

## LENT PT 1. MAKING TIME

As we begin this church wide discipleship series called "Lent, a time of spiritual spring cleaning," you might well be asking yourself, what is this Lent idea all about? Why are we doing "Lent". Isn't it a Catholic idea? Is it Biblical? Good questions. So here is a 1 minute history of Lent

It would seem from church history that very early on in the church, the leaders felt the need for some of kind of activities leading up to Easter to prepare people for this celebration. The key elements were fasting prayer and reflection (some would say giving, not reflection) and these have basically remained the same over the centuries.

When we say: "Well that is a catholic idea" we need to realize that for much of church history that was the only church. Today Anglican, Catholic Methodist and some evangelical churches would celebrate this season. Originally people fasted for 40 days. This was Not full fast but often one meal a day. Over the centuries this changed. It has been criticised by some protestant leaders as self effort, self mortification. But ultimately Lent is about Jesus and what he has done on the cross.

I have taken some of the traditional Lent concepts and built them around the concept of spring cleaning.. There are various theories of where this idea of spring clean came from. Some think it comes from the Jewish idea of preparation for Passover where the Jews would go through the house getting rid of anything that had yeast in it. Others relate it to the release from long cold winters, when you could air out of house, get rid of mould and wash the blankets.

When we came back from holidays after Christmas, the staff did a bit of a spring clean of the cupboards in the acacia lounge. After the building project, when we cleaned up everything that we were not sure about got shoved in the cupboards to be dealt with at a later date. But then of course we all got busy and the cupboards remained a mess. There are 4 steps to doing a spring clean.

**Make time to do it.** Why had we not cleaned out the cupboards before? We were all busy doing the day to day stuff. And we knew it would take a morning to do. So our theme for the first week is making some space in our lives.

**Sorting out.** The next step is to take everything out of the cupboard and spread it out. You find things that you had forgotten you had. You see things and think, "why on earth did we keep that". You find rubbish. When you spread it all out, it can be a shock as to just how much is in the cupboard.

So in spiritual terms, the second week of this series involves some self reflection. This is very Biblical concept. Read Romans 12:3 We are called to examine ourselves. This is a very unpopular concept today. We are not good at self reflection.

We examine all kinds of other things. We take our car in for a warrant of fitness. We get our accounts audited. We get the house we are buying inspected. We go to the doctor to get a check over. We have annual job appraisals. But we rarely take the time to stop and say, "How am I going in my spiritual life. Am I growing in my love of God. Am I growing in my love of others? What is really happening in my inner world?" This is what we are going to do in week two.

**Cleaning.** This is the third step in spring cleaning. Having taken everything out of the cupboard you see all the dirt that you couldn't get to. You see the dust and cob webs and mould food that somehow ended up in the corner. So before you put it all back, you clean the shelf and floor.

The danger of week 2's self reflection is that if we can end up feeling condemned and think. It's all too hard. I am a failure. I am useless. The reality is the spring clean has not caused the mess. All we have done is revealed what is already there, but that we have preferred to keep the door shut on it. And God is not surprised by what we find as we do the spring clean. All we are doing is being honest with ourselves and to God about where we are at.

This is where we become aware afresh of how much we need God and the work of the cross and God's amazing grace and love. Condemnation and guilt rarely lead to true life change. It is Love that changes our heart. And when we grasp the depth of God's love for us, despite what is in our hearts, that we can truly begin to grow.

**Throwing Away.** There is no point in doing a spring clean and just putting everything back in the cupboard. You have to make some hard choices., Do we really need that thing that has sat there for the last 5 years? This can often be the point where arguments occur. What one person thinks is rubbish, another person thinks is valuable.

Spiritually there are times when we have to get rid of stuff. Writer to the Hebrews says throw off everything that is hindering your race. (Hebrews 12:1-2) In the last week I make 5 suggestions of things that maybe God is calling us to ditch. It could be an action/ behavior that is sinful. (if it is sinful it is not a maybe) It could be lie that we keep believing. It could be a relationship that is pulling us away from God. It could be an activity that has started to consume your life. It could be something material

This is the hard part. Not just acknowledging the truth, but making changes. This is where we might need our homegroup, friends to help us and encourage us in the changes we need to make. This series is not about getting head knowledge about God but about changing how we live.

