

A GUIDE
LENT

AN INTRODUCTION TO LENT

O Lord and Master of my life!

Take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness,
lust of power and idle talk.

But give me rather the spirit of chastity, humility,
patience and love to my servant.

Yea, O Lord and King!

Grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother;
for thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen. "

A COMMON FOURTH-CENTURY PRAYER OF LENT FROM ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN

Lent is about the gospel. It is a time to narrow the focus of the Church to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to turn from our sin and trust in His atoning work. "

The season of Lent lasts approximately 40 days, excluding Sundays, between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. The 40 days have obvious biblical parallels in the flood narrative (Gen. 6-8), the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai (Exod. 24:12-18), Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:1-12) and Jesus' fasting and temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-12, Luke 4:1-13). The last of these accounts is most relevant to the season. "

Originally a preparation period for those desiring to be baptized, Lent eventually became embedded into Christian tradition as a season for the Church to symbolically follow Christ into the wilderness. It is a time for fasting and self-denial, though not for denial itself. It is a period to empty ourselves of lesser things so that we might be filled with the greater things of the gospel. Whereas Advent is a season of ever-increasing light awaiting the incarnation of Christ, Lent is a season of ever-decreasing light approaching the cross. "

THE LENTEN CALENDAR

Celebrated each spring as the days begin to lengthen (the term Lent is from a Saxon word meaning “lengthen”), Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 46 days before Easter Sunday. It is marked by periods of fasting and feasting. Each week, participants traditionally fast during the week and feast on Sundays. This pattern continues throughout the season as the Church journeys toward the Holy Week commencing on Palm Sunday. The final period of Lent is often referred to as the Triduum, beginning Maundy Thursday and continuing through Easter Sunday. ”

In our context, it is easy to get lost in the cultural expectations of Easter and miss out on the meaning. Lent is a reminder that the resurrection only occurred after the crucifixion. Rather than skipping over the ministry and crucifixion of Christ, Lent is a season to prepare ourselves for the joy of Resurrection Sunday as we enter the sorrow and pain which preceded it. ”

LENTEN SEASON ④ NORTHWAY

2/26”	.....Fresh Encounter | 7 PM | Ash Wednesday”
3/1”	.....Unself | Sermon Series Launch | Week 1”
3/8”	.....Week 2”
3/15”	.....Week 3”
3/22”	.....Week 4”
3/29”	.....Week 5”
4/5”	.....Palm Sunday - Week 6”
4/9”	.....Upper Room Service | 7 PM | Maundy Thursday”
4/10”	.....12:15-12:45 PM Service | Good Friday”
4/12	.....Easter Sunday

SCRIPTURE READING

Plan to spend ample time reading and meditating on Scripture. If you’re not already in the habit and need somewhere to start, you can search the popular Bible App (You Version) for Bible Reading Plans for Lent. We’ve offered a suggested plan at NWC.FYI: “Experiencing Jesus Together Through Lent.”

WEEKLY FASTS

Each week, we have suggested an area of fasting to apply to our lives. Far from a mere responsibility, these weekly fasts give us opportunities to pursue greater communion with Christ. By emptying our lives of commotion, clutter and noise, we hope to find greater room for Him to speak through His Word. Rather than simply subtracting something from our lives, this is an opportunity to add something greater. "

Some of the fasts are traditional (food, caffeine, sweets), while others may be novel for many of us (media, sleep, shopping). These particular fasts were chosen because each represents a common comfort to which our culture runs for distraction. The hope for each is that a season of unplugging from the background buzz will be leveraged for the sake of communing with the Lord. Therefore, we should consider ways in which we can leverage the fast to engage in deeper prayer, study, community, meditation, etc. "

Although encouraged to pursue a complete fast on many of the weeks (i.e. abstaining completely from the area of the week), there are two weeks in particular in which you are encouraged to plan ahead the degree to which you will engage in the fast. Weeks 1 and 6 are not expected to be absolute fasts. "

Week 1 involves a fast from food. You may choose to fast from one meal a day; others will do an entire day; others still might choose a fast of multiple days. "

Week 6 involves a fast from sleep. You are neither expected nor encouraged to abstain from sleep for the entire week. However, the hope is that we might set our alarms an hour or two earlier, stay up an hour or two later and devote one entire night or morning to prayer.

