

Chapter 7 - Say “No” to Yourself

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the story.
 - A) Standing firm in the face of peer pressure is a challenge for most of us, though a few hardy souls may claim to be beyond it’s reach. Caving in to it can fill us with regret and shame. Today, think about a time when you rose to the occasion and dared to be different.
 - B) Ezra made a boast about His God to the King, then when it looked like he had set himself up to be tested, he had second thoughts. It’s easy to be confident and full of faith when everything is smooth. Mull over a time when your faith was tested.
 - C) In Western culture, we are in the habit of giving in to our cravings whether they are for some new gadget, a few more minutes of sleep, or another big slab of chocolate cake. Think of a time when you said “no” to yourself in regard to something you wanted a lot. How did that feel?

2. Fasting is a subject with is rarely mentioned, let alone emphasized, in contemporary preaching. It is simply not on the radar for most Christians, though there is ample biblical support for it. Jot down a few thoughts about why you think this is the case.

3. Using a concordance or Bible software, look up some accounts of fasting in the Bible (including both Old and New Testaments). As you read these, make a few notes about motivations and outcomes. Think particularly about parallels in your own life.

4. One thing you will observe as you look at fasting in Scripture is that God's people practised both public and private fasting. Since you've just looked up passages related to fasting, make some notes about the two different categories. Are their differences? How about similarities?

5. One of the big obstacles with which we have to contend as we approach fasting is how counter-cultural it is. It has no parallels in secular culture - not even dieting, which is most often practised out of vanity. Think of some specific cultural messages (think "media" here) which must be overcome for you to begin to think positively about saying "no" to yourself.

6. In *Refresh*, I make a strong case for fasting as a normal part of the Christian experience. What are the most compelling arguments for learning to say "no" to yourself?

7. There are at least two ways we could measure "success" in our attempts to fast. One is simply that we abstained from food for the time we set for ourselves. (Of course, this can lead to pride.) More importantly, we gauge our success by the positive inner changes we see. Assuming you are going to take fasting seriously, what are the personal goals you want to set as you begin to plan?

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8. The next thing to do is to do it. Fasting is one of those things in which thinking and talking about it accomplishes nothing. In fact, you could memorize all of the pertinent passages and be able to take and defend an informed position and you would still fail the Fasting 101 course. Follow the suggestions in *Refresh* and then record your response to the experience of saying “no” to yourself.
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For Group Leaders:

Because of the physical ramifications of fasting, as a group leader, understand your responsibility to encourage people with medical conditions to check with their doctors before starting. This is particularly so in cases involving blood sugar levels. Ensure that your group understands that the spiritual significance of fasting is more important than the physical. Partial fasts may be best for some people.

Jesus emphasized fasting in secret because He knew how hard it is for people to engage in spiritual exercise and not compare themselves to those who are “less spiritual.” Emphasize the importance of humility in the pursuit of this and all of the other 18 ways to boost your spiritual life.

For the sake of learning together and from each other, some transparency is called for. Paul didn’t hesitate to talk about his fasting, for example. Encourage people to share their successes and their failures. We will all have some of both. Use the occasion to encourage prayer and support for each other.