

# Fasting for the Safety of the Little Ones

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the critical role of fasting and spiritual engagement in the pro-life movement, urging Christians to seek God's intervention for the protection of the unborn.*

**Duration:** 33:27

**Scripture:** Ezra 8:21

**Topics:** "Fasting And Prayer", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the book of Ezra and the faith-building background leading up to a specific event in chapter 8. The people of Israel are in exile in the Persian empire, and it is now time for their rescue and the rebuilding of the temple. Despite being a small and insignificant minority, God orchestrates their return through the proclamation of Cyrus, the king of Persia. The speaker emphasizes the power of God's word and how He fulfills His promises, highlighting the importance of seeking God through fasting and prayer for protection and guidance.

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## Transcript

The morning text is Ezra chapter 8, 21 through 23. The morning text is Ezra chapter 8, 21 through 23. If you are using Pew Bible, the text is found on page 575.

Page 575. Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him a safe journey for us, our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king's troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek him, but his power and his anger are against all those who forsake him.

So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and he listened to our entreaty. My purpose this morning is not to rehearse all of the pro-life arguments that we have developed in preaching and teaching and writing over the past seven or eight years. Those are all available in the file cabinets and in the booklets.

There are biblical reasons, there are philosophical reasons, there are psychological reasons, there are medical, scientific reasons, there are legal reasons. We could multiply reasons that for most of us I would guess in this room are very compelling reasons for taking up the cause of the unborn in this country. But even though it's not my purpose to rehearse all of those, it is remarkable to me as I've come toward this

Roe v. Wade anniversary every year and the Sanctity of Life Sunday and our focus on this, how amazing it is that there are outcroppings of validation of old arguments in new ways.

And the reason I think that happens year after year that in our culture there are public, wide, open to analysis validations of pro-life argumentation is because the evil is so obvious. It is so obvious it lies on the table on the face of it and takes a tremendous amount of blindness not to see it, I believe. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean about the ever new validation of old pro-life arguments.

There's a great debate going on now in certain medical circles especially and ethical circles about the harvesting of organs like hearts, livers from tiny handicapped infants especially those born who are anencephalic. That is they have virtually no brain. It is so small that there is no way these children can live out a normal life and most of them will die in a matter of days or weeks.

And the debate is can we harvest the organs of these children immediately while they're still good and not damaged by taking the life of the child before it would die a natural death in order to save the life of a baby who has a defective heart or some other organ. One of the persons in the debate said the quality of life for this child, this anencephalic child, is so low it would be ethically justifiable to sacrifice its life by a few days to save the life of another person. Now that's an ominous way of reasoning for the handicapped and for the aging which means all of us.

That's an ominous way of reasoning because to put into the hands of some group of people the decision whether your quality of life is sufficient to warrant allowing you to die a natural death or allowing some group of physicians to prematurely take your life, that is an awesome thing, a very dangerous thing. Now what's remarkable about the pro-life argument here is that the reasoning of the ACLU in this debate is absolutely mind-boggling and stunning. For decades the pro-life movement has argued like this.

So how can you justify in Roe v. Wade, virtually for any reason if you can find a doctor to endorse it, legalizing the taking of the life right up to birth? And condemning the taking of the life in the few weeks after birth. And it's been a pretty compelling reason which is why you have more and more laws protecting third trimester babies. Now the ACLU has never been a friend to the pro-life cause and it has undertaken to argue the case in this Florida case stemming from 1992 about a donor situation.

And they have basically now endorsed the reasoning that I just articulated and turned it upside down to justify infanticide. Let me read you their sentence, the key sentence which is chilling. There is absolutely no, this is a quote, there is absolutely no morally significant change in the fetus between the moments immediately preceding and following birth.

Now that's a pro-life argument for decades. And they say therefore to deny the legalization of the taking of organs from a newborn, at least in the case of an encephaly, would be unwarranted. The argument in other words is exactly the same one, it's just turned right around.

