

Exchange Your Online Distractions
for Real-Life Devotion

THE 40-DAY

*Social Media
Fast*

WENDY SPEAKE

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for Real-Life Devotion

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This book is dedicated to those of us who want to want God most but grab our phones more.

Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Colossians 3:1–2 MSG

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Foreword

What God wants from us, He also wants for us. For six months leading up to December 1, 2019, I knew God wanted me to take a break from social media. I felt that internal nudge, the silent but persistent Holy Spirit one.

After some reluctance I agreed. There was more to it than just feeling like I *couldn't* fast from social media. I didn't *want* to. With tendencies toward overworking, my night brain is occupied like a pesky hamster that runs my mind wheel to death, and scrolling seems to tame it. Let's be clear: I enjoy the numb of the scroll.

But all my resistance to fasting was pointless, because if there's one thing I've learned in my forty-eight years, it is that Jesus sticks with His plan. God had a plan for me to quiet my phone and listen to Him. In the middle of the first night after the detox started, He spoke an important revelation to my heart.

I wish I had said yes to God sooner. In a world full of loud and persistent human voices, it has become more dire than ever to hear from Him.

It brings me joy to be the one to welcome you to my friend Wendy's book—a book about much more than social media fasting. If you feel you have lost your way in a noisy world, this book will

Foreword

help you. If you feel overcome by your attachment to the numb of the scroll, in these pages you will find hope.

God has a plan to meet with you—a fresh revelation He wants to speak into your soul. Of that, I am sure. While this fast might at first feel like a tremendous sacrifice on your part, it's really a huge gift from Him.

Remember, what God wants from us, He also wants for us.

I'm so excited for you to begin.

Lisa Whittle, bestselling author, speaker,
podcast host, and ministry coach

Before You Fast

We all seem to be looking down these days. I wonder if that's why many of us feel down too. We perpetually bow our heads, but not in prayer. While we might believe prayer works, we don't have the time to get on our knees because we're on our phones. Checking in online, responding to a text, watching a YouTube video—then looking up just in time to snap a picture of the sunset. As we post it to social media, we realize our neck aches and that we forgot to switch out the laundry.

We need a break. A holy hiatus. A social media sabbatical.

My name is Wendy, and I'm exhausted. Perhaps it has something to do with late nights spent streaming movies, or maybe it's because I don't have any quiet moments without a screen stimulating me. I'm all tweeted out. I need to unplug for a season so that I can plug in to the One who seasons me. I want to be salty again. I want to be light-bright too, with energy to serve and smile, but I'm as drained as the battery on my phone—and I know I'm not alone.

Here's the backstory about how I came to fast from social media in a backward sort of way: Six years ago, I invited my online

“friends” to join me for a forty-day sugar fast. I was astounded by the number of people who signed up for our online community. Progressively, year after year, more men and women joined us for the annual event. We confessed, collectively, that we were turning to something other than God’s strength to get us through our days. So we fasted from sugar in order to feast on Christ and His sweet Word. Each time we journeyed through those forty days together, He grew in us a holy hunger for Him. He was increasing in our lives, and we were decreasing. Many of us dropped pounds, but more than anything else we dropped our idols. Some of us even dropped our phones.

*We need a break.
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sabbatical.*

While sugar is the emphasis during that forty-day fast, fasting from sugar opens the door to our sweet Savior. We invite Him into the innermost chambers of our lives. Once inside, He looks around and says, *Thanks for the sugar, but I want it all. I want your whole life.* At that point we ask ourselves what other distractions are distracting us and what other strongholds are holding us back from experiencing His strong hold. In chorus, the majority of my fasting friends respond, “It’s my phone!”

Smartphones distract us from focusing on what matters most: God. And the real-life friends He’s surrounded us with come in a distant third. Throughout the pages of this book and the days of our fast, we’ll return to Matthew 22:36–39, where an expert in the Levitical law asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” This man was really asking Him, “What matters most?”

“Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Nothing in my life has made loving God with all my heart, soul, and mind more difficult than my constant connection to my devices. The same is true when it comes to loving my real-life neighbors. Devices are divisive.

