



Links Players

Preparing for Augusta... and Easter!

Now it's time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins and pour out showers of blessing to refresh you.... (Acts 3:19)

Top professionals often skip the tournaments preceding the Master's in order to get extra practice either at Augusta National or simulate conditions at a similar style course.

They put together a game plan on how to play each hole and what clubs they will use to maximize their plan. They reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and what to work on with their coach and caddie.

I bring this up because the Lenten season begins on February 14. These golf preparation habits are similar to how Lent can make a difference in your relationship with the Master.

For many Christians, this special season enriches their worship and deepens their faith in God. Others aren't so sure about Lent's meaning or value.

Growing up, it never occurred to me that Lent was something I might actually be interested in, benefit from, or decide to keep or come to value to get to know God better. I've discovered that Lent is, in fact, recognized by millions of Christians.

Lent comes from a Latin word for "Spring," a six-week season in the Christian year before Easter. Technically, Lent comprises the 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays.

In the ancient church, Lent was a time for new converts to be instructed for baptism and for believers caught in sin to focus on repentance.

In time, all Christians came to see Lent as a season to be reminded of their need for repentance and to prepare spiritually for Easter. Part of this preparation involved the Lenten "fast," giving up something special during Lent...but not on Sundays.

While most churches continue to recognize a season of preparation for Easter, their emphasis is not so much on penitence and fasting as on intentional devotion to God.

Many churches sometimes add special Lenten Bible studies or prayer meetings to prepare their members for a deeper experience of Good Friday and Easter.

Lent became a season to do something extra for God, not to give something up. But if you think of Lent as a season to earn God's favor by your good intentions or good works, then you miss the point.

God's grace has been fully given to us in Christ. We can't earn more of it by doing extra things or by giving up certain things in fasting.

If, on the contrary, you see Lent as a time to grow more deeply in God's grace, then you're approaching Lent from a proper perspective.

After ignoring Lent for most of my life, I've paid more attention to it during the past 30 years. Sometimes, I've given up something to devote more time to personal devotions. Sometimes, I've added extra readings to my regular spiritual disciplines.

I can't claim to have had any mystical experiences, but I have found that observing Lent has helped me look ahead and appreciate more deeply the meaning of the cross and the victory of the empty tomb.

Let me be clear: Lent is not a requirement for Christians. Dallas Willard observed, "If a certain spiritual discipline helps you grow in God's grace, then, by all means, do it. But if it doesn't, don't feel like you must do it." I'd say the same about Lent.

Prayer: Father, let me be honest with myself, reflecting on times I've turned away from you, and then guide me as I repent and celebrate Easter forgiveness as never before. Amen

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Bill Crawford

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