

The less obvious and sometimes more costly forms of self-denial to consider during Lent

Self-denial is a slippery discipline, especially at Lent, when Christians traditionally give up something they like to eat.

Ages ago when believers gave up meat, eggs, and milk, they were suffering genuine hardship because they didn't have many other options in their diet.

Today, giving up a certain food is easy—there is always more to replace it.

No meat, no problem. We've got fish and soy products, blender drinks, and protein bars. In addition, there is always the thought lurking in the back of my mind that if I cut back on food a bit I might lose a few pounds.

There are other options for self-denial as we commemorate our Lord's 40 days in the desert as He began His earthly ministry. To add to your commemoration of Lent, or to begin now or anytime, consider these disciplines that may not be as obvious as food, but can be quite difficult:

We can give up our time. We can give up our free time and spend more time with Jesus, in His word, or serving others. This can be a genuine sacrifice, because for many today there is little free time.

We can give up control of our words to Jesus. This is hard for us because we want to speak first, to give our opinion. For Lent we can give up our words so we can listen carefully to others.

We can give up feelings of resentment. Living the Christian life is hard and few appreciate how hard we try but no matter how difficult our day, remember Jesus sees your efforts and loves you.

Spend time alone with Jesus, as He did with His Father in the desert. Ask Him what He wants you to give up. Obey Him faithfully, in secret, and your Easter reward won't only be a few lost pounds, but a closer walk with your Savior.

“Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

1 Cor.9:24-27

How easy it is to admire discipline in athletes, but how hard it is to practice it ourselves. Lent gives us a time to practice self-discipline and self-denial in our spiritual lives.

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