Ten years ago, I would wake up, stretch, and pick up my Bible from my bedside table. Well rested, I spent time with God at the start of each new day before seeing to the needs of my three young children. It was my morning routine. Today, however, the first thing I reach for is my phone. Though I promise myself, “I’m going to open my Bible app,” and often I do, my “quiet time” gets interrupted by noisy notifications from people I’m connected with online. Connecting online has made connecting with God nearly impossible.

Before I know it, I’m checking email, and then I hop over to find out who liked my Instagram post from the previous night. As my shower heats up, I interact with the virtual friend who left me a message as I slept. At the start of each new day I communicate with those I “like” more than I do the One whom I love most, which begs the question, Do I truly love Him most?

I believe in my heart that I do. I love God more than I love all the people in the world (and all the people on the World Wide Web), but the habitual way I turn to the world testifies to my priorities. That’s why *The 40-Day Social Media Fast* is my own personal journey back to what matters most—*Who* matters most.

C. S. Lewis wrote, “Human history [is] . . . the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”¹ Today in this digital age, with our smartphones, tablets, watches, and laptops beeping at us constantly, we are desperately looking for happiness. In Jeremiah 2:13, the Lord calls out: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

If you find yourself constantly thirsty for more, never quite satisfied no matter how often you go back to draw from the well of social media or online streaming and shopping, then you've likely been drinking from a well that was never meant to satisfy you. Like it or not, we all tend to forsake the spring of living water and dig our own cisterns. They're broken and, as a result, so are we. Still, we keep at it. And the more broken we become, the more fervent our search for happiness.

Each ping, buzz, and notification triggers a dopamine release in our brains, synthetically creating a short sensation of happiness. We've become chemically and emotionally addicted to these short-lived highs. That's why I've decided to put my foot down by putting my phone down, so that I might pick up the joy-inducing presence of God instead.

I'd venture to say that you originally picked up your phone as a resource to enhance your life, not to consume it. However, the brilliant people who designed Facebook, Instagram, and countless other social media sites are masterminds at cultivating addiction. Our online world has not evolved accidentally; it's been engineered intentionally. I feel it personally as I pick up my phone one hundred-plus times a day. I see it in my children as they play online games and send snarky memes to friends. I witness it as my husband sets his phone faceup on the table as we gather for dinner as a family.

We're all struggling to live in the moment as a result. We struggle to interact with those we love, because we're chasing after those we "like." We forget to actually smell the roses we're busy taking pictures of. What's more, the pixelated glow of our screens does not cause us to shine in the world as Christ called us to shine. I've already warned that we can lose our saltiness, and now I'm saying we can lose our shininess too. But I refuse!

Those are a couple of the reasons I decided to take my first social media sabbatical. I wanted more than a fleeting feeling of

happiness; I wanted lasting joy. So I deleted the distractions and devoted myself to finding it. The first place I looked was up, and it turns out that looking up was the answer. Now I'm lifting my eyes again and inviting you to look up with me.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND IS NOT

The 40-Day Social Media Fast is a collection of forty daily readings intended to lead you back into the presence of the One who matters most. This fast isn't merely a digital detox, though you'll experience that too. This is a spiritual fast with a deeply spiritual purpose. We are taking a break from everyone else in order to make room for Christ and those He has placed in our lives. John Piper wrote, "True freedom from the bondage of technology comes not mainly from throwing away the smartphone, but from filling the void with the glories of Jesus that you are trying to fill with the pleasures of the device."²

This book is not a treatise on the evils of social media. I'm not here to convince you that you're struggling in this digital age. Instead, this book and these forty days are an invitation and opportunity to make room for the glories of Jesus.

A recent study determined that every second there are eleven more people logging on to social media for the first time. By 2021 it's estimated that more than three billion people will be connecting online. That's 40 percent of the world's population. And I'm not talking about just "checking in." The average time individuals spend social networking continues to climb as well: 109 minutes a day in 2015, 126 minutes a day in 2016, 135 minutes a day in 2017, 144 minutes a day in 2018, and 153 minutes a day in 2019. At this rate, by the time this book is released people will be spending, on average, nearly three hours of their daily lives online.³ Of course, we don't need statistics to know it's true. That's why we're setting our devices down for forty days.

