When I was young and living in Henrico County, about 10 miles east of Richmond, we frequently visited a collection of flea market-type stores and outdoor stands known as the Williamsburg Pottery. The Williamsburg Pottery is famous now as a collection of local retail outlet shops that tourists visit. It's been gentrified.

In my younger days, it was nothing like it is now. While still a destination market, it was filled with old cinderblock and wooden buildings and stands. Some of the buildings had no floor or cement floors, and they meandered on – filled with all manner of flea market type merchandise. It was a lot like a low-end, outdoor version of Gordie Harper's Bazaar, although much bigger.

The Pottery was ugly – in fact, the newspapers referred to it as a" real eyesore." It had tacky signs directing you to different stands or buildings. And despite the bargains, it was not fun in the rain. If you went to the Pottery in the rain, you'd be covered with mud from head to toe. The funny thing is, the Pottery was always crowded and busy and bustling – even in the rain. If you found a bargain, you'd grab it quickly to avoid someone else getting it first.

If the Pottery had also included stands for selling animals, it might be a pretty good image of the market that took place in the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple. The Temple market was a bustling, outdoor bazaar. It was a destination market. Those coming to worship at the Temple often came from miles around, especially at pilgrimage days such as the Passover. The market would have been larger at these times because pilgrims would shop there to buy animals for sacrifice and perhaps food and other essentials. They'd also change their money to be able to pay the Temple tax. I picture the market as dusty and crowded with people hawking their wares and animals bleating and chirping. In fact, despite the many courtyards and doors between the market and the inner worship spaces of the Temple, I'll bet all that racket really made prayer difficult. Something about the idea of going someplace to worship and having to pass through all this commercial activity seems incongruent to me. Yes, folks needed to find animals for sacrifice and obtain Temple coins to worship, but the market had gone so toward profitmaking that this original purpose was lost. It might have been all right if the activity stopped during holy moments, but it seems the Temple's commercial activity actually increased the holier the season.

Our lives and, especially our minds, can be like marketplaces sometimes. We run from the shop of kids to the shop of school to the shop of work to the shop of preparing meals. We want to achieve. We want to consume. We want to improve ourselves. We want and buy nice things – cars, homes, clothes, smart devices. While some of these things are wholesome, they also can become so much about ourselves that they lose their purpose. We also allow them to make so much noise in our minds that we can't hear God. We can become so focused on the secular that we can't pray to the holy.

For example, raising children is a beautiful God-given vocation. Children are a blessing. But what happens if our child hopes to be the first violin in the orchestra, but his best friend is a better violinist and is chosen first violen? Perhaps we let that desire to be the first violin consume our children and us so much that we hope bad things happen to the friend or that we encourage our children to envy their friend's talent.

A more prayer-focused way is to thank God for the talent God gave our child and his friend. Then to ask God how God wants our child to use that talent in worship to God.

Let's say we need a new car. Having a new vehicle may be critical to us being able to go where we need to go, including work, school, and church. It may be necessary for our safety. But, new cars also have the tendency to create "noise" in our lives. For example, the noise says that we need an attention-grabbing car when an ordinary one will do. The noise says we should work harder or overextend ourselves to reward ourselves with that beautiful car when we'd feed our souls better by balancing work with prayer time in our lives.

We need to find time to worship God every day rather than be caught up in the market's noise and bustle.

The noisy market in our minds also sometimes encourages us to commit the sin of gluttony. Gluttony isn't really about overeating. Gluttony is about overconsuming. The sin is having to have 10 of something when one will do. It's having to be stimulated all the time – filling our calendar with new and exciting activities. The sin is taking the original good intent to serve others and turning it into a hamster wheel of action that may become more about what we achieve than about helping others.

We are created in the image of God and claimed as Christ's own forever to be in a relationship with God. We are made to worship God, to spend time in prayer with God.

To do that, sometimes we need to cleanse our minds and lives of practices that, while well-intentioned, actually detract from our worship of God. Sometimes we need to get rid of the busyness and noise of our lives.

Lent is a perfect time to examine our lives for what distracts us from spending time with God. We ask God to cleanse us of too much consumption or too much busyness. We ask God to make us grateful for our gifts rather than always striving to be better than others. We ask God to get us out of the noisy marketplaces that distract us so that we can worship. We ask God to help us stop and pray.