

What Are You Giving Up?

Jesus withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done." ~ *Luke 22:41-42 (NIV)*

As someone who loves chocolate in whatever form it comes — cookies, cakes, ice cream, candy, etc. — I can assure you someone will ask me again this Lenten season, "Are you giving up chocolate?" Let me make it perfectly clear, the answer is an emphatic NO!

Well, if God says to give it up, then I guess that is where the real struggle and battle of the will begins. Lent is not about giving up something we enjoy for 40 days, but a time to have our minds and hearts transformed in a way that becomes the will of God. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was most certainly asking whether there was another path than the one He would travel over the next hours. Yet, in the end, He declared, "Not my will but yours be done." It follows right in line with how Jesus had taught the disciples to pray when He said in the Lord's prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 NIV).

Lent is learning to surrender our will for the will and ways of our Lord. Will I give up bitterness toward someone to have the Lord's will of forgiveness? Will I stop fretting over things today and trust in God's good and perfect provisions? Will I go the extra mile out of my way to extend the grace of Christ? What is it about my will, your will, our will, that needs to change in a way that makes us more of a disciple of Jesus Christ?

So, what I hope we all strive to do in these 40 days is to give up some of our own ways and willfulness so that we might find our living and being to be a reflection of the will of our risen Lord and Savior.

Lord, I trust that you want only the best for me, and I love you for it. Let me truly believe your will is what I want for my life.

Pastor Glenn Conaway, Retired
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Sure and Certain

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. ~ *Hebrews 11:1 (GNT)*

On a tour of Denali National Park, our guide said, “Over there is the great one, but you can’t see him because of the cloud cover.” He was referring to Mt. McKinley, the highest peak throughout North America. They say only 30 percent of those who visit Alaska actually get to see Mt. McKinley because of cloud cover, so I was not surprised that we could not see it, but I believed our guide when he told me the mountain was there.

It suddenly occurred to me that God had a faith lesson He wanted me to learn from the mountain. The lesson was “The Great One” (The Lord, Most High) is always there even if I can’t see Him because of the clouds. In my life experiences, sometimes clouds — shattered dreams, broken relationships, tragic losses, illness — make it difficult to see God’s presence. But that doesn’t mean He isn’t there.

Hebrews 11 tells us faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. *Sure* and *certain*, two words that describe faith. We can be sure and certain that what God has promised, He will do. He has promised He will be with us always. We may not always see Him, but He has promised that He is present with us through His Holy Spirit.

If you feel as though God is silent and has disappeared and that you are all alone with your trial and burden, know there are times when God withdraws to test your faith. He wants you to trust Him in the darkness. Whether or not we sense and feel His presence, by faith we can be sure and certain God will never leave us or forsake us.

The next day the sun was shining brightly, not a cloud in the sky, and as we rounded a bend, I heard our guide say, “Look over there and you’ll get your first glimpse of the great one.” Words cannot describe the beauty and majesty of the sight I saw before me. It was then that I understood the second lesson the mountain was teaching me: keep believing because there will not always be clouds.

I can also be sure and certain that one day I will see the Great One — the Lord, Most High. I will see Him face to face in all His beauty, His majesty, and His glory. And I will hear Him whisper, “Welcome home.”

Lord, even in times when I cannot see you in my circumstances, I know you are there. Thank you for your continual presence and peace.

Linda Turk

Evangelical United Methodist Church

Hope!

It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade. ~ *Mark 4: 31-32 (NKJV)*

It's January, all the Christmas decorations have been packed away, and it seems like the earth has become darker with all the lights off. I feel sad, but just as my spirit gets a bit dimmer, along comes the *Farmer's Almanac* with its pages filled with gardening tips and charts for planting seeds for vegetables and flowers. Hope!

It lifts my spirits and gives me hope and a bit of happiness. Then I realized the Lenten season will soon be here as well. Jesus was “planted” in the tomb and rose three days later to give us eternal life. Hope!

We have to have faith and hope when we plant our garden, trusting that those tiny seeds will spring forth with food to nourish us. The same can be said for trusting that our beloved Lord Jesus will return as He promised to give us eternal life and peace. Praise God for HOPE!

Heavenly Father, thank you for seeds of hope, for trust and faith, and for the promise of eternal life through your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Kathy Chando
Zion United Methodist Church

What Should I Build?

“See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri ... and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills — to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts.”
~ *Exodus 35:30-33 (NIV)*

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
~ *1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)*

Back in 1969 or thereabouts, my church presented a play about a group of people who were marooned on an island. On the beach was a mysterious pile of bricks and other building materials. The question throughout the play was, “What should we build with this stuff?”

Some of the group fearfully looked out at the vast ocean and imagined that mobs of evil people were coming to kill them. This group wanted to build a wall. Other members of the group felt that the people “out there” wanted to help them. This group wanted to build a bridge.

My mom was in that play, so it made a lasting impression. As I was thinking of what to write for this Lenten devotional, memories of this play flashed into my mind. Lent is a chance to consider what we should build with the “bricks” God has left for us. Here are three options:

1. Ignore the bricks. God equips His people and puts them in situations where those gifts can be used, but we don’t know what the gifts are and we’re afraid to use them.
2. Build a wall. We can misuse our gifts and spend our time and money on things that we think will give us pleasure. When we do that, we’re actually building a wall between us and God.
3. Build a bridge. If our focus is on God, we can see His hand across the waters. Our desire is to reach out to Him at all times and to use what He’s given us to follow His will.

Lent reminds us that God gave the ultimate gift of His Son to build a bridge between Him and us. This season invites us to recognize God’s provisions and to refocus our priority on using them to His glory.

Heavenly Father, I know that you put me here for a purpose. You’ve given me friends, family, and resources to help you build your kingdom. Show me what these resources are, guide me in your purpose, and forgive me when I misuse your gifts.

Larry Bakely
Pitman United Methodist Church