A social media fast is not about keeping technology in its rightful place. Oh, no! **This is about keeping God in His rightful place: at the center of our attention and affection.**

HOW TO BEGIN

Throughout Scripture, we see that the Lord clearly speaks to those who seek Him. He spoke to His people through angels and dreams, through the law and the prophets, and at last through Jesus Himself. Because God became a person, He knows how to speak personally, and that means He will personalize this fast just for you if you allow Him to. He won't give you a to-do list (or a to-don't list) and send you on your way to muscle through alone. Take the specifics of this fast to Him, and then allow Him to guide you through it with the help of His Holy Spirit. Perhaps the Lord will speak to you about one or more of these online temptations:

Facebook: Are you tempted to abide on Facebook instead of abiding with the only One who said, "Abide in Me"? If that's the case, then make this a Facebook fast. Lay down Facebook and lift up your face. Put down Facebook so that you might spend some undistracted time face-to-face with Him. Your face in His book: that's the Facebook you need right now.

Instagram: If those beautiful little squares hold you captive, give them up and spend time with the One who gave up His life for you. If you find your worth in the perfectly curated images you share on Instagram, spend these forty days considering how you were made worthy in Christ.

Twitter: Have you bought into the lie that "You are what you tweet"?⁴ Spend forty days discovering who God says you

are. Your identity is not found in how witty or pithy your 280 characters can be. You are a child of God, made in His likeness. Shut down Twitter and open up your Bible. Spend your time digging into the Word and discover who you are there, based on God's opinion.

Netflix: It's not social media, but this site can suck your night hours dry. If you forego your nightly rest in lieu of a story line not your own, dive into God's story and the narrative He's writing in your life. Shut down the fictional characters you spend hours with each night and invest that time in real-life people, right where you live.

Online games: If you spend more time playing "Words with Friends" than you spend exchanging words with your friends and family, give up those games for forty days. When you stop focusing on leveling up, there's a chance you'll look up.

LinkedIn: Do you find yourself checking to see who in your industry is searching for you online? Quit LinkedIn for forty days and quit obsessing about your next job. It's your job now to cease from striving and ladder climbing.

Online work: Speaking of work, people often tell me they can't fast from social media because much of their work or ministry is done online. Take the specifics of this fast to the Lord. He knows your job. Perhaps He'll speak to you about putting parameters around your work hours, such as budgeting a half hour to posting and communicating with clients online at the start of each workday, followed by another short slot at day's end. Then stay offline the rest of the day.

That said, God may call you to do something even riskier. One of my friends owns a small business online, and during our fast she felt led to shut down her business

completely. I understand that isn't an option for most people. I share her story only to demonstrate that when we incline our ears and our hearts to hear, our Savior speaks to each of us in a personalized way.

There are thousands of other apps, social media sites, and on-line time sucks—virtual rabbit holes we tend to fall down each day. Snapchat and Pinterest, TikTok and online dating sites, podcasts and TED Talks, Instagram stories and Facebook Live videos, texting and emailing without end. While you might want to send me a DM to say, “We can't stop communicating altogether,” my response would be, “We already have.”

All this “communicating” has stopped us from communicating with the One (and the ones) we value most. I know this feels countercultural, and indeed it is. But Jesus said if we're going to follow Him, we must deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24). For the next forty days, stop following everyone else online so that you may follow Him with all your heart.

Exchange your online distractions for real-life devotion.

Guidelines

As you prayerfully take this fast to the Lord, list specifically what you're laying down and consider how you hope to fill those empty spaces with the glories of Jesus. Throughout your fasting days, the Lord may ask you to surrender something more. Do what He asks: obey. He has not called you to make a social media sacrifice but to be a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), so stay alert to the convictions that will surely come. Next, choose when you will fast, and invite your family and close friends to join you. Here are a few ideas for when to fast:

January: January is a beautiful time to step back from the hectic pace after the jam-packed holidays. The fact that it's the start of a new year makes me think of God's call to bring our firstfruits to Him. The first forty days is a little more than 10 percent of the year. In a way, we are tithing our words, our attention, and our focus. Jesus gets more than His share up front, first and foremost.

Lent: I personally choose to step back from social media each Lenten season. It's the time of year when Christians traditionally fast from food in order to feast on Christ's

presence. Since I have found that I mindlessly nibble on a virtual feast more than any literal food, I annually set down my devices during these holy days. This fast has become so meaningful to me, I eagerly anticipate it the way some people look forward to a literal vacation. The Lenten season has become my annual virtual vacation.

