



2021

LENTEN

GUIDED PRACTICE

A Six Week Practice Through the Season of Lent



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INTRODUCTION

What Is Lent?

Lent is a season devoted to the awareness of our sin and the practice of turning our hearts toward Christ in humble repentance. It takes place during the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, mirroring Jesus' own temptation when, for 40 days, the Spirit led him into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). The rhythm of Lent invites Christians everywhere to slow down and set aside time each day to focus on Jesus' own ministry—specifically his sacrificial death, which we celebrate on Good Friday. Therefore, Lent is often marked by fasting, prayer, and reflection on our need for Christ's atoning sacrifice. But ultimately, the season of Lent culminates on Easter when we celebrate the hope of the resurrection life that comes through saving faith in Jesus!

Although Lent is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture, we must not overlook its importance. This great tradition dates as far back as the 4th century AD and continues to be a vital rhythm in the church calendar across many denominations all over the world. In many ways, Lent is a retelling of the gospel story with our very bodies and lives. Through formational practices we are reminded that the gospel isn't only something that was accomplished *for us*, but also a reality that we *participate in*, with Christ himself and his body, the Church. It is in this great tradition that we imitate our great God and Savior (1 Peter 2:21; Ephesians 5:1).

How To Use This Guide

The beauty of Lent is that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. As a church family, we will celebrate Lent together on Sundays. But, we encourage

you to use this guide on your own as a way to slow down and intentionally “journey to the cross” with Jesus. This guide follows the six weeks of Lent and provides a theme for prayer and meditation each week. Included is a “suggested fast” for each week, which we strongly encourage. Items to fast from include things like sugar, alcohol, news, social media, Netflix, red meat, etc. You may instead choose to fast from one of these items for the entire 40 days. We recognize personal devotions can be intimidating, since it’s often difficult to know how or where to start. So, imbedded in every week is a liturgical flow for you to follow. Feel free to adapt it to fit your personal rhythm.

A Note About Fasting

Fasting has long been a primary practice Christians observe during the Lenten season. In his book, *Journey To The Cross*, Will Walker notes that fasting is “a tangible, physical activity that points to our spiritual longing to be rooted in Jesus alone and find our true comfort and joy in him.” Our physical hunger brings about a deeper awareness of our spiritual hunger for which only Christ can satisfy! This is why we fast—so our longing for Jesus grows stronger.

What About Sundays?

If you did the math, you probably realized there are forty-six days of Lent. This is because Sundays are known as “Feast Days” where people often break their fast one day of the week and celebrate with friends and family. This is encouraged since Sundays are a *celebration* as God’s people gather to worship Jesus and remember the new life we have in him! All that to say, use Sundays as a day to celebrate in this season.

Final Word

As a reminder, this is all by *invitation*. There is no requirement, as disciples of Jesus, to observe Lent. But, as a community we will go through this practice together and we invite you to journey along with us as we celebrate Christ’s amazing work!

REST

Suggested Fast: Shopping

Online or in store, apart from the necessities. Avoid unnecessary spending. Live simply this week.

Open in Prayer

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

Prayer of Confession: A Plea for Rest

Heavenly Father, have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Wash away all my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin. *Your forgiveness is the doorway to experiencing the rest you offer.* Surely you desire truth from my heart; please teach me your wisdom that it would flow out of me. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence! Instead, restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:5*

Devotional

To abide means *to remain* or *to rest in*. Whether you are aware of it or not, your soul is abiding in something right now; you just may be too busy to know what that “something” is. Truthfully, many of us wear our “busyness” like it’s a badge of honor. Even with the abundance of time gained in quarantine (at least for some), many have hardly slowed down in a way that is truly restful and restorative. Instead we tend to saturate our souls with media and entertainment to escape the fractured realities of life.

Thankfully Jesus offers His disciples a better way: he offers an unceasing rest that comes from abiding in him. Jesus says that like branches we are to remain connected to him, the true vine through which life itself is mediated. And just like a branch withers and dies when broken off from the vine, so do we when we are broken off from Christ. When we abide in the things of this world, we cease to produce kingdom fruit. In fact, Jesus makes perhaps the boldest claim of all, saying, “apart from me you can do *nothing*” (emphasis added). Through prayer and fasting, make this week one of abiding rest in Jesus. Seek to do nothing apart from the true vine of Christ.

Reflection

Do you truly believe that apart from Christ you can do nothing? How might your life look different if you believed Christ’s words? If not Jesus, in what or in whom is your soul prone to abide? What activities do you fill your time with as a way to escape and numb? Do those things truly offer the rest you desire? Why or why not?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving for Rest

Father God, in your steadfast love and mercy you have not despised the broken and humble heart. Rather, you have invited me into the eternal rest found in your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you, Spirit of God, for giving me the rest my soul so desperately longs for—in this life and in the age to come. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!

