



Sharptown Summer Sermon Series

The Top Ten Biblical Purposes of Fasting

1. To Strengthen Prayer - John Calvin stated that “whenever people are to pray to God concerning a great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer.”

- This is not a hunger strike that compels God to action. Fasting does not cause God to reconsider. Fasting does not cause God to sit up and take notice of our praying.
- It sharpens the edge of intercession and gives passion to our supplication
- Ezra 8:23 ... so they fasted ...
- Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3

2. To Seek God’s Guidance

- Judges 20 ... only after the sought God with prayer and fasting does the Lord give Israel victory
- Acts 14:23
- Fasting does not ensure the certainty of clear guidance from God. Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the One who loves to guide us.

3. To Express Grief - Three of the first four references in the Bible to fasting are connected with the expression of grief...this does not only pertain to grief as a result of death. Christians over the years have fasted in response to grief over sin in their lives.

- Judges 20:26; I Samuel 31:13; II Samuel 1:11-12
- I Peter 3:18; I John 1:9 ... mere admission is not confession ...confession may involve some degree of grief for sin committed

4. To Seek Deliverance and Protection - one of the most common fasts in biblical times was to fast to seek salvation from enemies or circumstances

- 2 Chronicles 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16
- Individuals also have fasted for deliverance and protection of a nation ... Psalm 109

5. To Express Repentance and Return to God - Fasting for this purpose is similar to fasting as an expression of grief for sin. Repentance is a change of mind (*will*) resulting in a change of action ... fasting can illustrate a commitment to obedience and a new direction.

- I Samuel 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8
- The caution here is to attempt to use fasting as a means of self-punishment for sin

6. To Humble Oneself Before God - When practiced for the right motives, fasting is a physical expression of humility and dependency upon God. Just as you may want to express humility by kneeling in prayer, fasting is a means of physically expressing humility before God throughout the day. Fasting itself is not humility - but merely an expression of humility.

- King Ahab - humbled before God with sackcloth and fasting ... I Kings 21:27-29
- King David ... Psalm 35:13
- Pharisee ... Luke 18:12 (*misplaced humility*)

7. To Express Concern for the Work Of God ... just as a parent may fast and pray out of concern for the work of God in a child's life, so too may a person fast and pray for the work of God on a broader scale in God's Kingdom.

- Nehemiah 1:3-4; Daniel 9:3;

8. To Minister to the Needs of Others

- In one of the most extensive sections of scripture about fasting, God emphasized fasting for the purpose of meeting the needs of other ... Isaiah 58:6-7

9. To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God

- Jesus in the wilderness ... Matthew 4:1-11
- Fasting is a way of overcoming temptation and of freshly dedicating ourselves to God

10. To Express Love and Worship to God

- Anna ... Luke 2:37
- Fasting can be an expression of finding your greatest pleasure and delight in life from God. Fasting may be a means of illustrating that your delight is in God and not on the physical "hungers" around us. It is a means of subjugating the physical to the spiritual.

Fasting is always with a spiritual purpose—a God centered purpose. Not a self centered purpose. Permit thoughts of food to remind us of our dependency upon God. Permit the lack of food to remind you of your purpose for fasting and pray that God would meet you and the desire of your heart.

Be reminded, this is not a means of manipulating God. Yet, it is a means of providing the "Optimum Environment" for growth and a divine encounter to occur.