Summer: Summer is another sensational time to fast from screens. Moms especially use their screens to sneak away and take a rest from all the people in their homes, all day every day. What would happen to your summer and your memory-making if you spent it with your hands free? Would you be less occupied with others and more present with your people? Less sharing your fun and more having fun?

Tuck these forty days anywhere into your year. Perhaps you'll enjoy the break so much, you'll log off again before the year is through. No matter when you take your social media sabbatical, I pray that you find great joy and freedom when you look up!

Additional Resources

Download a digital detox checklist, screensavers and decorative prints, scripture memory cards, and other free resources to help you prepare for your screen sabbatical at 40daysocialmediafast.com.

DAY 1

Is Social Media Bad?

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “Only God is truly good.”

Luke 18:19 NLT

Whenever I suggest to people that they spend a prolonged season fasting from social media or sugar or shopping or dating—anything that distracts them from their intimate relationship with the Lord—I get the question, “But is it bad? Is social media bad? Is sugar bad? Are dating and shopping and eating and drinking all bad?” The answer, of course, is both simple and complicated. No, these things aren’t bad . . . and yet perhaps, for you, they aren’t good. Instead of asking, “Is this good for me?” start by considering Jesus’s words: “Only God is truly good” (Luke 18:19 NLT).

Of course, God, in His overflowing goodness, has given us many good things to enjoy. As a matter of fact, in the creation story, He looked down upon all He had made and “saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). So, what did Jesus mean when He said that only God is good? I believe He meant that every good thing

is only good in light of the good purpose God created it for. Plants and animals are good as plants and animals, phones are good as phones, and relationships with loved ones are good in their proper place as well, but none of these things were ever intended to replace God. The sun was never meant to be the Son. Gifts were never supposed to take the place of the Giver. No created thing in this world was meant to replace the One who created this world. That would be bad.

God looked down on all He had made and enjoyed His creation. Of course, He wants us to enjoy it too. So, no. Food and drink and dating and reading and shopping are not bad in and of themselves. Nor is social media, unless the created gets in the way of the Creator. If social media has gotten between you and the Lord, then social media is not good for you.

Over the course of these forty days, you may discover, as many people have as they fasted and prayed, that social media, online games, and streaming movies are not good for you. Perhaps you will learn to set boundaries around your time online—what you share, when you share, why you share it, and how often you check back to see who liked it. Fasting from social media for a season may help you understand your relationship with both God and your phone.

First Corinthians 10:23 tells us that all things are allowed, but that doesn't mean they are necessarily good for us. I love how *The Message* version sums it up: "Looking at it one way, you could say, 'Anything goes. Because of God's immense generosity and grace, we don't have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster.'" The point is not to pass muster as we pass through life but to live life in Christ to the fullest. Does social media help you to do that?

C. S. Lewis once wrote, "There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan."¹ Our good God wants to use social

media for our good and His glory, but Satan is hell-bent on owning that territory and using it for our distracted demise. This is true in everything. God wants us focused; Satan loves us frazzled. God wants us devoted; Satan loves it when we're distracted. God wants us content; Satan loves us discontent—dissatisfied, depressed, and dejected. God wants us to know His incomparable love, while the devil wants us comparing our lives with others as we search for a different sort of love—a love that looks more like “likes.”

The greatest good you'll ever experience is the all-surpassing love of God found in Christ Jesus! Is social media bad? No, but our human tendencies are. **If you habitually look for love and companionship online, when the love of God is found in the companionship of Christ, then social media isn't good for you.** Perhaps you need a short forty-day break to connect with God. Disconnecting from that which is less good frees you up to connect with the One who is most good. With His help, when this fast is over you might be able to set boundaries around your online relationships that allow you to enjoy those good gifts in light of the good Gift-Giver. But if you can't, then don't reengage online. All things may be allowed, but if they don't allow you to stay focused on the satisfying goodness of God, then they aren't good for you.

Social media isn't the enemy, the devil is. Social media is simply another spiritual battlefield. The devil wants it for himself, but the Lord wants everything that touches our lives to be a holy touch from Him. He has good purposes for every good thing He's made. The devil knows it; that's why he is always on the hunt—looking for opportunities to take the ground beneath our feet. He is referred to as “the prince of this world” (John 14:30), and as our enemy he “prowls around” the whole world (and the World Wide Web) “like a roaring lion looking

*A life spent in
fellowship with God
isn't just a good life,
it's the best life.*

for someone to devour” and a clever way to devour them (1 Pet. 5:8). He uses everything this world affords him.

