

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Healing and Liberation through Lent

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Hi, my name is Tim Glemkowski, and I'm really excited to be with you for this Pray More Lenten Retreat. I hope it's a really fruitful experience for you in just growing closer to the Lord, and in becoming more of who He calls us to be. You know, one of the first things I want to talk about kind of in this first session here is I kind of want to reflect on, like, the purpose of Lent in general. I'm a big "why" guy. I love that book by Simon Sinek, *Start With Why*, and with everything I do I think, since I was a kid I was just kind of this way, where it's like I'm always interested in that "why" question. Like, "Why are we doing this in the first place?"

And I think the same thing with Lent can kind of happen sometimes, where I think what we do in Lent, like what we pick up in terms of our prayer, fasting, and alms giving, what we give up or take up should really have a core connection to, like, the "why." Like, what is the purpose of Lent in general? And really, I think a lot of the answer to that question has to do with, like, what's the purpose of the Christian life in general, you know. Because Lent is supposed to be a penitential season for sure, where we become humbly aware of, like, the consequences that sin has actually had in our lives. That it's made an impact and had an effect on who we are and our nature. That something about us is pulled back toward selfishness because of concupiscence, but also then because of the decisions that we've made.

And really, the point of the Christian life, right, is love of God and love of neighbor. At the end of the day, like, that's what the whole thing is about. But that love is not just about kind of like a, I don't know, kind of a sentimental or just emotional like "I just love you. I just have good feelings for you in my heart." That's not really what love is, right. If you're a parent, you know this. At the end of the day, what love is, is willing the good of the other, Thomas Aquinas tells us, right. It's being able to take your own desire for your own good and to put it at the service of another, which at the end of the day is our own good, right, because that's what we're made for. We're made to be saints. We're made to be holy. And what that holiness, that likeness to God is love of God and love of neighbor.

But that can be a hard thing to do, right. It's easy maybe to just, like, feel warm in your heart towards somebody else. It's another thing entirely to be able to say "I can sacrifice for your good." What that takes, at the end of the day, is an incredible amount of freedom. It takes freedom and detachment from our own selfishness and from our own concupiscent desires that just kind of want to move after what I want, you know. King stomach and king ego and, like, what in this moment I think

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I is going to be, like what is going to really satisfy me, me, me, me, right. To turn toward someone else's good is a much more difficult prospect.

And so I think what Lent is, at the end of the day, this 40 days is a process of us taking things up and putting things down in our lives in order to find a process of healing and liberation, right. Where at the end of this 40 days, we can actually be more free and more liberated, more healed by participating in our own healing to love others, and to love God more and more purely, from a more pure heart, right. I think that's what Lent should really be about. I don't think it's just about "I give up something because it's hard and, you know, because I'm a sinner, and so God, you know, doesn't want me to have nice things," I don't know. You know, it's more than that, right. It's really about how do we fall more in love with Him, and how do we fall more in love with people, and be able to actually will their good?

You know, it's interesting, my sister a few years ago, she did one of these, like, Whole30 diets, I don't know if you've heard of these. They're kind of a big craze right now, right. People are really interested in ketogenic diets, and Whole30 diets, and Paleo diets and, you know, they call it bio hacking. And really, what people are almost trying to do there is optimize the way that the human body works, and one of the things that they're realizing is that a lot of the processed foods and, you know, different ways that we eat as persons might not actually be, like, perfectly in accord with who we are in our biology. It might not actually lead to, like, the optimal functioning of a human body, right. This is what these are about.

So a lot of these diets, like the Whole30 or whatever, they're actually about, for like a set period of time - it can become a lifestyle - but initially you kind of commit to a more intensive way of cutting things out of your diet so that, you know, you walk through a more austere eating ritual for a period of time. And so my sister did this, right, and she was telling me, you know, it was great. She reached some of her goals in terms of what the diet was all about, and she just felt really good and really healthy while she was doing the process.

But actually, what happened is, at the end of those 30 days of doing the Whole30 diet or whatever, her entire relationship with food changed. It wasn't just that, like, she lost a couple of pounds and that's what it was all about. Really, what happened is the way that she viewed food, and this desire to when stress or, you know, loneliness or whatever kind of, like, kicked in, you turn toward, right, as a source of comfort. Really, what she learned to do through that whole process, through cutting things out was her entire relationship with food was transformed, and then that was like a really healing and a really freeing thing for her.

And I think that's a great, like, there's some wisdom. Like, our secular culture is, like, picking up these habits, you know. But really, you could see that the same

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thing is true of our fasts. That it's not just about, like, proving to God, like, "This is how much I love You. This is how much I'm going to earn Your love." But really, entering into fasting is about healing the human person. Like basically, like I said, the logic of Lent is becoming humbly aware that, through my own decisions over time, I've created patterns and habits in my life that lead me back toward sin. That lead me toward choosing created goods over the ultimate good, which is the Lord Himself, right. And any fasting, any abstinence that we take up, what we can do in the season of Lent by committing to Him for 40 days is actually beginning to set new habits, and having new rituals and new ways of interacting that can lead to a greater freedom over time.

I had a friend who gave up Twitter one year, and he was reading a spiritual book during that season, and that spiritual book was talking about whenever you're sad, like whenever those hard things happen in life, or you're in a tough situation and you just want to get out of it, turn to the Lord. Like, offer the Lord in that moment, like, welcome Him into that place, you know what I mean? Like, welcome Him into that experience and say, like, "I give this to You, God." And, like, relate to Him even. Like, He wants to hear what's on your heart, and He wants that kind of relationship with you.

