

# Speaking to the Soul



## August 26 - Fasting

“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and dishevelled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face.” 6:16–17

Fasting formed a significant part of Jewish life. Solemn fasts were held on particular days such as the Day of Atonement, the New Year and the anniversaries of notable calamities in Jewish history. In addition, special fasts were called when there was a particular emergency, such as the

autumn rains falling. Stricter Jews would also fast weekly on Mondays and Thursdays. In the early Church many Christians fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. So fasting was a regular experience for Christians and Jesus did nothing to discourage it. But his concern was the way in which it was done. He taught his disciples to be completely private about it. Because it was to be entirely between them and God, he encouraged them to go out of their way to hide the fact that they were fasting.

Fasting continues to be important for many Christians. It isn't a requirement, but many find it to be a blessing. It's a time to focus our attention on the Lord and to listen to him. The moment it becomes a public spectacle or is used as a way of showing others how deeply committed your faith is, it loses its blessing. The attention moves from the Lord to yourself. When you fast, you are telling God that he is more important than food, and are freeing up time to nourish your spiritual life. Some people use it as an opportunity to read scripture or a devotional book, or to have unhurried time in prayer. The choice is yours – but the focus is God.

## **QUESTION**

In what ways is fasting a blessing to you? And if you don't fast, in what ways do you think you might be blessed by doing it?

## **PRAYER**

Lord God, we thank you for the blessings that you bring to your people when they fast. Amen