What has seemed to so many millions of people that if there is legal protection for a baby after birth and there is no morally significant difference between that baby before and after birth, the legal protection is going to extend into the womb. And the ACL says no it works the other way. That's awesome.

That's morally repugnant reasoning. That is outrageous. And when I perceive that kind of reasoning, I say Lord what are we up against? I've sat with abortionists, I've talked with them and tried to reason with arguments.

And I feel like I'm talking to a stone. I've never gotten anywhere. Which brings me back to the issue of fasting, which we'll look at in a minute.

Might it be that the Christian church has left an arrow of power and grace in its quiver and has not used it? Namely fasting. I confess I have never fasted a day of my life for the cause of the unborn. Never.

Have you? Some of you have I'll bet. I have never done it. And as I've pondered this whole issue of fasting and as I've looked at this Ezra text about fasting for the safety of the little ones.

I've said Lord are you calling us not only for a kind of generalized fasting for a great awakening in our land. But a focused fasting somehow sometime during the year that would try to lay hold on the reason and the mind and the heart of our culture. To cause a sea change of attitude towards the unborn and cause people to wake up and say how could I have ever reasoned that if it is legitimate to kill in the womb.

It's legitimate to kill after the womb. How could I have ever done that? I'm so sorry God forgive me. What could we do that would bring that mind change about? And I just want you to consider this morning real seriously whether we have done spiritually.

Just spiritually as Christians dealing with God over the powers of darkness and breakthroughs into people's hearts. Have we done what the Bible offers us as a possibility to do? Namely fasting the penetrating earnestness of fasting. Now don't make a mistake here.

I believe really believe in the whole range of non-violent pro-life activity. And I stress non-violence in this explosive atmosphere in which we find ourselves today. Because I do believe that the battle will not be won with guns.

It will be won with brokenness and humility and a willingness to sacrifice and suffer. I can remember eight years ago standing before hundreds of people in the midst of the rescue situation in 1988. I guess that's six years ago.

Saying and I believed it all along because I've watched the anger develop on the lines. And the kind of words that get exchanged between the pro-life and the pro-choice causes out there. And I've said this will never ever win anything.

To talk like that will never work. One thing will work in the heart and the conscience of the American people. Suffering.

Suffering. Martin Luther King preached it. It's right.

A willingness to suffer. In other words, put it like this. The only way that this battle is going to be won is if you choose to identify with the suffering of the child.

Not identify with the killing of abortionists. The word of there is ambiguous. The killing that abortionists do and the killing of them.

If you choose to identify with killer and become a killer, you won't win. If you choose to identify with the sufferer and become a sufferer, great power will come into your life. This battle will be won by those who are willing to stand in the cold.

Stay up late. Write letters. Walk on the sidewalk.

Make telephone calls. Interact with frightened women. Bear the weight and the crisis of a child who's hard to support.

It will be that kind of people that will win this battle. So don't mistake. We are, I do endorse and support the whole range of pro-life activity.

I was so thrilled in October and November of last year when this document. She's a child, not a choice. Twelve pages of education was mailed to 900,000 Twin City homes.

And when two years ago it was put in the Tribune and in the Pioneer Press. That's good. That's good education.

There are good articles in here. Sober minded, authentic reasoning. I am glad for you who are called to the political arena.

That is so crucial. Whether you're a Republican or whether you're a Democrat is quite irrelevant to what really happened last fall. If you knew what the media never told you.

Namely, that not a single pro-life incumbent senator, house member or governor anywhere in the country. Whether Republican or Democrat was defeated by a pro-choice challenger. Not one.

And on the other hand, 30 incumbent pro-abortion members of Congress were defeated by pro-lifers. Did you hear that on the radio? Except maybe KTIS. There is a gray darkness.

The real meaning of what was going on. There are other meanings. But that was a real meaning of what was happening.

And I say amen to those who engaged their lives in that kind of effort. And I say amen to the crisis pregnancy movement. But the reason we have in your worship folder the Care Net insert is because I have been so moved in recent months by the Care Net system.

