when you fast and pray, the supernatural possibilities suddenly become much more natural! Holy surprises seem to come out of nowhere. God knows where the ax head fell off, and He will help you get your edge back!

One Thursday night, God illustrated vividly for me how He can

do this.

I met my daughter Courteney for dinner, and she began to tell me about her friend Nate. He was not much of a churchgoer. He decided to come to Free Chapel for the first time on a Wednesday night when I preached a message titled "Jesus Passing By."

But he was so moved by the message that when he got home, he felt compelled to start reading his Bible again. It had been months since he had picked it up—six months to be exact.

He knew it had been that long because six months before coming to Free Chapel, he had been paid \$2,000 for a job. He had stashed the cash somewhere safe, but had forgotten where he hid it.

He searched for it for months, but finally concluded he'd left it on the seat of his car and it had fallen out. He assumed it was long gone.

That Wednesday night as he was stirred to dig into the Word of God, he was blown away to find the \$2,000 tucked safely inside the pages of his Bible—right where he'd "lost" it six months before.

Seeking God will help you get back the things He gave you that you feel like are gone. Seasons of fasting and prayer make this happen. Cry out to God; fast and pray. Invite Him to begin demolition in your life. He's going to tear down who you used to be as He raises up who you are meant to be!

Remember, fasting is a gateway through which God releases His supernatural power into our lives, and we have the choice to either open that gateway or ignore it and stay in our routines. I challenge you: To whatever degree you can, make it part of your life.

Jentezen Franklin is the pastor of Free Chapel in Gainesville, Ga., and Orange County, Calif. He hosts a weekly TV program, Kingdom Connection, and is an author. His new book, *The Fasting Edge* (Charisma House), from which this article is adapted, released in November. His other books include *Fasting and Believe That You Can* (both Charisma House).