REPENT

Suggested Fast: Media + Entertainment

Social media, video games, television, and streaming (ie. Netflix)

Open in Prayer

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

Prayer of Confession from Psalm 51

Heavenly Father, have mercy on me according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth from my heart; please teach me your wisdom that it would flow out of me. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence! But instead, restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you." *Acts 3:19-20*

Devotional

God makes an amazing promise to us through Peter's powerful sermon in Acts 3. He says that if we want refreshment in our lives, the type of refreshment that comes from knowing and being known by Jesus, we must first repent. Repentance is in fact the gateway to experiencing the presence of Christ. Fundamentally, repentance is turning away from sin and turning toward God. During Lent we intentionally turn our focus away from the endless distractions of this world so that we can be more aware of God's presence in our lives. But Peter's words should serve as a clear reminder that it is first and foremost through repentance that we encounter Christ. Therefore, it's fitting that this week we meditate on and practice repentance.

Reflection

Open your journal and write down any thoughts the Holy Spirit brings to mind in response to the questions below.

Are there specific, recurring sins in your life that you need to repent of? What good things in your life are you prone to make ultimate things—idols that you elevate above God? What does it look like to turn away from these things and move toward Jesus?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus Christ, you have borne my sins in your body on the cross and healed me by your wounds. Holy Spirit, you have led me into truth and graciously spoken words of forgiveness, peace, and new life. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!

RECONCILE

Suggested Fast: Media

The news, whether online, app, or paper

Open in Prayer

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

Prayer of Confession: Division

Heavenly Father, have mercy on me according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Forgive me for all the moments I have sowed seeds of division instead of unity, whether knowingly or unknowingly; please teach me your wisdom and perfect ways that break down walls rather than build them up. Create in me a pure heart, O God, restore to me the joy of my union found in your Son, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” *Ephesians 2:13-16*

Devotional

Reconciliation is a primary theological theme in the Bible. We were created to be in constant communion with God. But because of sin, our relationship with God and one another has been broken. It doesn't take more than a glance at today's national and global newsreel to see that this is utterly true. When we consider for a moment the apparent chaos of our world—whether it be a pandemic, political tension, racial division, or some other social malady—it would seem that there are more fractured relationships than ever before. Where there was once deep oneness and wholeness there is now brokenness. Where there was once unity and peace there is now discord. And so our souls *yearn*. We yearn for that which has been broken to be mended. We yearn to be restored to oneness with our creator. And we yearn for peace on the earth.

This restoration of peace and relationship that we desire is called *reconciliation*. Paul says Christ came and shed his blood on the cross so that we might be reconciled “to God in one body.” The “one body” he is talking about is the Church. Christ came so that we might be reconciled to God and to one another, and the Church is God’s singular plan to extend the peace of Christ to the world! And so we pray with deep longing this week for unity in the body—for peace and reconciliation to take place in our relationships with one another.

Reflection

Where do you see and experience disunity in the church? How have you experienced the sting of broken relationships in your family, friends, and church community? What specific steps can you take to be an agent of reconciliation in your relationships?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving for Reconciliation

Praise be to you, Jesus Christ—Son of God!—for on the cross you reconciled humanity to God, as well as to one another. Holy Spirit, lead us into all truth and new life as you bind us together in unity, as the people of God, your Church. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!

Suggested Fast: Sugar + Sweets**Open in Prayer**

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

**Prayer of Confession:
Resurrecting Our Old Life**

Heavenly Father, have mercy on me according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Forgive me for the times where my old life, which bore bad fruit, seemed easier than living into the new life that you purchased for me through your death and resurrection. Surely you desire that I live completely into the *new creation* identity I now have in You. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me; renew in me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. *2 Corinthians 5:17*

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."
Revelation 21:5

Devotional

The designedly bleak words in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes speak of the absurdity of life: *“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”* When we compare this verse with what we experience in this life, we are quickly aware that there is some level of truth to what Solomon is saying. On the outside it may look as if our world, and maybe even our own lives, are moving away from renewal and headed toward destruction. Thankfully, the Bible didn't end there! God, in his mercy and kindness, has revealed His plan to us in the New Testament, a New Covenant that has been established by Jesus. He invites us to be part of a new kingdom that is full of new promises, like the ones above, which eclipse the old. In a very real way, God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, is making us new, raising us to new and everlasting life in Christ. These promises weren't given to simply boost our self-esteem. Rather, they are promises that we are meant to build our lives upon! Claim these kingdom promises this week and pray that God would bring about renewal in your life and in this world.