These words by A. W. Tozer challenge me profoundly: “Whatever keeps me from my Bible is my enemy, however harmless it may appear.”² In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis tells the story of a senior demon named Screwtape who is teaching his nephew, Wormwood, a young demon-in-training, how to entice a man away from Jesus. One of his main tactics is to distract the Christian from Christ. I would love to read a modern-day retelling of this classic.

*Is that thing you
hold in your hand
separating you from
the One who
holds you in His?*

In light of today’s technology, how would Screwtape advise Wormwood to lure his man away from God?

Has social media distracted you from the devoted life? Has it prevented you from experiencing an abiding fellowship with God? **A life spent in fellowship with God isn’t just a good life, it’s the best life—and that best life segues into**

a forever life of eternal fellowship. How wonderful! Fast from that which feels good temporarily in order to experience the only One who is good eternally, who holds your best life in the palm of His gracious hand. Is that thing you hold in your hand separating you from the One who holds you in His?

Is social media bad? No, maybe not, but for the next forty days, let’s set it down under the lamplight of Jesus’s words: “Only God is truly good.”

Dear Lord, You are good and good for me, and You desire to grow me up to be good, just like You. I need more time with You, Lord. I don’t want anything to get in the way of that sanctifying relationship. Thank You for these forty days. I am choosing You, the good Gift-Giver, over any good gift. In the good name of Jesus, Amen.

DAY 2

Follow Me

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

Mark 1:17

It's possible that the people you follow online have come between you and the One who said, “Follow Me.” This isn't a hypothetical statement. I know it to be true for myself. Unless I intentionally follow Jesus, I unintentionally drift along with the masses in this world's current. But Jesus didn't simply swim upstream; He walked on water. He rose above the cultural currents of the time and invited His closest companions to join Him above the waves. He said, “Come, follow me” (Mark 1:17).

He invited His disciples to follow Him at the beginning of their friendship, and after that He kept inviting them, over and over again. Consider Peter, who received his very first “follow me” in Matthew 4:19, then heard it again after Jesus asked three times, “Do you love me?” (John 21:17, 19). **Jesus does not offer a one-time invitation but a constant wooing.**

Matthew 14:22–33 tells the story of Jesus walking out upon the windswept Sea of Galilee. As He approached the boat that held His friends, in the hazy moments just before dawn, the disciples saw Him coming and were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they cried.

Jesus, who is always calling us up to greater faith, responded, “Take courage. It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Peter, impetuous and bold, shouted out to Him, “If it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” Jesus invited—just as He had at the start of their friendship, on the shore of that same lake. In response to this predawn invitation, Peter stepped out of the boat and walked above the current’s pull. Unfortunately, the wind and the waves rallied to catch

his attention, and Peter, distracted, took his eyes off of Jesus. Afraid and sinking, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. “You of little faith . . . why did you doubt?” He asked (Matt. 14:31).

It's possible that the people you follow online have come between you and the One who said, "Follow Me."

Here at the start of your 40-Day Social Media Fast, it is my hope that you hear our Savior’s familiar call: “Come, follow Me.” Whether you are standing

on the shore, having never before responded to His invitation, or are sitting in your little boat eager to walk with Him above the pull of the culture’s current, the invitation is yours. Join Him.

It won’t be easy. The temptation to take your eyes off of Christ and His buoying Word will be constant. Loneliness may even threaten to capsize you, but what a joy it will be to step out of your boat and follow Him in this countercultural, faith-building, water-walking way! Over the course of these days, you’ll need to keep your eyes continually on Him or be swept away. That’s why His invitation is ongoing, rather than once-and-done:

“Come, follow Me.”

“Follow Me.”

“Come . . .”

How gracious of the Lord to keep inviting us still!

Perhaps, in recent years, as the world’s waves have grown larger and louder, you can’t hear Him as you once could. If that’s where you find yourself today, I understand. However, I have learned from experience that it’s not because the Lord has grown quiet; the world has simply gotten so loud it drowns Him out.

