



FOOTBALL clubs often employ a chaplain who is involved at all levels of their club, offering pastoral and spiritual support to people of any faith and of no faith. This could mean supporting a player with a long-term injury; aiding a youngster through the disappointment of being released; or helping with bereavement. The spiritual aspect of the chaplain's role is sometimes embraced, with coaches seeing that this dimension is important for players, whatever their faith. ARTHUR GOODE is the Argyle chaplain.

I WAS reading yet more articles the other day about a super food that could refresh parts other foods could not reach. This time it was agave syrup. Equally, it could have been açai (pronounced a-sai-EE), kimchi or coconut sugar. Juicing is apparently a waste of time as well. As for coconut water/oil/matting - what nonsense.

One fad that does seem to be both effective, sensible and backed up with sound science is the 5-2 diet - fasting two days out of every seven. They found that, as well as resulting in weight loss, it also gave various other health benefits.

Without wanting to get all technical, I do find it very interesting that a simple thing like fasting has been proved to be so healthy: fasting as a discipline is at the heart of Christianity, as well as most of the other major religions. Just like Sabbath rest, mindfulness, group singing, prayer and charity work (all activities that have found their way

into health studies fairly recently written about in the colour supplements and glossy magazines as if they are new ideas) the old patterns of life have a lot of wisdom to teach us.

I have found that I am not great at dieting. I am not huge but could certainly shift a bit here and there (chest slippage), but, rather than face the pain and self-discipline I need for something like the 5-2 diet, I just try to moderate what goes in and keep up with the exercise.

Interestingly, though, I find it easier to fast for spiritual reasons, than for weight-loss reasons. Maybe because then it is not about me: it is about God and others. I think, when we have a motive beyond ourselves, we find it easier to make a sacrifice and follow through on a promise. That is why so many people, when they decide to train for a marathon or cycle ride halfway across the world, blog about it and get everyone else involved. Is it accountability,

encouragement, or a sense of responsibility that helps them push through and finish the challenge?

In football, when you have a group all working hard towards a shared goal, it is so much easier to train harder, eat well and not give up. It is a rare individual who can train alone and reach goals without the motivation gained from being around others, and the team spirit is displayed on the training-ground and in the dressing-room as much as it is in evidence on the pitch. And who can tell how much the support of the Green Army has played a part in our current league position?

My take on this is that life was not meant to be lived alone. We all need people, seen and unseen, cheering us on and reminding us that we are significant and part of something bigger - another idea at the heart of Christian faith that seems to resonate with the experiences of modern life.

"It is a rare individual who can train alone and reach goals without the motivation gained from being around others"