

What distracts you when you try to pray? Do you find your mind wandering going off at a tangent? Jesus speaks doesn't he about going to a quiet room and praying to God free from distractions, because there's something about removing distractions in our lives isn't there, to help us seek God in a more focused way.

Fasting has been part and parcel of the Judeo-Christian tradition for millennia and scripture is replete with examples of people who fast for a variety of reasons.

The Old Testament Saints fasted at times of mourning and national repentance. They fasted when they needed strength or mercy to persevere and when they wanted a word from God. However fasting was no magical guarantee that God would answer as the intercessor wanted.

Fasting was a normal practise for the Jews of Jesus day. And Jesus began his ministry with a 40 day fast in the wilderness. He also practised fasting before healings and to overcome temptation but he didn't hold his followers to a strict regime of fasting.

The New Testament church sometimes fasted when it sought God's will and needed the grace and strength to remain faithful to God's work. There are also fasts linked to times of worship.

In many Christian traditions fasting is an important part of preparing to embrace a particular season. Many of us during the season of lent are fasting aren't we?

But fasting isn't a magical way to manipulate God into doing our will, fasting clears us out and opens us up to intentionally seek God's will and grace in a way that goes beyond normal habits of worship and prayer.

Fasting is an opportunity to lay down an appetite-an appetite for food, for media, for shopping. When we fast we are brought face to face with the hunger at the core of our being. Fasting exposes how we try to keep empty hunger at bay, through fasting we begin to recognise what controls us.

Fasting is also a physical reminder of our need to trust in God, Jesus illustrated this to us when he was in the wilderness and Satan tried to tempt him, he reminded Satan didn't he, that man shall not live by bread alone? Saying no to one thing, even a good thing like food, technology, social interactions, and possessions, is a way of saying yes to the deeper satisfaction of knowing God and trusting in his provision. And by fasting we learn to live with a healthier attitude towards these things.