It's kind of prevention by compassion you could call it. Have you heard in recent months, I ask this because I haven't. What I did hear say five or six years ago, a kind of cynical statement like you pro-lifers the only life you care about is the unborn life.

You don't care about born babies who burden people. You don't care about women in critical situations. You just care about that little fetus so small you can hardly see it.

I don't hear that much anymore. You know why? It isn't true. You kick against the pricks of reality.

You turn to page five in this. Help for pregnant women, women, living adult women whom God loves. I counted them last night.

There are 74 crisis pregnancy centers in Minnesota on this page. A six for every killing station in the state. All over this country there are tens of thousands I believe of people and institutions engaged with arms extended to women before in the crisis, women during the crisis, women after the crisis.

Of every kind yielding every practical, emotional, spiritual, monetary help that anybody needs. The Christian church has responded to this thing so phenomenally that you can't get to a neighborhood in this country I don't believe where you can't get help with a local phone number. I don't know if that's true or not.

I would just guess it's true given the kind of networks that I see and the kind of statistics I read. So you don't hear it much anymore. You pro-life people all you care about is this unborn fetus.

It is a remarkable thing. I say amen and I bless those of you who are given your lives to be involved in the crisis preventative and then net catching of the kind of critical things that women go through in this matter of abortion. And I say amen to adoption ministries.

The Micah Fund here at our church is a glorious ministry. What God does through the Micah Fund here, M-I-C-A, Minority Infant Children Adoption. That is a remarkable thing.

The adoption option is a beautiful ministry and I say yes to it. And I say yes to the sidewalk counseling efforts. The 11th hour merciful intervention with truth.

Not a kind of bitter, ugly, hateful, hollering but a kind of we're here, we're willing to help. One last time we offer ourselves to you. The pro-life action ministries can document 80 babies saved last year and the women spared.

The kind of contamination of conscience and brokenness of soul that comes through abortion. And of course that's just one little ministry in our city and around the country. But all of that just to say when I focus in this morning on fasting and the spiritual dimension of this.

I am not minimizing or in any way treating as negligible those other ministries. And I hope all of you pray and ask God how do I fit in? How do I fit in this awesome task we have before us as a people? But the main issue is spiritual. There's a darkness out there.

There's a renovation of heart and mind that is so needed because there's so much hardness. That the only way ultimately it's going to be broken through is by God Almighty breaking in. And there's where fasting and praying and pleading come in alongside all those other ministries.

I want to take you to this text in Ezra briefly. And lead up to it, this text in chapter 8 verses 21 to 23 where he calls a fast for the protection of himself and the little ones. And show you the faith building background that I saw in chapters 1 to 8. It is an amazing book.

Let me summarize it for you like this. The people of Israel, God's people are in exile. The years have gone by.

The decades have gone by. It is now time for rescue, for bringing them back, for rebuilding the temple. But they're there in the Persian Empire now.

A new emperor has been raised up. His name is Cyrus. And how are you going to do this? You got a little out of the way people.

A little small foreign refugee minority. And God says it's time for this people to move out of Persia and into Israel and build a temple. How are you going to pull that off? Chapter 1, if you want to follow these you can turn quickly with me.

Chapter 1 verses 1 and 2 describe how. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah. God is very jealous for his word.

He doesn't leave predictions up to the will of man. He predicts and he performs. In order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia. So that he sent a proclamation through all his kingdom. And also put it in writing saying thus says Cyrus king of Persia.

The Lord the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. And he has appointed me to build him a house in Jerusalem. That is awesome.

If you were a little Jew out of the way. An absolute nobody in Persia. And you said the time is drawing nigh.

God said we are going to return. How is he going to get us to return? We are captives, we are slaves here. Would you think God is going to move into the palace.

And by his spirit go straight into the heart of the emperor. And say let my people go and build my temple. And it happens.

That is the way God is. With the presidents of the United States. That is the way he is with governors of Minnesota.

That is the way he is with administrators of abortion clinics. That is the way he is with all human beings. God is sovereign.

