

lay hold of it, and journey on. And how mayest thou be able to do these things? By subduing thy body, and bringing it into subjection. For when the way grows narrow, the corpulence that comes of gluttony is a great hindrance. Keep down the waves of inordinate desires. Repel the tempest of evil thoughts. Preserve the bark; display much skill, and thou hast become a pilot. But we shall have the fast for a groundwork and instructor in all these things. I speak not, indeed, of such a fast as most persons keep, but of real fasting; not merely an abstinence from meats; but from sins too. For the nature of a fast is such, that it does not suffice to deliver those who practice it, unless it be done according to a suitable law. "For the wrestler," it is said, "is not crowned unless he strive lawfully." To the end then, that when we have gone through the labour of fasting, we forfeit not the crown of fasting, we should understand how, and after what manner, it is necessary to conduct this business; since that Pharisee also fasted, but afterwards when down empty, and destitute of the fruit of fasting. The Publican fasted not; and yet he was accepted in preference to him who had fasted; in order that thou mayest learn that fasting is unprofitable, except all other duties follow with it. The Ninevites fasted, and won the favour of God. The Jews fasted too, and profited nothing, nay they departed with blame. Since then the danger in fasting is so great to those who do not know how they ought to fast, we should learn the laws of this exercise, in order that we may not "run uncertainly," nor "beat the air," nor while we are fighting contend with a shadow. Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the unskillfulness of him who employs it. For it is necessary to know, moreover, the time when it should be applied, and the requisite quantity of it; and the temperament of body that admits it; and the nature of the country, and the season of the year; and the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. Now if, when the body needs healing, such exactness is required on our part, much more ought we, when our care is about the soul, and we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, to look, and to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy. I have said these things, not that we may disparage fasting, but that we may honour fasting; for the honour of fasting consists not in abstinence from food, but in withdrawing from sinful practices; since he who limits his fasting only to an abstinence from meats, is one who especially disparages it. Dost thou fast? Give me proof of it by thy works! Is it said by what kind of works? If thou seest a poor man, take pity on him! If thou seest an enemy, be reconciled to him! If thou seest a friend gaining honour, envy him not! If thou seest a handsome woman, pass her by! For let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies. Let the hands fast, by being pure from rapine and avarice. Let the feet fast, but ceasing from running to the unlawful spectacles. Let the eyes fast, being taught never to fix themselves rudely upon handsome countenances, or to busy themselves with strange beauties. For looking is the food of the eyes, but if this be such as is unlawful or forbidden, it mars the fast; and upsets the whole safety of the soul; but if it be lawful and safe, it adorns fasting. For it would be among things the most absurd to abstain from lawful food because of the fast, but with the eyes to touch even what is forbidden. Dost thou not eat flesh? Feed not upon lasciviousness by means of the eyes. Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear consists in refusing to receive evil speakings and calumnies. "Thou shalt not receive a false report," it says.

Making a 'Rule of Life'

The meaning of Rule comes from the Greek word for "trellis" and the Latin word for mark on the wall. A trellis is a tool designed to enable a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life can be the trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually.

A Rule of Life, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the centre of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us intentionally pay attention and remember Him.

The purpose of any Rule is to unite us as a local church in our intention to follow Christ, keeping us faithful to our unique grace and calling. This Rule serves as an anchor for us, a kind of banister to support us as we move forward in our journey with and for God. It is how we do life together, expressing the longings of our heart for God. It is meant to be a framework for freedom, providing healthy boundaries while leaving plenty of room for flexibility and individuality. Remember, a good Rule works best when it challenges us. A Rule cannot be so easy that we are not stretched. At the same time, it cannot be so demanding that we are overwhelmed and discouraged.

Prayer

- ◆ Be a lover of God, seeking to live in the love of Christ above all else. *Psalm 27:1-4; Matthew 22:36-38; Deut.6:4-9* Jesus identified loving God as the greatest commandment, a summation of all Scripture. We want to be a people who know God in our experience (heart and soul) as well as with our minds.
- ◆ Befriend silence. *Ps. 37:7; 1Kings19:11-13;Ps.62:1-2*. Our tendency is to fear and avoid silence, not befriend it. Yet silence is one of God's great gifts, especially in our noisy culture. What makes our silence unique is its quality of being "before the Lord."
- ◆ Allow Holy Scripture to shape and form Christ in me. *2 Tim. 3:16-7; Ps.19:7-11;Matt.4:4*. We love the Word of God, affirming that maturing in Christ requires a life where we read, memorize, meditate, enjoy, study, and obey Scripture. Our focus is that Christ be formed in us, not simply the accumulation of more information about him.
- ◆ Integrate contemplative practices and rhythms (e.g. Daily Office, Sabbath-keeping) to slow down my life. *Luke 5:15-16; Ps.119:164; Deut.5:12-15*. A great problem in Western culture today is our crammed schedules, endless to-do lists, and general busyness. Powerful, often demonic forces, keep us distracted and adrift spiritually. We affirm God's call to order our entire lives in such a way that the love of Christ comes before all else. Recognizing our humanity and our limits, we choose to observe contemplative practices in order to slow down to be with God, ourselves, and others

Rest

- ◆ Value my own dignity as a human being made in God's image through self-respect and self care. *Genesis 1:27, Luke 14: 17-24, Galatians 4:4-7*. An accurate whole grasp of the gospel leads us to an acceptance of ourselves that enables us to love others well. We are image-bearers of God; there is no greater compliment that could be given that could be given regarding our value and worth. According to the gospel, we are no longer slaves or orphans, but adopted sons and daughters. Jesus took our sin record, taking our death on

the cross. At the same time, we are legally declared righteous in Christ and treated as if our record were perfect before God.

