

Cybercolumn by Brett Younger: Lent 101_30705

February 28, 2005

Posted: 2/28/05

CYBER COLUMN: Lent 101

By Brett Younger

Q: How do you write a helpful, informative column on a subject like Lent?

A: I do meticulous, painstaking research to create insightful, cleverly worded questions. Then I make up answers.

Q: What is Lent?

A: Lent, a tradition that may go back as far as the fifth century, is the forty day period before Easter, excluding Sundays. It begins on Ash Wednesday (this year on February 9) and ends on Holy Saturday (March 26). If you take Lent seriously, it can seem longer.

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Q: Why don't Sundays count?

A: Lent is a time of confession and repentance, but because Sunday is the day on which Christ arose, it's always a celebration (though some of the deacons in your church haven't figured this out).

Q: What are your memories of Lent growing up?

A: I believe that GA Coronation Night—the biggest event of the year—may have fallen during Lent. (If you aren't over 40 or didn't grow up Baptist, it's

hard to explain.)

Q: Why are the forty days called “Lent”?

A: Lent is the Old English word for spring. You could argue that Lent is spring cleaning for the soul, but it is more likely a reference to the season of the year in which Lent falls. (Lent is longer than spring in Texas.)

Q: Why is Lent forty days?

A: Forty is a biblical number for preparation. Moses was on the mountain forty days. Elijah traveled for forty days before hearing the still, small voice of God. Jesus was in the wilderness praying, I bet you guessed, forty days.

Q: Why do people give up something for Lent?

A: When you skip a meal or alter your routine, you are trying to remember, if not always successfully, Jesus’ sacrificial life and death. In theory, by giving up good things we free ourselves from dependence on them, cultivate the spiritual discipline of sacrifice and remind ourselves of the importance of the spiritual over the material. In practice, I know several people I’ll avoid if they give up coffee.

Q: What do you suggest giving up for Lent?

A: The most common practice is to fast for certain days in Lent. Not eating doesn’t make some of us more spiritual. Think about giving up television, newspapers, eating out, or shopping. Use the time or money you save on something you can imagine Jesus spending the time or money on.

Q: What are you giving up for Lent?

A: I’m planning to add something for Lent. Instead of reading the sports section each day, I’m going to spend each day with a Psalm. (During March Madness I may cheat and read both.)

Q: What’s the best way to observe Lent?

A: Find ways to focus on your need to look carefully at who you are and who you should become. Read the Bible. Read another good book about

faith. Minister in a new way. Set time aside to do whatever is necessary to be honest to God about your life. If we stop pursuing pleasure, then, come Easter, we might be caught by Joy.

Brett Younger is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and the author of Who Moved My Pulpit? A Hilarious Look at Ministerial Life, available from Smyth & Helwys, (800) 747-3016.

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