

# 12 Ways Baptists Can Observe Lent

Why would Baptists practice Lent?

Isn't it too close to an idea of "works righteousness," trying to earn the salvation that we teach is a gift of God's grace to be received only by faith? Shouldn't our time be focused on sharing this message through gospel proclamation and service to a lost and unbelieving world?

Isn't practicing Lent, or better yet, the idea of giving up something for the 40 days prior to Easter, better left to the Roman Catholics and the other Protestants who are more influenced by their teachings?

Questions like these are often presented to Baptist pastors like me, who encourage their congregants to consider the spiritual practice of intentionally dedicating a period of time for giving up something in their life as a form of Christian discipleship.

A bunch of reasons exists why this is a good idea, but the most compelling is what I call a "spirituality of subtraction" to counter the greater "spirituality of addition." The latter is often taught as necessary for becoming better Christians by "giving more, praying more, attending more, studying more and doing more." If a case had to be made for works righteousness, it seems most Baptists fall into this trap first.

Yet in our culture of staggering affluence, grace is best experienced when we purposefully take away something. It brings integrity to our witness, freedom to our service and identification with the less fortunate. We need a spirituality of subtraction challenging us to be less encumbered and burdened in our calling to follow Jesus.

So, here's a quick list of 12 ideas. They don't have to be limited to Lent and can be practiced any time you feel the need to lessen your load.

1. Take a walk to a destination you normally would drive. Most of the world relies on transportation other than a personal vehicle. What might God teach you if you weren't flying by at 45 miles an hour?
2. Fast from a certain food item. Meat, caffeine, sugar or fast-food menus are the favorites, but the possibilities are endless. The key is designating a certain time for a certain purpose. Some Christians skip a meal and donate the savings to the poor.
3. Take a one-day vow of silence. This might be helpful not only for your family and friends, but you might hear the inner voice speaking to you in the stillness.
4. Clean out a drawer, closet or room in your house. Use this time to ask yourself what other clutter you have accumulated that can be eliminated.
5. Give up a grudge or at least make some effort to let go of a past hurt. This may include permission to forgive yourself and will likely be more successful if you do so in the confines of a high-trust relationship.
6. Stop judging others. While you're at interior cleansing, you might wrestle with how much kindness you offer others. How frequently do you condemn the person who is ignorant, slow, offensive, selfish, loud, rude or troubled? It's amazing how prejudiced we have become against others who are prejudiced.
7. Create a media-free evening. Some give up Facebook for a season, but what if you unplugged everything: internet, TV, radio, iPod and video games? I believe if we had no electricity, we would immediately stop complaining about how little time we had.
8. Drive in silence. Our cars are our private sanctuaries, but we crowd them with our gadgets and distractions. Being silent while driving alone will not only clear our heads, but make our roads safer, too.
9. Give something of value away. We often give away our worn and used-up property, but what if we freed ourselves of something valuable? How

quickly could we respond, if God said to us as was said to Abraham, “Go to a land I will show you”?

10. Dedicate a day in your calendar to God. This is a tough one, but what if you scheduled a day completely for God? What would you put in it? That’s between you and the Divine. At the very least, it’s a great question to get you thinking. What would you do with a day totally dedicated to the Lord?
11. Reach out to the poor or suffering. They are not forgotten by God and should not be forgotten by God’s people. Just remember, your uneasiness is temporary. For them, it’s permanent.
12. Go live with the monks or nuns. Many places welcome folks for a short-term stay of a week or a weekend. It is the retreat from the world that allows us to enter back into the world effectively. Don’t listen to me, just ask Jesus.

In the devotional classic “My Utmost for His Highest,” Oswald Chambers said we should work out the salvation God has worked in. May God bless you in what you are willing to shed in order to be a lighter and more agile disciple.

*[Mark Johnson](#) is senior minister at Central Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky.*