

Upper Merion Baptist Church

Seeking God

through prayer and fasting



What comes to mind when you think of fasting? In our culture, it is hard to deny ourselves anything, much less food or drink.

Many Christians do not understand why fasting is important. Scripture gives fasting as much importance as prayer. The combination of prayer and fasting is a powerful way to connect with God's heart, to grow spiritually, and to discern God's will.

Fasting Explained

Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food or activity for spiritual purposes.

Fasting Expected

Jesus said, "**When** you fast" (Matt. 6:16-17). Jesus assumes we will fast and provides instructions. When challenged by the Pharisees because his disciples were not fasting, Jesus told them his disciples would fast after the Bridegroom was taken from them. **That time is now!** Jesus is the Bridegroom of the Church. He expects us to fast until he returns.

Purposes for Fasting

Isaiah 58:6-7 show why God calls a fast:

- To bring justice
- To undo heavy burdens, break the yoke of bondage
- To free the oppressed and loose bands of wickedness
- To provide for the poor
- To provide for one's family

Other biblical reasons for fasting are:

- To strengthen prayer:
Ezra fasted for safety (Ezra 8:23)
Nehemiah fasted for provision (Neh. 1:4)
Daniel fasted for strength in exile (Dan. 9:3).
The Church fasted before sending Barnabas and Saul on a missionary journey (Acts 13:3).
Fasting is not a spiritual hunger strike to compel God to do our bidding. Fasting does not change God's hearing so much as it changes our praying.
- To seek God's guidance or instructions
Israel fasted before going to war (Jug 20).
The church fasted before choosing leaders (Acts 14:23).
Fasting does not ensure that God will give clear guidance, but it does make us more receptive.
- To express grief
Israel fasted after a loss (Judges 20:26)
Israel fasted when King Saul died (1 Sam. 31:13)
- To seek deliverance or protection
Israel fasted when a vast army came against them (2 Chron. 20:3-4).
Esther fasted for protection (Est. 4:16).
Fasting, rather than revenge, is our first defense against persecution, regardless of its source.

The Power of Prayer and Fasting...



- For repentance
“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (Joel 2:12)
Fasting for repentance signals a commitment to obedience and a new direction. Without true repentance, fasting is little more than a “dead work.”
Fasting is effective when praying for corporate sin, in a congregation, or a nation.
Throughout Christian history, believers fasted before receiving the Lord’s Supper.
- To humble ourselves before God
King Ahab, one of the most wicked men in Jewish history, humbled himself by fasting, and God delayed judgment (1 Ki. 21:27-29).
The Pharisee who bragged about fasting twice a week was not humble (Luke 18:12).
We must practice fasting with right motives in our hearts.
- To express concern for God’s work
The Church fasts to see God work for revival and transformation in a city or nation.
Nehemiah fasted for the restoration of Jerusalem, and then he worked to do something tangible to strengthen God’s work.
- To dedicate yourself to God
Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness before being used for public ministry (Matt. 4:1-11).
- To resist the Devil’s temptation
Paul fasted when tempted (1 Cor. 7:5)
Jesus fasted when tempted (Luke 4:1-2)
- For spiritual power to cast out demons
The disciples were told to pray and fast in order to cast out demons (Matt. 17:18-21)
- For health and healing
Isaiah fasted for healing (Isaiah 58:8)
David fasted for health (Ps. 35:13)
- To die to the flesh
To subdue the desires of our flesh for spiritual purposes (Isaiah 58:3)
Fasting means that your stomach isn’t your god. You’re willing to submit the desires of your flesh to the desires of God’s Spirit. There is a difference between “hunger” and “appetite.” A fast thwarts your appetite; the body can go a long time on your stored reserves. Depriving your appetite puts your desires into perspective.
- To express our love and worship of God
Fasting expresses our pleasure and enjoyment of God. It honors God and is a means of worship.

God promises us that he will honor a biblical fast. Our fasting must have a God-centered purpose rather than a desire to force God’s hand. If you need stronger prayer about a matter, that’s God’s invitation to fast. If you need God’s guidance, that’s an encouragement to fast.

Are you willing to obey God when he prompts you to fast?

Will you fast as the Holy Spirit directs?

The Power of Prayer and Fasting...



TYPES OF FASTS

- Abstain from all food, but not water
- Limit food. Eat only vegetables and water, or other simple foods. Eliminate meats, sweets.
- Abstain from all food and drink for a short period of time, i.e. skip a meal or two.
- Supernatural fast. God initiates and provides supernatural strength to pray and fast for long periods of time.
- Abstaining from an activity; i.e. TV, computer, radio or other forms of entertainment

TIPS TO PREPARE FOR A FAST

- A few days prior, reduce or eliminate caffeinated beverages, high-fat and sugary foods otherwise you will experience symptoms of withdrawal (i.e. headache, body aches, etc.)
- One day prior, taper off the amount of food you eat.
- During your fast, drink more water than usual. Curb your “hunger pangs” by sipping water.
- Determine the purpose of your fast and what type of fast you will have. Set a time limit.
- Be sure you are medically fit for a fast

THE FAST

- Hunger pangs are a signal to pray or praise
- Set aside time each day to listen to God
- Keep a bible and notepad handy to write down your prayers or what you hear God speak
- Meditate on God’s word
- Spend time in worship and adoration
- If you are skipping an activity (i.e. TV, computer), use that time for prayer and worship

***Fasting is not an end in itself!
Seek the Lord, not the experience of fasting!***