



Week Four 2016 Lenten Study
Give up Running Away for Lent
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These shoes represent something that has been and is an important part of my life – running. When I was a freshman in high school I went out for track. I could tell the coach's expectations for me weren't that high, which is why he had me doing long jump, discus, and the like. But one day at a track meet I was put on a relay team as a substitute runner. Suddenly the coach realized I could run....and run fast. It became the first sport I truly excelled at.

Later in life running took on a different dimension for me. It has now become a way for me to return to a healthier lifestyle and I now run 5-6 times a week. As most runners will tell you, I simply feel better when I run.

As good as running can be for a person, it can also be harmful, especially when one turns to self-destructive behaviors as a means of "running away" from something, or as a way to avoid issues, challenges, or difficulties in life.

In our Lenten Series, "Give Up Something Bad for Lent," Rev. James Moore is helping us take a new look at the practice of "giving up something" for Lent. As he mentions in the introduction the usual practice is to give up something we like or enjoy as a part of our life; candy, coffee, chocolate, pop...you know the usual list of items that are "sacrificed" as a part of Lent.

However, Rev. Moore challenges us toward a new way of thinking that if we're going to give something up...why not give up something that is bad or unhelpful in our lives. I know, there are those who say that coffee, pop, chocolate, sweets – those are all things that are bad for us. But the challenge of the book is to take "giving up something" a level or two deeper in our life and in our faith journey.

So, this week's challenge is for us to give up "running away" from or avoiding certain things in life, mainly the challenges and difficulties that often we'd rather avoid, escape from, or maybe even deny their very existence. Now this could be addiction struggles, lifestyle challenges, it could be character issues that affect your life and faith journey, it could be educational or competency weaknesses that need attention. The list could go on. For me, one of my personal struggles is getting ahold of the clutter or disorganization in my life. Chances, are you've already thought of an item or two, a place or two in your own life that could use a bit of attention.

What Rev. Moore shares with us in this chapter are three "stages" as he puts it, of how Jesus tended to handle difficult situations in his own life. The first stage is that **Jesus chose to cope rather than run**. Or you might say Jesus tended to run towards, or at least lean into the challenge, rather than avoiding or running away from it.

Time and time again, we see situations where Jesus is dealing with people who are questioning him, challenging him, or even seeking to trap him in his words. It would have been so easy for Jesus to simply give a casual answer – saying the right words that would get him off the hook. But instead Jesus usually reframed the issue or turned it around on the people, which tended to not undue the tension...but it always helped to clarify the point or the teaching that Jesus was trying to make.

The second stage is that **Jesus used available resources**. Jesus was a master at assessing a situation, the people that were around him, and the resources of the day that were at his disposal. In tense situations I often become tense myself, which then makes we not think as clearly, which then brings on a more "tunnel vision" approach, and I become more reactive rather than reflective or proactive. Jesus on the other hand, remained calm, focused on what the greater issue was and the point that needed to be made, clarified, or revealed.

The third stage is that **Jesus turned the problem into an opportunity**. When I was an emergency room chaplain our staff would talk about how a crisis, what brought many people to our ER, was both a threat and an opportunity. The challenge was to help people see the opportunity in the midst of the difficult life experience they were going through. Such a change of direction didn't happen quickly and certainly rarely happened easily. Yet, when one was willing or able to step back from the calamity of the life changing moment, they could often begin to see the opportunity to make choices and move in different, and even in some cases, more positive directions for their life.

This is exactly what Jesus was able to do with many of the challenging moments from his life. He was able to turn them into opportunities for new understanding, new direction, and even new life. After all, that is what resurrection is about...God's promise that the threat of death and defeat can actually become a point of new life and new beginnings.

So, in the week to come may we each look for and identify a struggle or challenge in our lives that needs to be attended to. Then let's remember not to run away from it, but instead, to point our running shoes toward the issue or challenge – to lean into it, identify the resources that can help us, and recognize the opportunity for growth that is available in the moment.

Holy God, we give thanks for this season of Lent, a time of looking at our life and our faith journey with you. Help us this week to honestly look into our lives and to put on our running shoes in order that we might run toward...or lean into a specific challenge or difficulty that needs our attention. May we seek to follow more closely the ways of Jesus and to reflect more of your light and love toward the people and the world around us.
AMEN

