

Lent and the Harvard Business Review

The Rev. Paul Alcorn
Bedford Presbyterian Church
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Let me begin this morning with a quick survey...

- How many of have already mailed your Lenten greeting cards to family and friends?
If you have, did it include Lenten family picture and/or a letter highlighting family events since Lent last year? Anyone?
- How many of you have already planned or are going to Lenten holiday parties?
Have you sent your invitations or responded with your RSVPs?
No?
- Not to make any of you feel guilty...
How many of you realize that on the Christian calendar it is the season of Lent?

Obviously, Lent does not have the same *pizzazz* as Advent which is when and how we get ready for Christmas. We don't see Lenten decorations up in stores or in the community. We don't get the boxes down from the attic and fill our home with Lenten decorations. We do not pull out our favorite Lenten music to listen to allowing it to evoke memories of Lents gone by. Yet, here we are more than halfway through Lent, well on our way to Easter.

So, just as a reminder...

The season of Lent is the 40 days, excluding Sundays, that precede Easter.

This year it began on February 13th.

Originally, Lent was the time set aside for those who were new to the Christian community to learn about the teachings of Jesus and to undergo an initiation into those communities who were doing their best to live the vision of *God's Kingdom come* which they believed was not for someday, but for right here and right now. Later, as traditions developed, Lent became a time set aside for personal reflection and introspection. A period of time to intentionally deepen and sustain one's faith which sometimes gets a bit frayed in the push and pull world in which we live. It was and is a time to do our best to be emotionally and spiritually ready for the celebration of Easter which, as we know, is about more than Easter eggs and Easter candy and Easter bunnies.

When I was growing up, Christians were encouraged to *give up something* for Lent.

Dessert. Alcohol. A favorite food.

Roman Catholics, I remember, were not to eat meat on Fridays during Lent.

One year my family gave up drinking whole milk for Lent and instead mixed whole milk with powdered milk and the money we saved became our One Great Hour of Sharing offering.

In more recent years, instead of giving something up, people were encouraged to add something during Lent. Not another appointment to your calendar or another *should or ought* to your list; But something like...

- 15 minutes each day to read something that inspires you or which deepens your faith.
- 15 minutes set aside to write in your journal or to pray with some intentionality.
- For some of us it may be 15 minutes when we turn off smart phones and i Pads and computers and pay undivided attention to where we are and to who we are with.

All of which is to say that Lent was and is serious business because...

- This thing we call faith is not always easy and sometimes quite challenging.
- Figuring out how you take what we talk about in a place like this and translate it into how you live and act when you walk out these doors and into work or into school is often complicated.
- There is something about the values and the way of life that is reflected in words like gratitude and compassion and justice and peace and community that is serious business because that way of life often runs counter to the prevailing push and pull of the culture around us.

And, all of those things...

If we take them seriously...

If we want them to be a part of who we are and how we live, don't just happen any more than running a marathon *just happens* or becoming fluent in another language *just happens*.

It take time.

And practice.

And patience.

And trying.

And falling short.

And failing.

And starting over.

And trying again.

God, after all, is not a spoonful of sugar.

And, what God imagines for us and for all is not a quick fix solution.

God and what God intends is more like the long, hard work of building a relationship.

And, relationships, as you know, are built day by day and week by week and year by year...

After a while, adding up to a lifetime.

And, this is where Lent meets the Harvard Business Review.

One of the great things about technology and digital media is that we now have access to information and articles and news that I, at least, would otherwise, never see or read. One of those sources of information is the Harvard Business Review which is regularly updated multiple times each day on my iPad. Not too long ago the headline of one of their articles caught my attention.

It read *Why Many CEOs Can't Build Legacies Anymore*.

The thesis of the article was that CEOs no longer have the time necessary to develop skills and a strategy for long term success. The push is for instantaneous results rather than long term growth.

The focus is on maximum short term return on investment rather than a smaller return sustained over a long period of time. Unlike many of you, I do not live each day in that world and so cannot critique the accuracy of the article in the same way that you might, but the overall point of the article rings true for me in terms of the larger culture in which we live.

We live surrounded by the push for *right now*.

To get it done.

To do it quickly.

To do this one thing and then move on to whatever it is that might come next.

To be in it for the long haul...

To do the hard, pain-staking work that is able to be sustained over time...

To start and to not stop and to not give up...

Is not the mind set with which most of us begin each day.

Do you see the tension?

Between what we experience and live with each day and what we call *the journey of faith*?

And, maybe, that is why there is something just a bit hard and off-putting about Lent?

The journey towards God, whatever you imagine when you hear that word...

Is not a *walk in the park* or a one shot deal;

But an intentional day-in/day-out journey;

An intentional day-in/day-out decision to orient your life in the direction of that *Something More* that has something to do with our bravest hopes and our deepest desires.

A journey measured going forward one small step at a time, but often understood only when we have gone far enough to turn and to look back to see how far we have come.

There is something about faith that is always about Lent.

Always about being on our way towards understanding the meaning and the message and the impact of Easter.