

THE OPPORTUNITY OF LENT

Greetings Springs Community! This year, we have an opportunity as a church family to participate in a Fast for Lent together from March 5th to April 17th. Lent, an old Anglo-Saxon word for “spring season,” is a Christian observance of fasting, and prayer during the liturgical year in preparation for Easter. It echoes the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and enduring temptation by Satan before beginning his public ministry.

While Lent is not explicitly mandated in Scripture, it is a man-made tradition that allows us to intentionally seek God in repentance and recommitment—not as a means of earning salvation, but as a way to prepare our hearts for the miracle of Easter. Like all spiritual practices, Lent is not a requirement, but rather an opportunity.

An Opportunity to Direct Our Heart Towards Brokenness

Wait, that doesn’t sound pleasant! While I would agree, I can’t overstate the importance of this opportunity. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, and “ashes” holds significant symbolism in scripture representing grief over sin. The symbolism of Ash Wednesday reminds us of our fragility and humanity. In our brokenness, we gain a healthy perspective: We are indeed a lost people in need of a Savior’s rescue.

But our story doesn’t end in ashes! We began this year with ‘Stopping Before We Started’ to create intentional space to deepen our relationship with our Heavenly Father. When we get quiet with God, often our moments of introspection reveal our deep spaces of brokenness. Lent provides us with the opportunity to move from brokenness to the hopeful expectation that Easter embodies for Jesus’ followers.

An Opportunity to Reveal Our Heart’s Idols

When we see fasting in the Old Testament, it was abstinence from food, but in the New Testament, fasting becomes more nuanced, translating as “to be empty.” The spiritual discipline of fasting is the literal act of denying your physical [flesh’s] desires. It reminds and refocuses our attention to our complete dependence on God.

It’s likely (although not impossible!) that you don’t have little statues of gods in your home that you pray to at night or count on to bring you good fortune in life. But is it possible that you nonetheless have idols controlling your life and dominating your imagination? Absolutely.

Author, Richard Keyes, suggests two ways to examine modern idolatry: surface idols and source idols. “Surface” idols are more visible and include possessions, materialism, achievement, work, sex, drugs/alcohol, image, status, etc. Even good

things can be elevated to the sin of idolatry, like our spouse or kids, relationships, even religion, and serving. It's essentially putting the created above the creator.

However, beneath the surface are considered four "source" idols. The Bible doesn't explicitly list these, but they're helpful tools to identify the root causes of surface-level idolatry:

- Power: a longing for influence or recognition.
- Control: a longing to have everything go according to one's plan.
- Comfort: a longing for pleasure.
- Approval: a longing to be accepted or desired.

In Matthew 4:1-11, we find the story of Jesus led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. As Jesus is fasting during these 40 days, Satan goes right after these very source idols of the human heart: comfort (vs. 4), control (vs. 5), power and approval (vs. 8-9).

As we follow Jesus' model of steadfastness, the season of Lent presents us with an opportunity to reflect on our own natural inclinations. Prayerfully consider the things you naturally gravitate towards, and to "empty" yourself of, shifting your reliance and idol worship from the "things" of this world, to the ONE who can meet our true needs.

An Opportunity to Position Our Heart in the Joy of Easter

Writer, Susan Narjala, writes, "The resurrection is not just a celebration; it's the very foundation of our faith. Without the empty tomb, our faith would be hollow. Lent provides us with the space to allow the miraculous wonder of Easter to capture our hearts and inspire us to reaffirm our commitment to His glory."

Whenever I fast, I experience withdrawal, cravings, and a strong desire for my usual "fix". Denying my flesh is challenging! The Lent fast is not a rule to be followed, but a response to what Jesus did for us on the cross. If this is your first time fasting, start small—don't try to do too much too soon. Nobody starts out running a marathon.

Also, give yourself grace! If you lapse occasionally during your fast, Jesus will not be revoking your salvation—or even his love for you. Remember, we are undertaking this endeavor to position our hearts in the fullness of the JOY found in celebrating Easter—and there is still grace for you!

I like to call fasting "Addition by Subtraction." When we empty ourselves for God, He always fills the space, and then some. I look forward to participating in this Lent Opportunity (March 5 - April 17) together with you!

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