

# Voices: What I learned during Lent this year

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This year, my wife and I gave up meat for Lent, a practice we borrowed from the earliest Christians. (For those concerned, this practice predates the Roman Catholic Church.)



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In the era of online recipes and near-identical meat substitutes, it wasn't as difficult as we thought it would be. Maintaining a healthy and filling meat-free diet was mostly a matter of setting aside personal preferences. Sure, a burger may sound good, but learning to accept something other than your first choice should be lesson No. 1 for people who follow a Master who commands them to take up a cross daily.

We did have another reason for choosing to fast as we did. We've lately become aware that animal abuse is [unbelievably rampant](#) in the U.S. meat industry.

Chickens are kept in cages with less floor space than a sheet of paper and are kept from sleeping with harsh artificial lights so as to encourage them to eat more. Animals of all kinds are shoved into over-crowded spaces and

injected with hormones that encourage growth while making the animal sick, in pain and immobile. Beyond these concerns of animal abuse, beef production is [one of the largest contributors](#) to climate change on the planet.

### **Seeking the “Christian response”**



Learning about rampant mistreatment of the animals God made and entrusted to our care and the damage it was causing the Earth God called us to protect, my wife and I decided it would be beneficial to make some temporary dietary changes while we considered what the Christian response should be.

As I’ve already said, I was surprised to find the shift was significantly less difficult than I expected, especially given my steak-and-potatoes upbringing. More surprising, though, were the reactions we got from people when they enquired about our reasons for leaving meat behind during Lent. “I couldn’t do that. I love bacon too much” and “Suit yourself; I’m having steak for dinner” were archetypal responses.

This was distressing to me. When we told fellow believers our biblical convictions regarding the sanctity of animal life and human responsibility to be good stewards of the Earth were leading us to make this decision, they replied in such a way that assumed their preference—a tasty bacon cheeseburger—was more important than following Scripture.

### **Thoughts captive to Christ**

I wouldn’t have been bothered by someone questioning our evidence that

animals were being abused or challenging our interpretation of [Scripture's command](#) "to work and keep (the Hebrew is literally "serve") the Earth." No, I was bothered by people's insinuation that, since they liked something, they didn't have to consider its relationship to their Christian convictions.

Is Christ not Lord over our diet as well? Does taking every thought captive to Christ not include our decisions about the food we eat? This isn't a call to vegetarianism and a condemnation to those who eat meat. My wife and I have resumed eating meat, but in lesser quantities and only what we buy from local farmers.

No, my call here is to recognize liking something doesn't mean it is necessarily good. Far too many people who asked about our Lenten plans seemed to imply the fact an action brings them pleasure means it is exempt from Christian examination.

### **Room for idolatry**

Any area of our life that we aren't willing to ask, "Does Christ approve of this?" is an area where we are guilty of idolatry. Taking *every* thought captive for Christ means taking every thought captive, no exceptions.

The things we eat, the way we spend our money and other such "personal matters" are subject to Christ's lordship as well.

This Lent taught me no area of our life is exempt Christ's lordship. When we become his followers, we agree we will submit to his will as revealed in Scripture in all things. Jesus ate fish, but would he have eaten a chicken that was raised in a cage too small for it to move and that never was allowed to see sunlight?

If we aren't willing to at least genuinely consider this question, we won't be able to "take up our cross and follow" him.

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