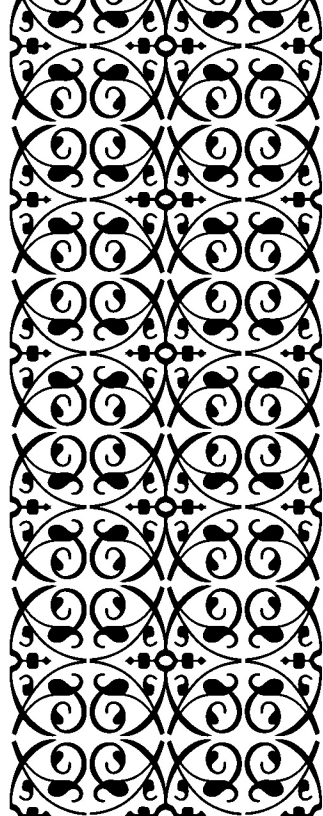


the
evergreen
community

lent
prayer guide



What is Lent?

Lent, a period of 40 days (not including Sundays) between Ash Wednesday and Easter was originally a period of preparation for those to be baptized at Easter. It later became a time of penitence and self-examination for all Christians. In some ways, it is meant to reflect the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and resisting temptation prior to His ministry.

By celebrating Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness, resist temptation, pray, and proceed “on the way” to Jerusalem, and the cross of Good Friday. Our Lenten journey is one of repentance,

that is, changing directions from self, self-serving patterns and an myopic focus toward the others-focused way of life of following Jesus. We follow Jesus in laying down ourselves for others and trust that the power of that raised Jesus from the dead is enough to guide us in repentance and renewal. The intervention of God’s gracious Spirit makes life-long changes become possible. Turning from the old self at Lent and experiencing a dying of old ways prepares us to truly experience the joy of Easter.

The following outline for this period of prayer and reflection is intended to assist

you as you along the way. It is not meant to be followed legalistically. But we often need help in focusing on what is truly important and in laying aside distractions ... and this guide is designed to provide that help.

Use as much or as little of this as seems appropriate for you. Remember that we are in the season of Lent and our praying has repentance (turning from the wrong towards the right) as its focus.

So, repentance is a two-fold spiritual discipline.

First, it is an acknowledgment of our sin as it shows itself in the different aspects of our

being, wrong thinking and attitudes, wrong affections and aspirations, wrong behaviors and actions.

Second, it is a turning from our sin to Christ for forgiveness and strength to change and grow to be more like Him. It is a sober reflection upon our condition, which leads us to faith and fresh trust in and leaning on of the finished work of Christ.

The reflection of Lent on our sin, our brokenness and all the ways we are tied to and contribute to the brokenness in the world should serve to increase our gratitude and wonder at the love of God.

May this time work that in you, and in our community as a whole.

Some general ideas for Lent

INWARD & PERSONAL DISCIPLINES

Is there something that has become too important in your life, something that has been impacting you negatively? Can you give that up (or a portion or aspect of it) for Lent? Spend time in solitude and quiet (without TV or music) each day. Read a book for inner growth. Consider something stretching like Dallas Willard, Henri Nouwen or Eugene Peterson. Read through one of the Gospels between now and Easter. Begin to keep a journal of prayer concerns, questions, reading. Find a way to go to bed earlier, get enough rest and rise earlier. Make a list of people with whom you need

to be reconciled. Pray for them and let Jesus guide you in your thinking and feeling toward them. Attend both Ash Wednesday and Good Friday as the bookends of your Lent journey. Make a list of the priorities in your life at the beginning of Lent. Revisit at the end. Still the same? Forgive someone who has hurt you.

OUTWARD & SOCIAL DISCIPLINES

Visit a "shut-in" neighbor, a rest home or someone sick. Write a letter of affirmation once a week to a person who has touched my life. Go to coffee or dinner with someone you wouldn't

Weekly Fasts

ordinarily. Say “NO” to something that is a waste of money and time. Give that money to something or someone else.

Work through the Weekly Fasts below. Consider Isaiah 58 and pray through the next 40 days as to what God is really looking for from you.

AS A WAY OF BEING ACCOUNTABLE:

Share your intentions for Lent on the Forum, with your housemates/family, with your homegroup or a friend.