Though I turn to the Lord in the quiet morning moments as I read a passage of Scripture and a daily devotional, the majority of my day is spent in the clamoring conversation online. I’d like to say it isn’t true, but the proof is on my screen. My iPhone tracks my time online, testifying to my priorities. Seventeen minutes on the YouVersion Bible app at the start of the day, followed by 163 minutes on social media, news threads, and texting. No doubt, my eyes are on the wind and the waves, and my ears are attentive to those I follow online.

While Jesus clearly said, “Come, follow Me,” I wear myself out following everyone else. Perhaps you’re tired too, and ready for a rest. Jesus extended this invitation in Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” While I memorized this verse years ago, recently I’ve felt the Lord speak this invitation to me in light of all the other things I run to, turn to, or “come to” each day: *Come to Me*.

As I turn on my computer: *Come to Me, I want to connect with you.*

As I make a phone call to talk through my stress with a friend: *Call on Me!*

As I scroll through Facebook: *Don’t follow them, follow Me.*

As I open up Instagram: *Come to Me, open up to Me.*

As I binge watch another late-night TV show: *Come. To. Me.*

As I start a text, complaining to a friend about my day: *Delete that; don't complain to her, come to Me.*

As I link over to Amazon Prime for a little retail therapy: *Come to Me, I'm a Wonderful Counselor.*

As I run in to Starbucks for something sweet: *My words are sweet as honey. Come to me.*

As I turn to comfort food: *Come to Me, I'm the Great Comforter.*

Come to Me.

There are so many things I mindlessly turn to each day—so many things I eat, read, watch, buy, and consume. But God's invitation to His disciples was, and remains, "Come to Me. On the beach, on the waves, on the hillside, in your home—wherever you are, I Am. Come to Me."

Are you weary? If you're worn out and wiped out, exhausted from running to all the false gods this world has to offer, run to the One who invited you to bring your weariness to Him in the first place. He can carry your burdens. The One who shouldered the cross can shoulder what concerns you today. It's what He does, what He came for. Amazon Prime can't do it. Facebook can't do it. Netflix can't do it. And all the people you're following online can't

do it either. It's not their job to lighten your load or brighten your countenance. It's God's job. *Don't follow them, follow Me. Come to Me.*

*The One who
shouldered the cross
can shoulder what
concerns you today.*

He is able to carry your hurting relationships. He can handle your fears and your failures. He can shoulder your loneliness too. He alone is able to re-

lieve you of your sin-struggles and your shame. He can carry the weight all the way up Calvary's hill and lay it down at the foot of

the cross on your behalf. In exchange for those heavy burdens, He offers His light yoke. That's what He gives us when we give it all to Him.

Do you like the idea of "coming to Jesus" but you're not sure what that even looks like? Then follow me in the pages of this book as I follow Jesus. Take a moment to accept Christ's gracious offer and let Him lead the way these forty days!

Dear Lord, Your Word isn't a far-off record of an old and distant God. You are speaking today to my listening heart, "Come to Me." You're inviting me now. Holy Spirit, give me the courage to stop opening my phone and instead open my ears to Your quiet voice. I've been stubborn, but I'm so grateful for Your oft-repeated invitation, "Follow Me." Nothing else has ever been able to get the job done. Only You have that power to meet my needs as I follow You. And so I'm praying in Your name as I say yes to following You today. Amen.

DAY 3

Escapism

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Matthew 19:4-6

Grandma passed away on my twenty-fifth birthday. Of all the women in my life, she best modeled for me steadfast devotion to one’s husband. Grandpa wasn’t perfect, and neither was she, but she remained a devoted wife through wartime, followed by a lifelong marriage. Grandma did, however, have one passion that lured her away from her family. She loved to read. When she

Note: While this book isn’t written specifically for married couples and parents, the focus of this chapter is on those relationships. If you are not married or don’t have children, I hope you’ll read it and apply its lessons anyway. We all have stressors we’d like to escape from time to time, and the online world is an easy escape route for us all when we grow weary of our real-life challenges.

needed a break from Grandpa's big personality (or her rambunctious grandkids), she'd disappear into the bathroom with a library book.

Over the years, Grandma checked out so many books from her local library that she came up with a system to prevent herself from accidentally checking out the same books multiple times. On page thirty-six of every book she read, she'd underline the page number in pencil.