- ◆ Ruthlessly eliminate hurry: *Luke 10:38–42; Ps. 46:10; Prov. 19:2,22:3*. The word ruthlessly was chosen intentionally because that is what it takes to eliminate hurry from our lives. It captures one of the great challenges before us as we seek to live authentic spiritual lives in our 24/7, multi-tasking world.
- ◆ Remember God's history of faithfulness with each new challenge. *Exodus 14:10-14; 1 Samuel 17:34–37*. We each face “Goliaths” and “Red Seas” during our lives as we journey with Christ. God invites us to remember His powerful acts through history and the specific ways He has delivered us from the “lion and the bear” (as with David). Forgetting leads to unbelief while remembering fills us with courage to follow Him wherever He leads.
- ◆ Receive God's limits as a gift. *Matt. 4:1-11; John 3:27; Eccles. 3:1-8*. God is God; we are not. God is perfect; we are not. While our culture resists the idea of limits, we embrace them. Limits are gifts and expressions of God's love and goodness to us. We recognize them as a friend, keeping us grounded so that we don't hurt ourselves, others, or God's work.

Relationships

- ◆ Love my neighbour as I love myself—embracing my singleness as I bond with others, or in marriage, giving first priority to my partner and children. *Genesis 2:24-5; 1 Cor. 7:25-38*. We recognize both marriage and singleness as vocations in God's kingdom, with deep significance for our walk with Christ. For those married, bonding with and serving our partner comes before all else but Christ. For those single, we affirm our call to be the bride of Christ, bond in healthy ways to others, and serve as parents who bear fruit for Christ.
- ◆ Walk in community while respecting each person's uniqueness. *1 Cor. 12:17-31; Hebrews 10:24-5; Prov. 27:17*. We place a high value on community, walking out our faith together as a local church family. At the same time, we affirm the biblical emphasis on the uniqueness of each person's individuality, gifts, and calling.
- ◆ Apply emotionally healthy practices in order to love well. *1 Cor. 13:1-3; Luke 10:25-37*. Jesus made it clear that the second greatest commandment is to love others. Part of our discipleship includes learning new skills—peaking, listening, clarifying assumptions and expectations, and clean fighting, among others. These “practices” are easy to learn but difficult to implement consistently, especially under stress.
- ◆ Listen more than I speak. *Proverbs 18:7-8; James 1:19, 26; James 3:1-12*. Scripture is clear that we are to be slow to speak and quick to listen; real maturity is reflected in our ability to control our speech. James states that if we are able to manage our tongues, we will be able to keep all our unhealthy passions in check.

A rule shouldn't be long or complicated and expect it to change—talk to one of the priests if you need to reflect on what you're taking up.

Fasting and Abstinence

Fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. It's one of the oldest and most universal ways in which humans have tried to discipline themselves and concentrate on prayer. Today we live in a culture of fast food, instant gratification, and self-awareness and we're being hugely counter-cultural if we

fast not for health reasons but for God.

Truly, one of the best ways to get our eyes off of ourselves and back onto God is through fasting. However, fasting as an ordinary part of being a believer has been forgotten under a tsunami of health advice. So, why not think about fasting and/or abstaining during the 40 days of Lent? Or on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent?

The definition of abstinence is it lowers the quality of food (usually by not eating meat) and of fasting is that it lowers the quantity, and usually means not more than a light breakfast, one full meal, and one half meal daily each fast day.

You could sum up Lent by saying "keep it smaller and keep it simpler." Smaller portions of food, and simpler menus. Not because you necessarily have to lose weight, but because the practice will give you strength in your spiritual life by weakening the attractions of the sensate pleasures. Fasting makes the waistline shrink and the heart get larger, and abstinence makes the heart grow fonder! Don't get discouraged if you have to eat as part of work or because you're ill - just try again another day.

And just in case you think I'm making this up here's a quotation from St John, the Golden-Mouthed, a famous preacher and bishop of Constantinople. Its from his Homily III of his "Homilies on the Statues,":

...We have this fast too as an ally, and as an assistant in this good intercession. Therefore, as when the winter is over and the summer is appearing, the sailor draws his vessel to the deep; and the soldier burnishes his arms, and makes ready his steed for the battle; and the husbandman sharpens his sickle; and the traveller boldly undertakes a long journey, and the wrestler strips and bares himself for the contest. So too, when the fast makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons; and as husbandmen let us sharpen our sickle; and as sailors let us order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires; and as travellers let us set out on the journey towards heaven; and as wrestlers let us strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a husbandman, and a sailor, and a soldier, a wrestler, and a traveller. Hence St. Paul saith, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers. Put on therefore the whole armour of God." Hast thou observed the wrestler? Hast thou observed the soldier? If thou art a wrestler, it is necessary for thee to engage in the conflict naked. If a soldier, it behoves thee to stand in the battle line armed at all points. How then are both these things possible, to be naked, and yet not naked; to be clothed, and yet not clothed! How? I will tell thee. Divest thyself of worldly business, and thou hast become a wrestler. Put on the spiritual armour, and thou hast become a soldier. Strip thyself of worldly cares, for the season is one of wrestling. Clothe thyself with the spiritual armour, for we have a heavy warfare to wage with demons. Therefore also it is needful we should be naked, so as to offer nothing that the devil may take hold of, while he is wrestling with us; and to be fully armed at all points, so as on no side to receive a deadly blow. Cultivate thy soul. Cut away the thorns. Sow the word of godliness. Propagate and nurse with much care the fair plants of divine wisdom, and thou hast become a husbandman. And Paul will say to thee, "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. He too himself practised this art. Therefore writing to the Corinthians, he said, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Sharpen thy sickle, which thou hast blunted through gluttony--sharpen it by fasting. Lay hold of the pathway which leads towards heaven; rugged and narrow as it is,