(Fasts begin Monday and end Saturday- Sundays are “Feast” days when in celebration of the goodness Jesus brings, we break our fasts. Either do each fast for the week and only for that week or consider letting them build on each other, so that by the end of Lent, you are doing all five weekly fasts at the same time.)

Week One: Sweets, Treats and Self Indulgence

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself but what is absolutely necessary. Buy no new clothes or gadgets, books or music, don’t go to the movies or buy coffee or candy. Eat cheaply, save money (or give what you would have spent on coffee, treats, entertainment for the week to Kiva or someone else in need). Keep journal entries of what happens inside when you deny yourself something you’ve become accustomed to or something you really want. How does it affect you? Why?

Weekly Fasts

Week Two: Food/Meals

Pick either a type of food (like meat or carbs or even "solids") and fast from them for the week. Or alternately, pick a meal (like breakfast or lunch) to skip on a daily basis. If you skip meals, spend that time you would have spent preparing and eating food in doing something else: Prayer, or reading Scripture, or serving others, perhaps finding a way to bless someone with each of those blocks of time, even if it's just time spent listening to them. Keep journal entries of what it's like to go hungry, even if it's just for one meal. What is it like to begin to assert some mastery over your body these past two weeks? How does your body/mind respond to that?

If you forgo a whole category of food, consider: What is it like to deny a craving? Is it easy or hard. How does that craving grow the more you deny it? Does it eventually become easier? Why?

(As with all fasting, please consider your health and talk to a doctor before engaging more advanced fasts like fasting from solids)

Week Three: Television/Music/Media

This week, forgo the usual shows. In fact, turn off the TV altogether. Drive without the radio. Leave the iPod at home.

What is it like to increase the silence/decrease the media inputs into your life? Do you miss it? Does it make you anxious? Relaxed? Something else?

What does your reaction to this fast tell you about your connectedness to media?

Keep journal entries of what silence does for you, what missing certain shows/events means. Spend the time listening for the still small voice of God.

Week Four: Social Media and Internet

Turn off Twitter, Facebook, blogs, news—check and answer work emails and nothing else. Put a Lent “Out of Office” reply on your personal email letting people know you’ll get back to them next week.

Keep journal entries of what it’s like to unplug and disconnect—to not obsessively check email/Facebook, etc. Do you feel disconnected...or free?

Week Five: Time

Go out of your way for others this week. Fast from indulging yourself time-wise. Get up a half hour or an hour earlier. Make it a goal this week: To bless someone else through your words or actions daily. Once or twice, to give someone else the gift of your listening ear—resist the urge to share your troubles and instead focus on someone else and helping to share theirs. Commit this week to doing something for someone else—help a friend move or paint, serve the poor, stop and help a stranger even if (especially if) you are in a hurry to get somewhere. Keep journal entries of what it’s like to spend your time on others.

Daily Reading/Contemplation

[Week One Readings]

Day 1: Simplicity

Read: Matthew 6:19-34

Consider: In what ways have the things you own ended up owning you? Where could you simplify if you only had the will to do so? What are we really saying to God when we place such an importance on things? When we worry?

PRAY: That your worry would melt into trust, that your desire for things would be redirected into a desire for God and His kingdom.

Day 3: Greed

Read: Luke 12:13-21

Consider: Why does Jesus talk so much about money? How is an over-emphasis on material things corrosive to our souls and our world?

PRAY: That God would show you where and how you are overly concerned about and tied to money, possessions and acquisition.

Day 5: Relationship

Read: John 15:9-17

Consider: What has been the story of your relationship with Jesus? How has He pursued you? How have you pursued Him?

PRAY: The God would help you know, feel and learn into the love of Jesus for you on a daily basis.

[Week Two Readings]

Day 7: Sin

Read: Matthew 18:5-9

Consider: In what ways does sin have a grip on you? What do you know you need to let go of, but have been unwilling up to now. How might your unwillingness to deal with that affect others?

PRAY: That God would search your heart and point out to you anything that needs to go, be let go of, be crucified in your life.

Day 9: Rules

READ: Matthew 23:23-24

Consider: Do you think doing certain religious things (like fasting or observing Lent) or even not sinning makes you a better person? What's more important?

