

Why do Christians give up things for Lent? Should I do it?

In the earliest church, Lent began as a period of preparation for baptism. People who converted to the Christian faith and received Jesus as Lord and Saviour, were welcomed into something like “an apprenticeship” during which they were mentored in Christian belief, worship, prayer, and practices. The final weeks led directly to baptism, which was celebrated on Easter Sunday.

Part of the preparation for baptism included the discipline of fasting – for example, doing without meat or abstaining from food for one or more meals every day. This is the origin of the custom of giving up something for Lent.

The point was to enter voluntarily into a spiritual exercise intended to

- (a) deepen one’s prayer life and walk with the Lord
- (b) and heighten anticipation of the great festival of the resurrection.

If “giving up something” raises spiritual consciousness and serves as an aid to a more intimate prayer life, an aid to reflect on the meaning of the dying and rising with Christ, and to claim one’s baptism as God’s solemn promise to be our God, go for it!

Spiritual discipline should simply mean a focused time toward the end of deepening one’s relationship with Jesus.

But if it is nothing more than a topic for discussion, a way to any form of perception of spiritual superiority, or just a pain that makes one feel like a martyr, *then it is better not to do it.*

The character of Spiritual discipline that always make a difference during Lent:

- Learn the value of daily repentance and turning to Christ in prayer for forgiveness and sanctification.
- Deepening ones prayer life by adding more time to our quiet times for the sake of listening to God.
- Deepening our walk with the Lord through additional reading of the Word, for example adding a Psalm to our readings every day, and choosing a Gospel to read the history of the passion of Christ, passage by passage.
- Being diligent in worshipping with God’s people on Sundays and celebrating his Supper with his people.
- Giving sacrificially after prayerful contemplation of what God expects us to give and to which cause.
- Forgiving those who sinned against us, as God has forgiven us. Seeking peace with all the significant people in my life, including my fellow church members!

An Example of a Lenten Prayer:

O Lord, who has mercy upon us,
take away from me my sins,
and mercifully kindle in me the fire of your Holy Spirit.
Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh,
a heart to love and adore you,
a heart to delight in you,
to follow and enjoy you,
for Christ’s sake, Amen.

Lenten Prayer of Ambrose of Milan (AD 339-397)