God is accomplishing his purposes in the world. In ways we could never ever dream. Let's keep going.

42,000 people are released to go back. 42,000 plus. They start building the temple.

And they are surrounded by these enemies in Judah. Who do not like what they see at all. And they get very angry.

And they write a letter to Artaxerxes. Who has now moved into the throne. And they tell Artaxerxes.

These people are rebuilding a rebellious city. Just read and you will find out. How rebellious this city has been over the centuries.

And Artaxerxes stops the work. He shuts it down. Now you might say.

Oh setback for the kingdom. Oh dear. What will God do? As though God is not in this.

As though God is not in setbacks. There is a lesson here for us. Watch it as it develops.

So he stops them. What does God do? God is not the least frustrated by this. He is in this.

In chapter 5 verse 1. He sends two prophets. He sends them. To inspire and encourage the building of the temple.

So he says come on. In the name of the Lord let us build. So they are going to take up building.

Even though Artaxerxes had shut it down. Well the enemies get real mad again. And this time Darius has come to the throne there.

In Assyria, Persia. And they send another letter off. And they start complaining.  
That this building has started up again. And Darius. I wonder who was guiding Darius.  
Does a little research. And he finds. That Cyrus.  
Had endorsed. The return of the people in the building of the temple. Listen to what he.  
Writes. To the enemies of the people of God. In chapter 6. Verse 7 and 8. Leave this work on the house of God.  
Alone. Let the governor of the Jews. And the elders of the Jews.  
Rebuild this house of God. On its site. And here comes just an.  
Unbelievable thing. This is why God ordained. The setback.  
He had something better planned. Verse 8. Moreover. I issue a decree concerning.  
What you are to do. For these elders of Judah. In the rebuilding of this house of God.  
The full cost. Is to be paid to these people. From the royal treasury.  
Out of the taxes. Of the provinces. Beyond the river.  
And that without delay. What a reversal. What an incredible.  
Act of God. Oh what lessons. There are for us to learn here.  
You might be asking wait a minute. Are you jumping to a conclusion. That this was really God's doing.  
The hindrance from Artaxerxes. And then the endorsement. And the paying.  
He not only permitted the temple. To be paid to. The Lord.  
Had turned the heart. Of the king of Assyria. Toward them to encourage them.  
In the work. God did it. God did it.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense. But trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence.  
Of Artaxerxes. He hides a smiling. Face of Cyrus.  
Or Darius. Behind a frowning providence. Of 1994.  
At Bethlehem Baptist Church. He hides a smiling face. You think the crash and burn.  
Year of 1994. Is outside the holy saving. Awesome blessing purposes.  
Of God on this church. You don't have the God of Ezra. If that's the way you think.  
No way it was an Artaxerxes year. And you've got an Artaxerxes. Experience in your life.  
Probably right now. It was going so well. Cyrus gave us permission.

The marriage was right. The kids were right. The job was right.  
Way to go Cyrus. And then Artaxerxes. Rears his ugly head in your life.  
And the whole temple shuts down. The worship doesn't go right. The marriage doesn't go right.  
The kids don't go right. The health doesn't go right. The jobs don't go right.  
And you're tempted to say. You who behold this house. In its former glory.  
And see it now in Romans. The glory. Of the latter house.  
Will be greater. Than the glory of the former. And that started to awaken them to the fact.  
That maybe God had a purpose. In Artaxerxes. And along comes Darius.  
And says not only build. But I'll pay for the building. You think this building might be paid for in three years.  
1.4 million dollars. You think there might be. A connection.  
Between what we've lost. In 1994. And the fact that this thing's going to be paid for.  
In three years. Ponder that possibility. That Darius might come along.  
And say. It's going to be paid for. Because God put it in my heart.  
Or you pick out your. Ache. And trust the living.  
God. And. He.  
Wants to go up. To Jerusalem. And it's a flashback.  
He lived during the time of Artaxerxes. It's a flashback. And when he went up.  
And he. Says I don't want any. Armed guard.  
I'm going to do this. On my own. He did that.  
So that he could show to Darius. Or to Artaxerxes. That God will take care of them.  
And this is what he. He wrote then. This is where fasting comes in.  
In chapter eight. Verse 21 to 23. Then I proclaimed a fast.  
There at the river Ahava. That we might humble ourselves. Before our God.  
To seek from him. A safe journey for us. Our little ones.  
And our possessions. For I was ashamed. To request from the troops.  
To request from the king. Troops and horsemen. To protect us from the enemy on the way.  
Because we had said to the king. The hand of our God is favorably disposed. To all those who seek him.