PRAY: That God would use Lent to form you, to humble you, to convict you of your priorities and convince you of your place in serving others

Day 11: Judgment

READ: Luke 6:37-42

Consider: Who do you end up feeling most judgmental about? Why? How can we be passionate about the truth of the Gospel and convinced of the rightness and health of life in the way of Jesus without coming across as a complete ass? If you were wrong about something how would you want someone to approach you?

PRAY: That God would soften your heart towards others and most specifically- show you the "specks" in your own eye.

Day 13: Compassion

READ: Matthew 9:35-38

Consider: When was the last time you felt moved by compassion? What did you do because of your compassion? Are you truly moved by compassion if no action follows?

PRAY: That Jesus' prayer would be answered- that more and more people would be moved "out into the fields" to not only heal and love, but to preach the Gospel with words and deeds. Pray that God would show you your place in that.

[Week Three Readings]*Day 15:* Worry

READ: Luke 12:22-28

Consider: Do you worry about things? What place do possessions have in your heart? How easy or hard is it to trust God to give you what you actually need?

PRAY: That God would decrease your desire for more and more... and increase your desire for and trust in Him

Daily Reading/Contemplation

Day 17: Hatred

READ: Luke 6:37-42

Consider: Who are you enemies with? Why? What would it look like to lay that down, give up what you think they owe you and instead forgive?

PRAY: That God would show you how to love even those you don't like.

Day 19: Friendship

READ: Matthew 9:9-13

Consider: Who are you friends with? Why? What would it look like to intentionally seek out people who need you to be their friend?

PRAY: That God would show you someone you can be a friend to in a way that others couldn't.

Day 21: Fear

READ: John 14:15-27

Consider: What are you most afraid of in life? What

do you want to say to God about that? After spending some time listening and reflecting, what do you think He wants to say to you about that?

PRAY: That God would give you peace, trust in Him and the ability to see your fears through the lens of His presence alongside you.

[Week Four Readings]

Day 23 Status

READ: Mark 10:35-45

Consider: What did Jesus think about self-promotion? What do you think about it? How would you rate your desire for status and acknowledgement?

PRAY: That God would show you clearly your need to matter and all that you do to get that need met. Pray that you would feel the love and acceptance of God, because of Jesus and His life and death on your behalf—not your performance.

Day 25 Pride

READ: Luke 20:45-47

Consider: What does having others' honor and respect do for you? What are you willing to do for it? What blinded the people Jesus was talking about to their character defects? What blinds you to yours?

PRAY: That God would reveal areas of pride and self-righteousness to you and what you can do about them.

Day 27: Criticism

READ: Mark 3: 1-6

Consider: Do you think you tend more towards criticism or encouragement? Which is easier for you to engage in? Which do you desire more of in your life? What do you think your criticism might be saying about you?

PRAY: That God would help you control your tongue and that your words would build others up, not tear them down.

Day 29: Results

READ: Matthew 12:33-37

Consider: What kind of "fruit" has been coming out of your life recently? What are you rooted in? What are you feeding yourself? Does the one have anything to do with the other?

PRAY: That God would help you do what leads to good results in your life.

[Week Five Readings]*Day 31:* Generosity

READ: Luke 12:29-34

Consider: Does worry impede generosity? What are we forming in ourselves when we worry? What are we forming in ourselves when we choose generosity?

PRAY: That God would show you how and where to be more generous.. and if it's hard, why this is hard.

Daily Reading/Contemplation

Day 33: Service

READ: John 13:1-7

Consider: What do you think it was like for the disciples to see Jesus humble Himself this way? What's it like for you? What work is beneath you? What would you absolutely never do for someone else if they really, truly needed it? Why?

PRAY: That God would help you understand what the disciples had such a hard time getting.

Day 35: Apathy

READ: Matthew 21:28-32

Consider: Have you ever told God you would do something, felt Him stirring you to care and act about a certain situation and then failed to follow through? Why? What keeps you from putting your values into more consistent action?

PRAY: That God would again stir your heart for others- that he would show you where and how you make a difference.

Day 37: Joy

READ: Luke 10:17-21

Consider: What brings you joy? What do you really need to be happy? What stops you from remembering that?

PRAY: That God would realign your ideas of what it means to be "happy" and filled with joy- and that you would be both of those.