Additionally, participants should consider the possibility of building each week upon the next. For instance, an individual could continue the Week 1 fast into Week 2 and so forth to eventually do all seven fasts together. Again, this is not intended to be a burden, but rather an opportunity, and should be stewarded as circumstances allow. If we are to follow Christ in the wilderness, it will take some degree of discomfort and inconvenience. May we begin to prepare our hearts accordingly. "

WEEKLY FAST SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: FOOD

Consider fasting from lunch this week and spending that hour in prayer, reading the Word, or praising the Lord through music. Or choose a specific type of food—candy, soda, meat, etc.—to fast from for the week. Or choose one day to fast from dawn until dusk, again spending the time you'd usually be eating to sit in God's presence."

WEEK 2: TELEVISION AND MOVIES

Think about unplugging your televisions or devices and spending that time soaking in the Lord's presence. If your family typically watches a show or movie together, consider exchanging that hour or two each day to open God's Word, pray, and discuss the reality of sin in our hearts and in our world."

WEEK 3: SOCIAL NETWORKING AND INTERNET

Think about exchanging the time you would normally scroll through social media or browse the internet for a time of intentional prayer, Bible reading or worship. Consider staying off certain platforms at certain points of each day or for the entire week, deleting the apps off your device or blocking those websites as you fast. (Of course, many people will need to use these during work hours for employment purposes)"

WEEK 4: CAFFEINE AND SWEETS

Consider fasting from your favorite caffeinated beverages or candy this week. Think about placing sticky notes with Scripture or prayer requests on or near where you keep those items so you are reminded to refocus your heart and mind on the Lord throughout the day. Consider setting aside the money you would typically spend on those beverages and treats and pray about where you could give it to help those in need."

WEEK 5: SHOPPING FOR NON-ESSENTIALS

Consider fasting from shopping (including "window shopping" online) for anything that is not absolutely necessary this week. Reflect on the ways that God has provided for your every need. You could choose to start a list of God's provision in your life, spend time praying for God to help you remember that He is your ultimate sustainer and giver of life, or find small ways to be generous toward others in gratitude for what the Lord has given to you."

WEEK 6: SLEEP

As we approach the end of Lent, think about getting up an hour earlier than usual or staying up an hour later to intentionally spend time with the Lord. Whether that be in prayer or confession, consider giving up a portion of your sleep to focus your heart and mind on God, specifically the passion of Christ. You may even consider spending an entire evening in prayer, following the example of our Lord who tarried."

PRAY THE HOURS WITH THE CHURCH @ NWC.FYI

Praying the Hours is a rhythm of public or personal prayer set to specific hours of the day, an opportunity to regularly pause and sanctify the day with spiritual practice. Birthed out of the Jewish tradition, the practice of praying the hours can be found throughout the Psalms. The early Christians carried on this tradition (Acts 10:3, 9; 16:25), and with the rise of the Roman

empire, the hours of prayer began to coincide with the hours of the bell that rang to mark the work day at 6am, 9am, noon, 3pm, and 6pm. In contemporary times, prayer books have been compiled of brief readings and Psalms to guide us along together."

If you're not already doing so, we invite you to take up this practice during the season of Lent. Many of the readings and prayers will be aligned directly with the season. "

Northway has a direct link to an online version of The Divine Hours. Simply go to [NWC.FYI](#) and look for the link. Join us when you can throughout the day: morning, midday, and evening. Set reminders on your smartphone to help you remember."

Additionally (or alternatively) join us each day in the following themes as a part of your daily prayer rhythms.

