

## Lent: Is It Giving Up Something or Gaining Something?

Now that Lent is here, what have you “given up” to show God you are serious about your faith? Did you decide to give up sweets, soft drinks or some other habit that you enjoy? Sacrifice – isn’t that what it is all about? After all, Jesus was the supreme sacrifice for us all. We can recognize His sacrifice by denying ourselves some small pleasure for the next six weeks.



People of faith during Old Testament times fasted and repented for their sins by wearing sackcloth. Bible passages Esther 4:1-3, Jeremiah 6:26 and Daniel 9:3 tell us about the fasting, weeping, wailing and mourning as their way of showing sincere sorrow during those times. They were attempts to win favor with God. The coming of Jesus changed everything. He was very clear that we don’t need to try to gain God’s blessing because grace cannot be earned. Grace is the result of righteousness which is only possible because of God’s forgiveness. *For if, by*

*the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!* (Romans 5:17.)

The 46 days of Lent are a time of preparation and repentance. The biblical definition of repentance is “turning away from evil and turning to the good.” It is much more than just saying you are sorry. Being sorry centers around being remorseful and doesn’t address our human inclination to repeat the sin. On the other hand, repentance (turning away from sin) is both an effort to not repeat the sin plus asking God for forgiveness (turning towards the good).

Judas, one of the villains of Holy Week, was remorseful for betraying Jesus. Judas didn’t think God would forgive him and he didn’t trust Jesus to love him because of his sin. Judas ended up hanging himself. On the other hand, Peter, who denied Jesus three times and ran away, was repentant for his sin. He was sorry for his sin but trusted Christ to be merciful. Peter demonstrated repentance and as a result, he would become one of the most important leaders of the faith.

I don’t mean to downplay intentional sacrificial efforts during Lent. Giving up something we enjoy takes us out of our daily routine and makes us more aware of the season. Lent is a season of preparation for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The end result of this is that we have hope for eternal life. It is a mammoth gain, not a loss. The forgiveness of sin allows us to live free from guilt in this world and in God’s grace for all of eternity. A common acronym of G.R.A.C.E. spells out “God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense. You gain God’s riches -- eternity. May you be reminded that whatever you choose to “give up” during lent increases your awareness of what you gain by being a believer.

**Question:** What are your Lenten traditions? Does it help prepare you for the joys of the resurrection?

**Prayer:** Most graciously Heavenly Father. We can never repay you for your mercy and the grace you provide to all believers. This Lenten season let us prepare ourselves to focus our attention on Jesus’ victory over death. Because of it we have everything to gain. Amen.

*Note: Some of the concepts of this devotion are based on a devotional Facebook post by Rev. David H. Peterson, Senior pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.*