

## Three Disciplines of Lent and the Christian Life

### Almsgiving

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**What?** Almsgiving is the discipline of giving to those in any need.

**Why?** We are freed in Christ to give knowing that God will provide for our needs. We give because God is a giver and because he uses our giving to bless all in need. We serve him by serving others.

**How?** The one giving does so in many ways. They may help a neighbor with a need noticed or revealed. They may donate money to the parts of the Church which help the needy. The one giving does not limit their giving to money alone but uses any gift entrusted to them.

**Cautions:** “When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...that they may be praised by others...But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. *Matthew 6:2-4*

**How did Jesus fulfill this discipline?** He gave countless needy people food, health, and good news. He also gave his very life for all those needful of salvation due to their sins.

### Praying

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**What?** Praying is responding to God’s words and promises with words directed heavenward asking for mercy, rejoicing in blessings, and praising him for his goodness.

**Why?** We are freed in Christ to pray knowing that because of Jesus our Heavenly Father hears and answers our prayer. As we pray, our relationship with Christ is nurtured and strengthened.

**How?** Prayer should be both regular and constant. The one praying is gathered with his congregation for corporate prayer often. At least one time is set apart each day for prayer in the home. Other prayers are offered as need arises. The one praying use the Lord’s Prayer as both the ultimate prayer to be repeated and a guide for all other prayers.

**Cautions:** “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. ...But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” *Matthew 6:2-4*

**How did Jesus fulfill this discipline?** Jesus was a man of constant prayer. He often went away to speak with his Father. He prayed even on the cross. He knew that there was never an occasion were prayer would be improper.

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## Fasting

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**What?** Fasting is the practice of doing without something for a time.

**Why?** Fasting reminds us that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. We learn that things we thought necessary for our lives are not essential. Fasting is often therefore accompanied by repentance over the ways we have turned earthly as into idols on which we depend.

**How?** The one fasting may do several things. Certain days or parts of the day can be set apart as a time to not eat or to eat less than normal. Likewise, a specific item precious to the one fasting can given up for a number of days. Sometimes congregations or other groups of Christians will all fast together on prescribed days in prescribed ways.

**Cautions:** “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. *Matthew 6:16-18*

**How did Jesus fulfill this discipline?** Jesus fasted at the beginning of his ministry right before his temptation. He also fasted during his passion being deprived of many and various good things including his Father’s presence. No doubt he fasted at other times as well.



While these disciplines are laudable and given by our Lord, we must admit that no one keeps them perfectly in Lent, let alone our entire Christian lives. Therefore let us turn again to the One who gave, prayed, and fasted perfectly in life and then gave his life for our sin and our salvation. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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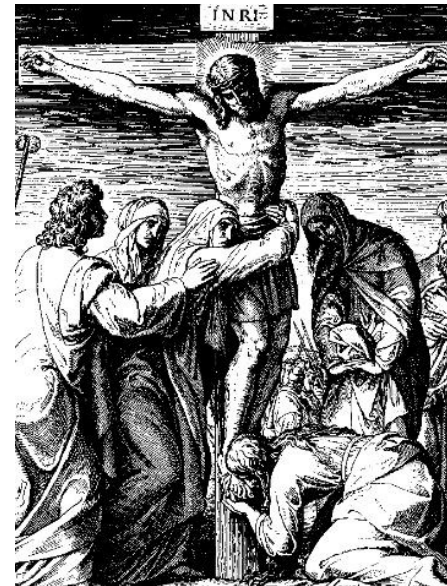
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