

## Lent and the Gift of Faith

Lent is often associated with self-denial, and giving things up. So, we often find ourselves scrambling to choose what to drop when we see Lent coming. It can become the Christianized version of New Year's resolutions (or maybe just our second go at them!) - giving up sweets or swearing off social media. While Lent is indeed a time to shift our habits, we may not always consider why we do such things. Why does the church observe Lent, and what good does it do for us?



Over the past few months, our church has been looking at spiritual gifts and how God uses them to help us live out our calling as Christians. Lent is one way that the church helps us develop one of the most foundational of these gifts: the gift of faith. Unlike other gifts, like hospitality, administration, or leadership, faith is a gift which isn't dependent on our natural talents and abilities. Instead, it is a gift that helps us develop all the other gifts God gives us.

One of the most popular definitions of faith comes from the Bible itself (Hebrews 11:1): "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." In other words, faith is a basic belief that God has control of the future, and that He can be trusted even when we may not feel or see Him. This trust is what encourages a person to start using their gift of hospitality in a new way, maybe by inviting a new person out for coffee when you meet them at church. It is what guides someone to sign up to lead a new venture for the church or non-profit, trusting that God will help them take on leadership in ways not known before. The same is true for our other gifts: we have the courage to start using them only when we trust that God will lead us to use them well, and will be there for us when we face rejection or other setbacks.

This foundational quality to faith is why a whole season of the church year is devoted to it. Lenten practices are designed to help us grow in our trust of Christ as the one who can always be counted on. By encouraging us to give up some things, the church encourages us to consider who we can rely on when our regular supports are taken away. For example, we may be in the habit of eating snacks when we are anxious, or scrolling through social media when we feel unsatisfied. These can become our go-to methods of dealing with worries, but they don't really solve anything. Instead, they may actually keep us from asking Christ for His help and comfort. By giving up things like this for Lent, we are left only with Christ to rely on. Those times of relying on Christ alone are when we find out Christ can be trusted in full.

Just like any relationship, our relationship with Jesus grows more trusting and meaningful as we see how reliable He is. Each time we give things up in Lent, and put more of our confidence in Jesus, we find that He is worthy of our trust. That gives us confidence to use spiritual gifts we may not have had the courage to use before.

This Lent, take some time to consider how you can deepen your faith - by removing something that's holding you back, adding something to help you grow, or a combination. Is there something you should put aside, in order to put more trust in Christ? Consider giving it up for the season. Is there something you could add to your daily rhythms, such as attending worship regularly or

praying more consistently, that would nurture your faith? Consider adding it to your routine. Is there some gift God is wanting you to develop more fully? Consider trying it this season, doing something you haven't had the confidence to do before.

Faith is often difficult, because it requires the courage to trust God in deeper and deeper ways. Yet, it is the ground from which God's blessings grow - and when you tend to it, it will yield fruit. Trusting Him brings hope when outward appearances seem grim. It brings peace when circumstances are troubling. And it brings joy in the midst of an often-sorrowful world. These are the blessings God wants to bring you. Let this Lenten season be the time your faith grows more ready to receive them.

### *Your Stewardship Team*

To learn more about spiritual gifts and stewardship in the life of the church, or to get involved, please talk to any member of the Stewardship Team: Mark Stalter, Tracy Albert, Francis Christensen, or Kristen VanderHoek; or email us at [stewardship@stpaulshk.org](mailto:stewardship@stpaulshk.org).