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***Make Giving Your Lenten Discipline***

Growing up in my church-going family, petty sacrifice was our yearly Lenten marching order. The idea was this (at least this is how I understood it at age 11): If we “give up” something for Lent, then God would certainly be very pleased with us and probably love us more.

So my brothers and sisters and I wouldmake a Lenten fast of things like chocolate, or donuts, or pizza, or ice cream, or sweets in general. Or we might give up a bad habit, such as swearing, biting our fingernails, cracking our knuckles, fighting with one another, eating with our elbows on the table, etc.

Although I now understand that God doesn’t love us more because of our Lenten disciplines, I’m convinced that even petty sacrifices have value for spiritual growth. Denying ourselves even small things reinforces our will and determination, and it definitely bolsters our self-control. We are a little bit spiritually stronger for petty sacrifices.

Think about it. Spiritual power is like any other kind of strength – we cultivate it through intentionality and exercise. We develop our brainpower by taking classes, reading books, pushing ourselves into new areas of intellectual curiosity. We develop our physical strength by walking, going to the gym or lifting weights.

With God’s help, we develop our spiritual strength by prayerfully undertaking disciplines and exercises that will lead to growth and strength. That’s why Lent presents us with such a great opportunity to stretch and grow. We can “give up” bad habits or treats, or we can “take up” exercises, such as praying for 15 minutes more per day or reading the Bible or a devotional every day.

And just as with developing our brains or our bodies, the more we undertake spiritually, the greater growth we will have. Reading a popular novel will boost your brainpower, but not as much as taking a college class. Walking around the block will improve your physical health, but not as much as regular weight training with a fitness coach.

Avoiding Snickers bars and M&Ms for Lent will lead to minor growth, but why not take on a spiritual challenge that will lead to real growth? This year, make financial giving a part of your Lenten discipline. For the eight weeks of Lent, give more generously to your congregation. And make it a sacrificial discipline – an amount large enough to be significant in whatever way is best for you.

Christian tradition lifts up tithing – giving 10 percent of your income to God’s ministries -- as a biblical benchmark for generous giving. Can you make tithing a discipline for the six weeks of Lent? It’s a great opportunity to take tithing for a “test drive” to see what you can learn from the discipline.

If tithing is too much of a stretch, can you double your regular offering? Increase it by 50 percent? What do you have to lose? You have much more to gain.

One thing is for sure: The more you undertake, the more you will grow. Petty sacrifices are fine, and they lead to small spiritual growth, but larger disciplines lead to a stronger sense of spiritual self-control, freedom, centeredness and power.

*--Rob Blezard*

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