



February 2012

Dear friends,

We're coming upon the season of Lent. So, what is Lent? Many of us have heard of it and know generally that it's a fast from something we enjoy, but where did it come from and what's the point? It actually started as a pagan practice in ancient Babylon. When the Roman Empire adopted Christianity, they kept Lent as part of their religion. Many of our current practices come from that time period of merging pagan practices with Christianity – Easter eggs and Christmas trees, for example. God has been showing me that just because something originated in a way that wasn't good, doesn't mean it can't be used for good. Religion of any kind is meant to drive us humans to worship something greater than ourselves. If something drives me to worship the One True God and it doesn't go against anything the Bible says, it can be a good thing. We just need to be careful to talk to God about our motives and ask Him to guide us in how we worship Him.

The Catholic Church has kept Lent in place since the time of the Roman Empire. They define it this way: "Lent is a special time of prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works in preparation of the celebration of Easter." At this point, you may be wondering why I'm telling you about Lent. I'm not Catholic and not trying to convert anyone to Catholicism. But, if you look at it simply, Lent is a fast, and God is teaching me some things about fasting that are worth sharing. I borrowed this quote from a friend: "Lent offers us all a very special opportunity to grow in our relationship with God and to deepen our commitment to a way of life. In our busy world, Lent provides us with a chance to reflect upon our patterns, to pray more deeply, experience sorrow for what we've done and failed to do, and to be generous to those in need."

Matthew chapter 6 expounds upon these things; here Jesus is teaching a crowd what life should look like in the long-awaited Kingdom of God. He tells us to give, pray and fast without drawing attention to ourselves. This way, God gets the glory, not you and me. One mistake we tend to make with Lent is to advertise to others what we are giving up, making it more about us than a chance to grow in our faith. It has become a trend to be a part of instead of a private sacrifice that changes our hearts. The purpose of Lent is to examine ourselves and worship God in preparation for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, an event that changed the world forever, and gave us the hope of eternal life.

Fasting can be a very personal, intimate experience with our Father. In the Catholic church, Lent started as a literal fast from food for 40 days, much like Jesus' fast in the desert, or Moses' fast on Mt. Sinai. Can you imagine the dependence on God you would have to have to not eat for 40 days? Of course, our culture has simplified it to be just a break from something we like a little too much on a daily basis. TV, chocolate, shopping, Facebook. But, if you do this for the right reasons, there is much to learn. If you really have to sacrifice to give up something and if it drives you to call out to God more often, it's a good thing. If you choose to give up something that you enjoy for a month, God may show you how much you were putting that in place of Him. You may learn to live without it for good. You may find that you enjoy your time with God more than you ever enjoyed the thing you fasted from. In Philippians 3:8, Paul reflects on how the things of this world are not worth having when we can have Christ instead. "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."

Let's all examine the things we might put in place of God sometimes, things that might distract us from Him. Consider giving up food for a day each week to experience a new level of dependence on God. Consider giving up TV for 30 or 40 days, or even for a week to start with. Talk to Him every time you miss the thing you are taking a break from, every time you're tempted to falter on your commitment. He is always there, always longing for you to want Him more than anything else. He

knows that He is better for you and me than anything else. Keep your commitment private, just between you and Him. Give yourself the chance to need Him more. Colossians 3:1-3 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

## **Produce Recipes of the Month: Cabbage**

### **Grilled or Baked Cabbage**

Preheat your grill or oven to 350. Cut a head of cabbage into quarters and cut out the core. Sprinkle the cabbage with salt and pepper and garlic powder if you like. You can also wrap the cabbage in a piece of bacon for extra flavor. In the hole where the core was, put a pat of butter and a piece of ice and wrap the chunk of cabbage in foil. Cook on the grill or in the oven for 25 to 30 or until tender.

### **Wilted Cabbage and Bacon**

Cook bacon in a skillet. Remove bacon, crumble and set aside. Keep bacon fat in the skillet. Add chopped onion and garlic and fry in the bacon fat until browned. Add ½ cup water or cider vinegar. Bring to a simmer and add the cabbage and bacon. Saute briefly and serve warm.

### **Cole Slaw**

1 head of cabbage	1 tablespoon vinegar
1 large carrot or several small carrots	2 tablespoons diced onion
2/3 cup mayonnaise	¼ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons vegetable oil	½ teaspoon poppy seeds
½ cup sugar	

Shred cabbage and carrots. Whisk together the mayo, vegetable oil, sugar, vinegar, salt, and poppy seeds in a medium bowl; blend thoroughly. Pour dressing mixture over coleslaw mix and toss to coat. Chill at least 2 hours before serving.

### **How to Freeze Cabbage**

You may not be able to use all of the cabbage you have right now. It is easy to freeze some for later rather than let it go to waste. Take off the outer leaves, cut the cabbage into quarters and remove the hard, white core. Boil some water and a teaspoon of salt on the stove. Have a bowl of ice water ready on the counter. When the water is boiling, add the cabbage for 3-4 minutes. Remove the cabbage from the boiling water with a slotted spoon and add it to the ice water. This stops the cooking process and preserves the nutrients. Drain the cabbage. Pour it out onto a clean dish towel to dry some more. Store the cabbage in serving sizes for your family in a freezer bag. Get as much air out of the bag as you can before closing it. You can use frozen cabbage in soups or stews or boil it as a side dish. Cabbage that has been frozen doesn't do well in coleslaw or fresh salad.

***Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."***