

What Should I Give Up for Lent?

A Quick Summary: *Many people choose to give something up for Lent—like desserts or Facebook. This can be good, but don't just give something up; incorporate something that helps you enjoy God more. Lent is a time for repentance (turning from things in our lives that aren't honoring to God) and faith (turning to Jesus for forgiveness and new desires, and following Him). "Spiritual disciplines" are a way to practice both of these. In a sense, spiritual disciplines are like putting up a sail on a sailboat: It helps it be moved by the wind. Spiritual disciplines are like putting up a sail so God's grace moves more freely in our life, so we can better know and enjoy Him. If you want to read more about spiritual disciplines, see below. Otherwise, skip to the "disciplines" listed below, & consider one from each list to practice alongside another Christian until Easter.*

Not watching TV, going on Facebook, or eating desserts for Lent may be hard, but that by itself doesn't mean it's good. We need to understand "fasting" from things like this in the context of "spiritual disciplines." **Spiritual disciplines are regular practices that open us to receiving God's grace**—kind of like regular time with a friend allows you to get to know them better and allows the friendship to grow. **They are meant to help us to enjoy God more!**

Lent is a time for focused repentance from sin, and renewed faith in Jesus. Spiritual disciplines can help us practice repentance and faith, saying "no" to things that aren't good and "yes" to God.

Consider—alongside others at New Hope—engaging in a "spiritual discipline" over Lent. But don't just remove something you see as bad; replace it with something of God. Pair a "discipline of abstinence" (removing something) with a "discipline of engagement" (adding something).

As you decide what spiritual disciplines may be most valuable, **ask yourself: "What is something in my life that may not be in itself wrong, but is serving as a cheap replacement for God,** or distracting me from the life He's called me to?" (maybe TV or an iPhone that is filling up all your time, or busyness in general, etc.) Then give that up in some specific way, and add in something that addresses the true need. (So if gluttony is about eating to satisfy loneliness rather than hunger, perhaps build habits of memorizing Bible verses about God's love & presence, & regular fellowship/prayer time with a fellow Christian.)

Don't try to go it alone: **practice the disciplines alongside another Christian** (a "workout buddy").

Spiritual disciplines—no matter how much we give up or add in during Lent—never earn God's love or grace. But **they can help up grow more receptive to His love and grace,** and more satisfied in Him!

Final thoughts on resolutions and spiritual disciplines....

- **Revelation must always precede resolutions.** The revelation of what *God* has done and will do in you must energize your resolutions. We loved because He first loved us. So if you resolve to be more patient with your co-workers, begin by soaking up *God's* immense patience towards *you*.
- The goal of resolutions & spiritual disciplines is to **grow in knowing, enjoying, & honoring God.**
- **Resolutions that build your kingdom rather than God's will always fall short.** "Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain." (Psalm 127:1a, NIV)
- **Unless listening comes before doing, all doing will be useless.** Don't just select a resolution or spiritual discipline that lines up with your goals; first listen to God's will for you through Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and other mature Christians, and then follow.
- **The power for change isn't in your resolution; it's in God.** Your resolutions are like a sail and the Holy Spirit is the wind. So we actively raise the sail by regular Scripture reading, repentance/faith in God, prayer, corporate worship and fellowship, cultivating relationships centered on seeking God, and spiritual disciplines. But in all of this, **God holds the power for change!**

The following list of spiritual disciplines is taken from <http://www.soulshepherding.org/2012/07/spiritual-disciplines-list/> (minus one they list), and supplemented from a list by Bill Donahue on Bible.org:

Disciplines of Abstinence:

- **Solitude:** Refraining from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God and be found by him. (Solitude is completed by silence.)
- **Silence:** Not speaking in a quiet place in order to quiet our minds and whole self and attend to God's presence. Also, not speaking so that we can listen to others and bless them.
- **Fasting:** Going without food (or something else) for a period of intense prayer — the fast may be complete or partial.
- **Frugality**—*Learning to live with less money and still meet your basic needs. Before buying something new, choose to go without or pick a less expensive alternative that will serve your basic needs. Live a simple, focused life.*¹
- **Chastity**—*Voluntarily choosing to abstain from sexual pleasures for a time (those pleasures that are deemed morally right in the bond of marriage) to find higher fulfillment in God. Decide together as a couple to set aside time to go without sexual pleasures in order to experience a deeper relationship with God in prayer.*¹
- **Sabbath:** Doing no work to rest in God's person and provision; praying and playing with God and others. (God designed this for one day a week. We can practice it for shorter periods too.)
- **Secrecy:** Not making our good deeds or qualities known to let God or others receive attention and to find our sufficiency in God alone.
- **Submission:** Not asserting ourselves in order to come under the authority, wisdom, and power of Jesus Christ as our Lord, King, and Master. (If you think of this as submitting to a person as unto Christ then it's a discipline of engagement.)
- **Sacrifice**—*Giving of our resources beyond what seems reasonable to remind us of our dependence on Christ. Choose to give your time or finances to the Lord beyond what you normally would.*¹

Disciplines of Engagement:

- **Bible Reading:** Trusting the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Scripture as our guide, wisdom, and strength for life.
- **Worship:** Praising God's greatness, goodness, and beauty in words, music, ritual, or silence.
- **Prayer:** Conversing with God about what we're experiencing and doing together. (As we see in the Lord's Prayer the main thing we do in prayer is to make requests of our Father for one another.)
- **Fellowship/Soul Friendship:** Engaging fellow disciples of Jesus in prayerful conversation or other spiritual practices.
- **Confession**—*Regularly confess your sins to the Lord and other trusted individuals. As often as you are aware of sin in your life, confess it to the Lord and to those you may have offended. (Of course this isn't just for certain times; it's a central part of living as a Christian every day.)*¹
- **Service:** Humbly serving God by overflowing with his love and compassion to others, especially those in need.
- **Submission**—*Humbling yourself before God and others while seeking accountability in relationships. Find faithful brothers or sisters in Christ who can lovingly hold you accountable for your actions and growth in Christ.*¹

¹ Reprinted with permission from <https://bible.org/illustration/spiritual-disciplines>, quoting Bill Donahue, Leading Life-Changing Small Groups, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), pp. 51-52.