Reflection

Where do you long to experience restoration and renewal in your own life? Have you been on spiritual autopilot or maybe even completely switched off to Jesus? Do you have wounds that you wish to be healed but have stopped asking because you doubt God's ability to do it? Is there a part of your life that seems broken beyond repair?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving for Renewal

Lord Jesus Christ, I thank and praise you for the renewal of life gifted to me in your life, death, and resurrection. Holy Spirit, I am grateful for your continual guidance that helps me live into my identity as a child of God. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!

REVERE

Suggested Fast: Meat

Open in Prayer

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

Prayer of Confession: Indifference

King Jesus, forgive me for being indifferent to your holiness and for failing to live my life in a way that mirrors your perfection. I repent for not recognizing your sovereign Lordship over all the things I try to hide from you. Wash away all my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth from my heart. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me, teaching me to once again revere the salvation you have gifted to me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. *1 Peter 3:15*

Devotional

True evangelism is born out of a heart that reveres Christ. When our affections burn for something, *anything*, we can't help but tell others about it. And so it is with Jesus. If we revere him, that is, if we worship and treasure Jesus in our heart, the truth of his transforming love will produce a hope and a joy in us that others will want to know about! Of course, telling others about Jesus isn't always easy. There are many factors that hinder our ability and desire to share the gospel. We are fearful about what others will think of us. We doubt our ability to communicate the message of the gospel clearly. We falsely believe it's up to the "professional" Christian leaders to do that kind of "work." We make our schedules air tight, leaving us unavailable for those who may have "ears to hear." We fill our minds with the things of this world, rendering us unprepared when someone actually asks us about Jesus. But the two commands Peter gives us are back to back for a reason. They go hand-in-hand. Peter knows that a deep reverence for Christ trumps all our fears, doubts, and presuppositions about sharing the good news. So we pray this week that God would give us hearts that revere Christ, minds that are prepared to share "the reason for the hope that you have," and opportunities to engage with those who don't know Jesus.

Reflection

Is there someone in your life who the Spirit is nudging you to tell about Jesus? What holds you back from sharing the gospel with that person and others? How can you better put on display the hope that you have in Christ? What can you do to be better prepared to share the gospel?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving for Christ's Holy Mission

Son of God, I praise you for stepping into humanity to bear the weight of sin, yet remaining utterly holy as the Lord of the cosmos. Holy Spirit, you have led me into truth and graciously spoken words of forgiveness, peace, and new life. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!

REVIVE

Suggested Fast: Alcohol

Open in Prayer

Sit in silence for at least 90 seconds. Pray as you feel led to open your time with God.

Prayer of Confession: Lack of Zeal

Heavenly Father, have mercy on me according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Forgive me for lacking in passion and zeal for the truth of the Gospel. Forgive me for letting the hurriedness of life snuff out the flame that once sustained my joy in you. Wash away my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth from my heart; please teach me your wisdom that it would flow out of me. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and revive a steadfast spirit within me, breathing a fresh wind of your Spirit into the caverns of my soul. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

Celebrate Forgiveness!

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*

Scripture Meditation

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. *Ephesians 3:16-19*

Devotional

Paul's famous prayer to the Ephesians cuts right to the heart of what we all need to live as Christians: the power of God to revive our soul through the Holy Spirit. More than ever we all long more deeply for God to bring about true revival in our own lives, our nation, and our world. Revival begins with God pouring out his Holy Spirit into his people and ends with God himself being glorified. When we pray for revival, we are praying for the same thing Paul prayed, "to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being." This is, of course, what God is always doing in his people all around the

world. But when asking for revival, we pray specifically that the Spirit would not only empower our own souls, but also those in our church and surrounding community. We ask that God would do a unique work, concentrated in a specific time and location, within our local churches to save the lost, awaken those who have fallen asleep, and embolden his children with greater joy and passion for Jesus. Ultimately, a prayer for revival is a prayer that the glory of Jesus would be on full display through his beautiful bride, the Church!

Reflection

How is the Holy Spirit revealing the person of Jesus to you? Are you living a life dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit? How do you need to respond to what the Spirit is doing in your heart?

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus Christ, you have borne my sins in your body on the cross and healed me by your wounds. Holy Spirit, stir up in me a personal revival—that those who I connect with sense my zeal for your Gospel and notice the fruit you bear through me. Thanks be to my gracious and compassionate Triune God! Amen!



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