



Lent is almost upon us. This year we are joining two other churches for Lent. The theme is the meaning of the cross and we will follow Jesus from his baptism to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But this is probably not what you would expect from a series on the cross. Three times in the gospel of John Jesus said referenced how he would be lifted up. He said that when he was, the lifting (the cross) would draw people to him. We think of the cross as an act of sacrifice and a means through which forgiveness of sin is secured, but I doubt if we think of the cross as a magnet, or as a way that God pulls us toward Christ. We will hear the claims of Jesus as he tells us that if we follow him that we must deny ourselves and pick up our cross.

Are you ready to seek God? He tells us that if we seek him that we will find him. <sup>13</sup> "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV) He tells us that when we draw near to him, that he will draw near to us. (James 4:8) Aren't those great promises? We are assured that if we make the effort that he will give us the desires of our hearts. But there must be effort.

There will be a special Ash Wednesday service on Wed., Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM. Like last year, we will have a time of worship, prayer, and expressing to God our desire to live in him by changing our habits for forty days. We will write our decisions on how to lift him up this Lent on a large poster that will be in our worship area through Easter. It is something that young children can understand and join.

I want to encourage you to begin to prepare now. Sometimes people need some ideas as to how they might make time for God or how they might live more deliberately. What follows are some ideas of how others have set apart their time and their bodies for God. This is a private action, not one that we make a show of for others, but when a

church seeks God together it is very powerful. It is as if the prayers of the individuals are not just added together, but multiplied by one another.

### **The union of Body and Soul.**

Western people have long tried to separate the body from the spirit or soul, but the Bible knows no such separation. One helpful Lenten practice is to discipline the body in order to bring health or to the soul. Here are some passages that stress the integration and importance of the body in our spiritual lives.

- Romans 12:1 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- Galatians 2:20 (ESV) <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (ESV) <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
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### **Fasting (stopping)**

Fasting is always linked with prayer in the Bible. It is giving something up in the body in order to bring our body desires into discipline and at the same time to bring focus to our prayers. It is not just a diet, but a diet with a spiritual purpose of prayer. The practice of fasting can include:

- Abstaining from food, drink, shopping, technology or media and intentionally spending more time with God and people.
- Abstaining from habits and comforts in order to give God our undivided attentions.
- Addressing excessive habits that take our time, energy, and our hearts from productive Kingdom activities.

A list of things often given up:

- Coffee, sweets, one meal a day, meat, alcoholic drinks, soft drinks, Face Book, or TV. The more something is to you, the greater will be the benefit in bringing your body and heart back to God as the Lord of your life.

- The Daniel Fast. There are many versions of this popular fast. It comes from Daniel 10:3. The basic fast is abstaining from meat, sugar, white flour, alcohol, and coffee for twenty-one days. The diet is actually a purging diet where consumption is heavy on vegetables, fruits, nuts, and beans.

REMEMBER THAT FASTING IS SIX-DAYS-A-WEEK. SUNDAYS ARE CELEBRATION DAYS!!! Balance is important. Enjoy your Sabbath rest.

### **Starting**

In the space that is made by stopping, there is opportunity to fill it with actions that will bring us closer to God where we will find real joy. Here are some ideas:

- Take a prayer walk every day
- Read a daily devotional instead of watching morning TV
- Pray three times a day. Daniel 6:10
- Attend worship even when you are tired and don't feel like it.
- Keep a time of silence and solitude each day
- Invite your neighbors over for a meal
- Begin a journal
- Read a book on prayer
- Volunteer somewhere each week
- Write letters to old friends
- Do some house chores for your spouse that he/she normally does