FASTING LOVE

By Joan Carey, Executive Director of Firstfruits Faith Center
Headshot by Patricia Photography

Over the years I have given up many different things for Lent. There was the usual chocolate, ice cream or Carmel deLites. (Funny how the Girl Scout cookies always show up right around Lent.)

For as long as I can remember, I have followed the tradition of giving up something for Lent. I was taught that it teaches us discipline and allow us to experience some degree of suffering, which helps us connect with Jesus during this time when we focus on His suffering for us. Along with prayer and almsgiving, fasting is what Lent is all about.

I've had that understanding of the traditions of Lent my whole life, but recently something I read added a new dimension to it. In her book, *The Disciple's Wife*, Marilyn Malcolm shares a fascinating insight about the purpose of fasting. When we fast from physical things, we are to do it out of love for Jesus. For example, when we are tempted to eat chocolate, we are to deny ourselves because of love for Him. Let that motivate the action, or lack of action in this case. As we work on this more and more, Jesus will fill that void with His love for us.

As it becomes easier to deny physical things, it allows us to dare to fast from deeper things. We can apply this discipline to things like fear, anxiety, anger, loneliness and self–pity. When we are tempted to give in to anxious thoughts or fears, for example, we turn to Jesus and tell Him we aren't going to worry or fear because we love Him. Let Jesus fill our thoughts with His love until it becomes easier and easier to not have the thoughts in the first place. It takes a lot of trust and that is what comes from repeatedly denying ourselves out of love for Jesus.

I like this concept of fasting out of love instead of as a sense of obligation. Jesus promises that He is right there waiting to fill the void with His love.

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