

**E-News**  
**February 22, 2023**

As we enter Lent, many Christians are giving up something as part of this season of fasting and penitence in preparation for Easter. As Calvinists, we have had a complicated relationship with fasting since the time of the Reformation. Calvin commended and practiced fasting as a regular spiritual practice; however, he also feared that many of the ways that fasting was practiced promoted the idea that fasting itself was “meritorious work” and called that “pernicious superstition” (Institutes IV.12.19). Instead, he believed that fasting had three ends:

1. To learn self-control in worldly hungers
2. To prepare ourselves better for prayer
3. To humble ourselves before God as an act of contrition for our sins. (Institutes IV.12.15).

The second item on that list speaks to me most and it is the one that I think we too often forget. I have often told church members who ask me about fasting to think about what they need to do to clear the way for a deeper relationship with God. In that vein, the disciplines of Lent are as much about what we will pick-up as they are about what we give-up: giving scrolling through social media in order to have more time for prayer ([click here for my favorite Lenten Devotion!](#)), giving up two hours a week to volunteer at the food pantry, or giving up a daily habit (smoking, Starbucks, etc.) and donating the money saved to support God’s work in the world (need some suggestions? How about the relief effort in East Palestine, South Street Ministries, or the response to the earthquake on Turkey and Syria?). The other question I often ask is “If it was getting in the way of your relationship with God then why would it be part of the post-Resurrection life after Easter?” Regardless of how you choose to observe Lent, I pray that this season will draw you closer to God as we follow the example of God’s self-giving love we see in Jesus Christ.

May the Peace of Christ be with You,  
Barry