While she always had books scattered throughout her house, I don't remember ever seeing my grandmother reading one. She never had a paperback covering her face when I was in the room. Not when we painted with watercolors at the kitchen table, not while I swam in the pool, and not as we watched a show together. It was always her face that I saw.

Just as Grandma made sure there was never a book in her face when she was with me, I try to keep my face out of Facebook when I'm with my family. Over the years it's gotten harder and harder. I am very much like my grandma, with quiet sensibilities, and my husband is like my grandpa, with endless energy and charisma. What's more, we have three equally strong children in our home, with constant questions and loud voices. As an introverted, highly sensitive person, I get overwhelmed regularly, and social media is a tempting way for me to escape the stress. Unfortunately, when I pull away for a few quiet moments online, I rarely come back rested and ready to reengage.

When I turn to my phone to cope with stress, I don't return to my family more able to handle the stress. When I sneak away to social media, I don't return to my husband and children more socially available. When I put my face in Facebook, rather than the Good Book, I don't find the help I need when it's time to face my family again.

When I turn to my phone to cope with stress, I don't return to my family more able to handle the stress.

Back when my oldest was four years old and my youngest was a newborn, I started turning to Facebook on my desktop computer during their afternoon naps. When the children woke up, I'd shut it down and leave it in the office. Because I'd not used the time to prep dinner or put away laundry, I always felt a bit guilty, but even so I was able to leave my distractions behind in the other room and dive into family life again.

Things changed when my phone outsmarted me. Once Facebook had a permanent place in my pocket, it became a permanent portal—able to transport me away from my family. Even if we were physically in the same room, I wasn't necessarily there with them. Facebook was no longer simply a naptime vacation but an all-day form of escapism.

The effects on our marriages are doubly compounded because our spouses have their own virtual rabbit holes offering them an easy escape route as well: text threads with friends keep them laughing, and the news can get more of their face time than we do.

When Jesus spoke of marriage, however, He told His followers not to let anything separate them from their spouse. Matthew 19:5 tells us that a husband will leave his family and be united or *hold fast* to his wife. I've always loved the King James Version word choice: *cleave*. God created us to leave and then cleave. Unfortunately, in this present culture, we leave one another and cleave to the wrong things.

The Hebrew word for cleaving is *kollaó*, which comes from the root word *kolla*, meaning glue.¹ This isn't your run-of-the-mill white school glue. This is spiritual superglue that binds us together, making us one. To separate from each other requires a ripping so intense that shards of the one remain embedded in the other. That's why divorce and estranged relationships with kids are so painful. Today, however, many of us leave without leaving—we leave our families and cleave to our phones. Escaping our loved ones was never God's plan for us.

Leaving our phones and computers in another room is a good first step, but most of us don't set such a precautionary boundary.

When we don't make the choice to leave our temptation behind, we're making the choice to allow the temptation to remain. It's hard to *hold fast* to someone when you're holding your phone. Hopefully this fast will help you to hold fast to your loved ones again.

When one of my friends returned from our community-wide social media fast, she exclaimed, "These past forty days, my children saw my face more. That alone made it so worth it!" I have heard similar statements from many parents after fasting. Not only did their kids enjoy them more, they enjoyed their kids more. I'd venture to say that many of those kids even became more enjoyable. When our children have our intention, they don't need to get our attention. Andy Crouch explained the phenomenon this way: "An awful lot of children born in 2007 . . . have been competing with their parents' screens their whole lives."²

The same is true for our spouses. When we intentionally disconnect from our phones and make ourselves available to them at the end of a long day, we simply get to connect. No guessing, no stressing. I love how Arlene Pellicane said it: "Think what would happen in your marriage if you reached out to touch your spouse as many times as you reached out to touch your phone."³

*When our children
have our intention,
they don't need to
get our attention.*

What would happen if you gave your loved ones your best instead of what's left? Hold fast as you fast and find out for yourself.

Dear Lord, I don't want to escape from stress or people anymore. During this fast, teach me to hold fast to You and to the people You've given me. It's hard to stay committed; please help me re-commit. I want to put down the phone and touch my loved ones, to close my screen and open my arms. Bless my friendships and bless my family as I learn to bless them with my undivided attention in the days ahead. In Jesus's name, Amen.