

FASTING

To fast: 'to abstain from certain foods as a form of religious discipline.' (Collins dictionary)

Fasting is primarily the act of willingly abstaining from some or all food, drink, or both, for a period of time. Fasts may be total (though we should never stop drinking water), or partial - limiting particular foods or substance. Often, we talk about 'giving something up' for the period of Lent.

Fasting should always be considered as a way of coming close to God. We give something up, in order the focus our minds more directly upon our spiritual centre. Normally, we think about giving food, but it can refer to renouncing anything that we enjoy, for a limited period of time, in order to devote ourselves to God.

The practice of fasting is common to all main religions, not just Christianity. There are many examples quoted in the Old Testament of days of fasting for specific reasons. In the Gospels, Jesus gives advice and warnings about how to fast:

"When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6: 16 – 18)

Fasting is normally associated with prayer. For example, in the Acts of the Apostles, we note that the church prayed and fasted before sending out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries.

What can fasting do for us?

Christians have always used fasting as a way of devoting themselves to God. Of course, it is important that we do so with the right attitude. It is not something to boast about (Jesus talks about fasting in secret). Humility and fasting are often mentioned together. The practice of fasting is used by believers as a way of re-focusing their minds on God, repenting of sin, and reminding themselves that God provides for our needs.

Always remember that fasting is not an end in itself. It is a way to approach God. The Bible gives several warnings that true fasting is all about doing God's work, not merely going through outward rituals for the sake of outward appearances.

For example:

"Is not this the kind of **fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)**

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (Joel 2:12 – 13)

“When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.” (Mathew 6:16-17)

And finally:

Do not fast (by abstaining from food at least), if you are diabetic, suffer from any medical condition which would result in danger for you or if your doctor has told you not to!