So lets start with the first week: **Making time.**



Jesus seemed to totally master his time management. His job description was to save the world. He developed this huge crowd following demanding he perform miracles. Where ever he went people wanted healing. His disciples were not mature men but teenagers who needed lots of coaching. The authorities wanted to kill him or trap him in debate. Jesus had a lot on this plate. Huge pressure. But what do we read. But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness to pray. It was his habit. If before the days of cell phones and every other gadget we have today, Jesus found the need to withdraw from it all, then maybe we need to make space to withdraw as well.

The story of Mary and Martha is one of two sisters. (Luke 10:38–42, NLT) Martha's name means lady of the house. I reckon she is the oldest, the responsible, task focused one. Mary is the more relational one. The people person. The world needs both types - not right or wrong.

It seems that Jesus and the disciples might have arrived unexpectedly. Which in Eastern culture is fine. There is an expectation of hospitality. Martha is busy preparing a meal, beds for the unexpected guests. Mary is sitting listening to Jesus teaching. (this is very counter cultural. She was relating to Jesus as a disciple of a rabbi Jesus which females never were allowed.

I think in saying her name twice (some translations) it indicates the tone is one of compassion. He sees what she is doing. It is not that he does not appreciate it. But he also sees her anxiety. You are worried and bothered about so many things. Maybe she was trying to make the meal really flash to honour Jesus. Maybe something simple would have sufficed.

Martha is busy doing the household tasks. Mary sits at Jesus feet to listen. Jesus commends Mary. It's not the other stuff didn't need to happen. The guests had to be fed. The beds had to be made up. It is just which one gets priority. It about making choices.

Jesus says. There is only one thing worth being concerned about. What is it? Spending time at the feet of Jesus. It is a story that is so relevant to us today because what ever culture, whatever era, there is always time pressure. There is always other stuff to do. There is never enough time to do everything we would like to or want to do. Sitting at Jesus feet can seem like a waste of time.

Jesus said if you are tired and weary then my yoke is easy. You might say. Well, I am following Jesus and I feel weary all the time. What's going on? How does this work? A yoke is what was used to hold to oxen together so that could plow the field. It was wooden and went around the necks of the animal so they would walk beside each other, in unity.

There is something about walking alongside Jesus that is not meant to weight us down and burden us. There is something about Jesus that is meant to be light. It is not meant to be heavy. Jesus calls us to walk alongside him, to be his apprentice as it were. And Jesus said, "My yoke is easy

to bear." I wonder if that is our lived reality? There is something profoundly simple here. Jesus is saying, "It is not about following this great set of rules. It is just walking beside me day by day. Just watching what I do and following me."

The biggest threat to our spiritual well being is busyness. Our lives are too busy and the first thing that goes when we are busy is time with God, silence and reflection. It is impossible to love God and love others in the midst of busyness. We don't have the capacity. The space. The time.

Typically lent involves giving something up for 40 days. At the beginning of this series here is the challenge: What could you give up for a month that would create more space in your life? The idea is not to say give up coffee for the month for the sake of giving up coffee. That is just giving up something for the sake of it. And it is not about getting rid of something bad. It is about creating some space in your life to slow down and enter this Lent season and take the time to prayerfully do the devotions, journal, listen to what God might be saying to you. It is making space to do the work during this time. Snatching five minutes as we rush out the door is better than nothing but the challenge is could we create more space to create some more quality time To sit quietly. To listen to the still small whispers of the Spirit. To pray. To reflect. To chew on Scripture. Read and re read it and soak in it. To be aware of the presence of God.

What you get from this series will be directly related to what you put in. If you come with an attitude of : "God, I want you to speak to me. I want you to examine my heart. I want to hear from you. Use this material to do your work," I can almost guarantee you will encounter God and grow during this time. Not because I have written profound material but because God always meets us when we come humbly and seek his face.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- # What spoke to you through this message? Did anything jump out at you?
- # Do the hurry sickness quiz at the end of the week 1. Can you identify with any of the symptoms?
- # Why does life seem to be busier than ever? What makes it so busy?
- # Why are we often so reluctant to slow down? Is it fear, expectations, guilt...???
- # Is it actually possible to live at a slower pace in the 21st century?
- # What are the dangers to our well being of living such busy lives?
- # What are we going to "give up" for 4 weeks to create space for this lent series?
- # What do you hope to gain from this series?



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS