

FASTING – 21st CENTURY STYLE

INTRODUCTION

If you are a bit put off by the idea of fasting – read on!

Fasting has gathered some negative images around it.
So let’s begin again and see what it is really about.

At its heart it is about **getting things into proportion.**

The work of evil (however we understand it) is to *distort* our lives. Evil is, often, not the opposite of good, but good that has been *distorted*.

The Christian will want to use every means available to have things in their lives not distorted, but balanced, correct and as God wants them to be.

This is where the fasting principle comes in. **It can be a deliberate choice to experience a little less of something** so that

- We realise afresh that it is not all-important.
- We are made aware if something is trying to dominate our lives.
- We break its domination over us.
- We move into greater freedom from it.
- We see it in a truer perspective.
- We increase our appreciation of it.

FASTING DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN FOOD

In poor cultures food assumes massive importance and has little to compete with it. Eating is, then, the area of life which can dominate it, and so be in most need of keeping in proportion.

In the rich Western society, for many food is taken for granted, so it does not stand out as the most obvious item that wrongly dominates our lives.

The label ‘TOO MUCH’ is a useful item. On what areas of your life would you stick it?
Spend some time deciding your answer. Make a list.

Some of the items on your list might be helped by ‘fasting’ from them.

- Reduce them
- Bring them down to size
- Break their tendency to dominate

I suspect for many they need to break the domination of **computer games**, the **internet** or **television** over their lives, more urgently than they need to tame the attraction of food.

A disciplined restriction of, say, television – or anything else –

- restores its true position,
- restores its value,
- helps you appreciate it.

Some years ago the area in which I lived had an acute water shortage. A friend said to me after it was over. “I have never appreciated water so much! I will never again keep the tap water just running away while I brush my teeth!”

Earlier, water had been taken for granted. After an imposed ‘fast’ it was appreciated as never before.

Water reduction brought water appreciation. This is a basic principle.

CHRISTIAN FASTING

Reduction brings appreciation and corrects distortion.

Appreciation in the Christian life of course leads us to praise God who is the ultimate source of our blessings. It moves us God-ward.

Correcting distortion in the Christian life is combating evil and helping to establish God’s kingdom. It loosens the grip of evil on our lives.

The principle of fasting, whenever a Christian applies it, is therefore of great spiritual significance and importance, and applies to every Christian from whatever Christian tradition they come.

It is more important to grasp the **fasting principle** and apply it, than it is to partially abstain from eating without understanding why.

Jesus’s followers are ‘disciples’ – a word closely linked to ‘discipline’.

No one fasts from anything at all who is undisciplined.

To fast is one sign of the disciplined Christian life. The disciplined Christian life is so ordered that evil finds maximum resistance in its attempts to distort it. It is this that accounts for the

strong Christian tradition that, when needing to confront evil and exercise Christ’s authority over it, ‘prayer and fasting’ are necessary.

Fasting helps us put things into perspective, to begin to see items in our life as God sees them. When this happens, the results of fasting can change our patterns of priorities and behaviour – not just for a period, e.g. Lent, but, ideally, for life.

God does not wish us to be ill, but when we are, he can use the experience. Illness can impose the fasting-principle on us whether we wanted it or not! Illness, by denying us so much, can help us see life’s things in truer proportion. That is the fasting-principle, and can give a rich dimension to our illnesses when we recognise it.

[See also the article *The Wilderness Experience* on this website.]

A Text:

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...

[Acts 13:2a]

Lord God,

We thank you for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life.

Forgive us for what we have taken for granted.

Free us from those things that try to dominate us.

Cleanse our hearts and open our eyes to see more truly and more clearly.

Give us today our daily bread.

Guide us/me in our/my choices.

Correct our/my priorities.

That Christ may be seen more clearly in us/me,

to the honour and glory of his Name. Amen.