

A Valentine for God

By: Barbara Dickson

Bible Reading: Matthew 6:16-18

When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Valentine's Day is fast approaching. Stores are stocked with chocolate, heart-shaped boxes, roses and baubles to help ardent romantics proclaim their love. While plumbers' wrenches and motor oil collect dust, flowers and confectionery sell by the truckload.

What's all the fuss about? Why do we shower our loved ones in posies and trinkets on Valentine's Day? The answer is easy. When we love, we seize every opportunity to show that love. The 14th of February gives us a perfect excuse.

Too bad we can't send a candy-gram to God. A huge chocolate heart sealed with a kiss sent special delivery to Heaven to show Him how much we love Him, and to thank Him for all His wonderful blessings. If only there was a way.

There is. After hearts and bouquets, February ushers in another special day. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season, starting February 28th and lasting until Easter. While couriers don't deliver to Heaven, God has provided a beautiful way to offer Him our tokens of love.

Instead of sending God a chocolate valentine, we give up a Lent's worth of chocolate. Instead of indulging in an extravagant dinner, we forgo a day's worth of food. He receives our love hearts through our sacrifice, abstinence and fasting.

In fact, this pre-Easter season calls upon those who love God to imitate Jesus, God's son, who spent 40 days in prayer and fasting. Lent becomes a time of spiritual and physical preparation as we remember Jesus' life, and His death on a cross.

Fasting simply means going without, whether it is food, food and water, treats, sweets or any enslaving habit. There are many ways to fast. Some people choose not to eat for one day per week, like Fridays. Others fast for 40 hours while still others fast for three consecutive days per week. Some abstain from their comfort foods like candy, bread or coffee. Others forgo watching television, playing video games or other activities that restrain their hearts and minds from resting on God.

Whatever form our fast takes, we express our love for God in humble praise and thanksgiving, where we sacrifice earthly comfort to gain a heavenly outlook. Fasting, along

with earnest prayer and quiet reflection, causes us to see the world through new eyes. We lose the desire to want "things." Tongues are held and anger is tempered. We become sensitized to the needs and sorrows of our fellow humans. Fasting causes us to crave the fruit of God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We hunger after things that are pure, lovely and true. The Bible says that a peace that surpasses all human understanding can be ours.

Although Lent is an accepted time for fasting, the blessings of fasting can be enjoyed at any time of year. Like lovers who set up regular dates, we can set up regular times to fast, to thirst for a closer relationship with Almighty God.

Jesus taught His followers to fast in secret, because God sees what they do in secret. The greater the secret, the greater the blessing. Lovers enjoy knowing glances and private moments. Imagine sharing whispered prayers, secret fasting and sacred trysts with the Creator of the universe.

God loved us so much that He gave us His perfect valentine, His Son, Jesus. He dwelt among us and gave His life, the ultimate sacrifice, so that we could live forever with Him in Heaven.

Come, taste and see that God is good. Why not make this February 14th the beginning of a beautiful love affair with God, starting with the loving act of fasting? ☪

Remember to seek medical approval before fasting. Going without food helps to humble our bodies and spirits. If our health is compromised due to illness or weakness, then fasting should be within our physical limits.

Fasting Tips:

- Begin fasting with a partial fast once a week for 24 hours, from lunch to lunch, skipping two meals.
- Fast several weeks at this level before extending your fast.
- Offer every task of the day to the glory of God.
- Break your fast with a light meal of fruits and vegetables. Rejoice!
- Fasting without prayer and worship are like empty calories—nothing to it. The devil also never eats.

Fasting Facts:

- Fasting is a voluntary act of love.
- Forty days is special. Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days in the desert. It rained for 40 days in the time of Noah. Moses and the Hebrew people wandered in the desert for 40 years.
- "Lent" comes from "lencten," the lengthening of days in the spring.