



March 2, 2022

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

Lists. Goals. Achievable outcomes.

For much of my life, these are the things that have helped motivate me to accomplish tasks and complete the work I'm expected to do. Few things are more satisfying than crossing something off a to-do list... especially if it was something challenging or something that I had struggled with in the past.

I get anxious when the list starts getting longer and longer, and I get even more anxious when things get added to my plate that feel overwhelming or unattainable. I would much rather stick with things that I know how to do. Things in my comfort zone. I like to set goals I can ACTUALLY achieve.

This is probably why Lent has always been such a helpful season for me.

Today, March 2, Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of Lent. (<https://hilliardumc.org/current-message-series/>)

These 40 days (not counting Sundays) leading up to Easter have in the Christian church traditionally been a time of reflection, repentance, fasting, and preparation.

Historically, Lent was a season when early Christians would spend time in prayer and discernment about whether they were ready to be baptized and formally identify themselves as a part of the Christian church.



Giving something up for Lent was a practice that allowed for more time and space for quiet reflection, or meeting with mentors and spiritual guides, in order to prepare for that moment on Easter Sunday.

There's a lot of wisdom to the idea of doing something for 40 days — it's the amount of time that Jesus spent in the wilderness facing the fullness of his humanity through the temptations before him.

It's about the length of time it takes any person to let go of or form a practice or habit. It's enough time to get to the heart of things and begin to experience some transformation.

For me, it's the one time of the year when I feel like I can take a few steps out of my comfort zone and try something challenging or new that will help me grow. After all, it's only for 40 days. It feels like an amount of time that's achievable. If I hate it, I can always go back to what I was doing before.



The first year I ever decided to give up something for Lent was when I was in my early 20s. I had racked up an impressive number of speeding tickets. Not only did I have a hard time slowing down, but the experience of driving was stressful and tense. (Not to mention the terrified passengers in the car!)

I was always in a hurry, often running late, and constantly exasperated by these ridiculous drivers who had the audacity to drive the speed limit and get in my way. Didn't they know I had somewhere to be?

Putting my Christian faith into practice was a new idea for me, and I had to admit that my driving habits were probably not reflective of the love of Christ. So, for 40 days, I decided to give up speeding... more than five miles over the speed limit. (I wasn't ready to go cold turkey just yet!)

While it might sound silly to most people, it was truly a transformative experience. I was astounded at both how hard it was AND how much different it felt in my body to slow down.

I stopped feeling so stressed when I arrived at work. I started to notice the feeling of the wind in my face or the beautiful weather. I even stopped seeing the other drivers as obstacles, instead as fellow humans just trying to get where they needed to go.

It was a powerful season of reflection, one where I learned that **the discipline of making even small and subtle changes could help me feel more connected to myself and to God.** I found that the car ride became a good time of day to pray or even worship.

Since those early days, I have continued to return to the rhythm of the Season of Lent as a welcome opportunity to consider where that place of needed growth is.

As I have grown on the journey, so too have the things I choose to do during these 40 days. I've used the season to develop a new prayer practice, to intentionally practice gratitude, and even to stop speeding entirely.

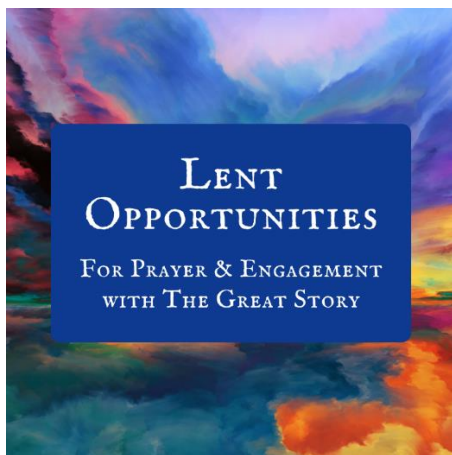
The last few years, Lent has been a chance to practice some compassion for myself — spending 40 days lifting up new definitions of what success means (i.e., taking a nap, saying no to something I didn't need to do, etc.) or learning to listen to my body (i.e., again, taking a nap, and giving myself the exercise or food I most needed).

Sometimes I take the 40-day journey in a different part of the year. There was too much going on during Lent of 2020 for me to focus on this kind of thing, so I did it for the final 40 days of the year.

Regardless of when it happens, the 40 days are always a time when I can return to myself and to God. It's healing. It's a gift.

It's also still hard. I keep myself accountable by adding colored post-it notes to the back of my door as I move through each day and celebrate the learnings. Yes, it still feels good to complete each 40-day season.

This year, after a season of such anxiety, I am practicing the simple gift of savoring the moment. I will give myself at least a couple of minutes every day to enjoy the sound or smell or sight or taste or touch of something in the moment. I know that coming back to the present moment will help remind me that I'm able to be HERE in the now, that God is HERE in the now, and that all will be well.



I wonder where God will be speaking to you during this Season of Lent.

Our journey through The Great Story will be lifting up some VERY human stories in the coming weeks.

As you see in these stories your own struggles to find connection to yourself and to God, perhaps you will notice some simple and subtle shifts you could make in your life that might help you navigate daily life in new ways.

Perhaps you may choose to lean into this season through joining one of our Lenten groups to engage with The Great Story in some way, or our Centering Prayer gathering on Sundays (click/tap the Lent Opportunities image for details and signup links, <https://hilliardumc.org/grow/adults/learning-opportunities/>).

There's no right or wrong way to listen to the nudge from God during this Season.



I confess that I did not continue with my Lenten practice of no longer speeding. (But I'm happy to say I haven't had a speeding ticket in many, many years). The lasting impact, however, was returning to a place where I could enjoy driving again.

Whether it is behind the wheel of an ACTUAL RACE CAR (through an amazing experience my husband gifted me with a few years ago), or an occasional quick zoom across the parking lot late at night when no one is there... some things are meant to be savored.

Praying it's a meaningful start to the season of Lent for all of you.

Blessings!

Pastor April



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