And he was realizing, like, that was how he used Twitter. Whenever he was feeling lonely, or angry, or hurt, or frustrated, he would turn to Twitter and tweet about it over... just, you know, binge on social media and kind of like distract himself from what he was really feeling in his heart. And the giving of that up actually helped him to create a habit where, over time, he didn't realize that there was this destructive pattern where he wasn't turning to the Lord with those things, but he was turning toward, you know, other people, in these kind of like social media type relationships, and that was what he was really looking to for that interior conversation. He had replaced God with Twitter.

So, in the season of Lent, what we're trying to do is not just give things up because they're hard, though they should be - because if it's not hard we're probably not creating a new habit. There should be some kind of challenge to it, but always with that end goal in mind of, like, growing and healing, letting our hearts be renewed, letting our habits be liberated from the things that we turn to, and place them in places where God should be. And in doing so, we begin to walk toward our own healing.

You know, I love the story in John chapter 5. There's the healing by the pool of Bethesda, and there's a man there who's been crippled for many years, right. And he says, when he encounters Jesus, he's been here for a long time because, like, whenever the pool is stirred up and it's the time when someone can enter into it

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and be healed, there's never anyone to take him to the pool and to lay him in there. And I love what Jesus says to him. Jesus says to him "Do you want to be healed? Like, do you want to be healed?" Like, almost as if there's something about his story that's not quite ringing true. Like, there's something about his story that's... he's using his own situation, there's this enslavement in a particular situation that circumstances have put him in, and it's incredibly difficult, right. But the first thing Jesus asks him is "Do you want to be healed?" And the man says "I do." And He says "Rise. Pick up your mat and walk."

There's a way in which our own confidence and our own participation in our healing is a prerequisite to the Lord working with His grace. Because, at the end of the day, it's a heresy, right, Pelagianism that we just kind of earn our own holiness. If we just kind of create the habits and virtues, like that's all that holiness really is. It's like this kind of self-perfected, self-aggrandizing process of "I make myself better and better and better, and, you know, and it's kind of by my own efforts that I can do that." At the end of the day, salvation is through grace. The grace to take up a process of conversion is a grace, and then the grace to continue on it is a grace. Like, it's all grace. We're fully reliant on the Lord, and we're going to talk more about that in our next talk.

But at the end of the day, what we do to show the Lord that we're willing to be healed, that we want Him to come in and enter into a place with His grace and bring His healing, and bring freedom into our lives, and change us, change who we are, is we begin to think humbly in recognizing our own weakness, and what sinfulness has done in our lives, the habits it's created, the ways it's changed our hearts to not be the image of the love of God and love of neighbor that we're called to be. The way that we do that is by actually beginning this process, to say "I'm going to pick up my mat and I'm going to walk. I'm going to trust that the Lord wants to bring long-term liberation and long-term freedom into my life, and not just, you know, a short-term kind of giving something up and then returning to our old way of life." I guess that's my thing, is like "Let's make this Lent, if it's truly going to be a penitential season, let it be penitential in a way that's going to bring lifelong change, right." It's going to be hard anyway, it's going to be touch anyway, we're going to give things up anyway, but let's do it in such a way that our habits and our heart are actually transformed, so that we find liberation in the grace of Jesus Christ that can enter into those places.

Lent and the great image of it, right, is the desert. It is the 40 days that Jesus, in Luke's gospel, is going into the desert, and that's where He's tempted. He's tempted in His... by the devil, by the, you know, the different... the bread becomes stone, and he takes Him to the parapet and "Cast thyself down," right. But it's this place of desert and of temptation. And in the bible, the desert, even though it's this

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situation of kind of putting ourselves in a place where there's going to be struggle and there's going to be difficulty, right, it's the Holy Spirit who drives Jesus out into the desert. Because it's in the desert that the Holy Spirit wants to encounter us, right.

There's this great image in Jesus' time in the desert, because the Holy Spirit wants to say to us "That's where I want to meet you. I want to meet you in the desert," right. Like, "I want to meet you in the place where you're past your own strength. Where you're past what you feel like you can do in your control, and on your time, and on your efforts, right. I want to take you to the desert so that I can encounter you," because God wants to make us something so much more than what we can just make on our own, right. He wants us to be saints. And saints are the masterpieces of God, right. Saints aren't the masterpieces of my own efforts. I don't create myself into a saint. But it's only in the desert that that happens, because the desert is fundamentally this place of encounter with God.

And so whatever we pick up, whatever detachment, whatever fast, whatever sacrifices that we're taking up for this Lent, let's let it be, at the end of the day, about creating a space and a place in our life for grace to work. To pick up our mat, to cooperate with our own healing, but at the end of the day to let the Lord get in there and meet us in that place, and transform our lives forever. There's no going back, right. I've picked up my mat. It's always with me as a sign of my weakness, but I'm walking forward and I'm moving forward in freedom. I have confidence and I hope, even though I've failed a thousand times, that God is going to bring long-term healing if I work with Him and if I fundamentally allow His grace to change me.

So Lent, this 40-day process, it's kind of like the Catholic keto diet. You know, and at the end of the day I think it's about ridding us of the addictions and attachments to self and to created goods that we've placed before God, and allowing us to become the true images, the sons and daughters of the Father that we're called to be.