But his power and his anger. Are against all those who forsake him. So we fasted.  
And sought the Lord concerning this matter. And he listened. To our.  
Desire and treaty. So let me close by just drawing your attention. To two things about fasting here.  
For the sake of the little ones. The first thing is in verse 21. Where it says it's an expression of humility.  
We proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava. That we might humble ourselves. Humility.  
Is the experience. Of the utter. Utter.  
Forsaking of self-reliance. And reliance upon what God can do. And I cannot do.  
But if you deal with the pro-choice. Issues. And deal with the people.  
And try to reason. You might wind up saying. Reason.  
And action. Have their place. As I say entirely.  
But Lord. If you don't move. In the heart of Cyrus.  
If you don't move in the heart of Artaxerxes. If you don't move in the heart of. Darius.  
And our legislators. And the administrators. And owners of these clinics.  
If you don't move there. Then we just reason till we're blue in the face. And nothing seems to give.  
And I'm asking you this morning. Whether fasting. Should be part of that.  
Intercession. Lastly. Verse 23.  
Fasting is an expression of seeking God. In a life and death seriousness. So we fasted.  
And sought our God. God simply ordains. That there are different ways to seek him.  
You can seek him in worship. And you can seek him in private prayer. And you can seek him in fasting.  
And there are times. When life. And opposition.  
And resistance seems so great. That we as a church should humble ourselves. And seek the Lord with  
fasting.  
That he might. Give the little ones a safe trip home. Give them a safe trip home.  
From conception to their mother's arms. I appeal to you. To pray about this.  
Next Sunday. I'm going to. Give you some concrete.  
Ideas. For how we can move together as church. Through the rest of this year.  
I've been asking you to fast on Wednesdays. Through this month. And I continue to ask you to join.  
In doing that. But now I'm asking you to consider. Whether a general fast.

Should be supplemented by. A focused fast. That part of that Wednesday fast.

There should be a focused intercession. On behalf of the children. And as you leave here now.

I want to just remind you. That the table is over there. And Cam and Christa are over there.

They'd love to talk to any of you. They'd love to get you on a list. Of brainstorming, dreaming, praying.

Pro-life people. And while we're bowed. I just want to close with this invitation.

I'm going to stay at the front for a few minutes. And the prayer teams will be here. There are some of you.

Here who have had abortions. And I want to hold out. What you probably already know.

But need reassurance of. Perhaps after a sermon like this. That there's wonderful cleansing.

And forgiveness. For that act. There are some here.

Perhaps who are contemplating abortion. And you need. To get on your knees.

And open yourself to God's. Leading. And there are guys here.

Who've really gotten off cheap. In this. Got some girl pregnant.

And solved it. Real quick. And quiet.

And your conscience is. Filthy this morning. And you need relief.

And it is there in Jesus. And then there's the rest of us. Who feel bad.

Sometimes. Because we don't know what to do. And the pro-life Sunday.

Comes around once a year. And we say. Oh let's do something now.

And then we forget about the children. The rest of the year. And we need help.

And anything else. That the Lord might touch you. In this morning.

He's really eager to minister to you. And we are too. Here at the front.

If there's anything you want to pray about. Talk about the stand for the benediction. And once you look at me.

Because benedictions are. For me to you. From God.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you. And give you peace. Amen.

You're dismissed.

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