DAILY PRAYER THEMES

W: Desire to repent and walk closely with Jesus

T: Growing love for those around me

F: God to be exalted and loved all over the world

S: God to save unbelievers in my life

S: My church to be healthy

M: Unity between Christians

T: God to show His power in unexpected ways

W: Gratitude in the hearts of God's people

T: The next generation to treasure Jesus

F: God to protect the unborn

S: God to provide wisdom where it's needed

S: My church to be filled with love

M: Opportunities and courage to share the gospel

T: Power to comprehend the love of God

W: Self-control for fighting sin

T: College students who are questioning faith

F: The church to demonstrate racial unity

S: Deeper sense of hope despite trials

S: My church to be bold in evangelism

M: Forgiveness for ways we fail to love

T: Deeper trust of God

W: Increased desire to obey God's word

T: Ability to see people like Jesus does

Persecuted Christians to stand strong :**F**

Pastors to preach the gospel with power :**S**

My church to be generous :**S**

More awareness of God's work in my life :**M**

Sexual purity in myself and others :**T**

Willingness to embrace suffering for Christ :**W**

Parents to nurture children in the gospel :**T**

Joy in all circumstances :**F**

Those who will be invited to Easter services :**S**

My church to impact our community :**S**

Discernment to know God's will :**M**

Direction on who needs encouragement :**T**

Increased gratitude for God's kindness :**W**

Deeper experience of God's Spirit :**T**

Church leaders who are preparing for Easter :**F**

God's kingdom to come on earth as in Heaven :**S**

My church to be hungry for God :**S**

Strength from God to obey Him :**M**

Compassion towards those different from me :**T**

Christian students to boldly live their faith :**W**

Growing ability to pray with faith :**T**

Powerful confidence in God's love :**F**

God to open the hearts of people to His love :**S**

GENEROUS IN LOVE...

God, give grace! "

Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record. "

Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry. "

I know how bad I've been; my sins are staring me down. "

You're the One I've violated, and you've seen it all,
seen the full extent of my evil. "

You have all the facts before you;
whatever you decide about me is fair. "

I've been out of step with you for a long time,
in the wrong since before I was born. "

What you're after is truth from the inside out. "

Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life. "

Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life. "

Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,
set these once-broken bones to dancing. "

Don't look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health.

God, make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. "

Don't throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me. "

Bring me back from gray exile,
put a fresh wind in my sails! "

Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
so the lost can find their way home. "

Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,
and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways. "

Unbutton my lips, dear God; I'll let loose with your praise.

Going through the motions doesn't please you,
a flawless performance is nothing to you. "

I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. "

Heart-shattered lives ready for love
don't for a moment escape God's notice."

PSALM 51 - THE MESSAGE

EVEN MORE BACKGROUND ON LENT

The New Oxford Dictionary describes Lent as “the period preceding Easter that in the Christian Church is devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penitence in commemoration of Christ’s fasting in the wilderness.” "

Lent is a 40-day season to repent over sin, lament over the rebellion in our hearts, and anticipate the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. Often, Christians have fasted or abstained from things or behaviors (food, sweets, meat, coffee, television, social media, etc.). In addition to abstaining, some Christians also add something to their lives during Lent (more church attendance, prayer, giving, Bible reading, etc.)"

WHERE DID LENT COME FROM?

The first documented mention of this practice was part of the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. In addition to producing the Nicene Creed, this council also produced twenty practical directions (called “canons”) for church practice. "

Lent is mentioned in the fifth canon of Nicea—not explained, just mentioned—in such a way as to indicate that Christians were already familiar with the practice. In this document from Nicea, the word used for Lent is tessarakonta (in the original Greek), which means ‘forty.’ "

So where did this familiar practice come from? Long before Nicea, Christians had begun celebrating Easter Sunday as a day to commemorate the Lord’s resurrection. Many of these early churches fasted for two or three days in preparation for this special day."

Additionally, many early churches celebrated baptism on Easter Sunday and instituted fasting as a way for baptismal candidates to mourn their past sins, consider their need for cleansing through Christ’s blood, and anticipate their baptism."

By the time of the Council of Nicea, many churches had extended this time to forty days, modeled after the forty days of Jesus' fasting in preparation for His public ministry (Matthew 4:1-2)."

FAST FACTS ABOUT LENT

The English word "Lent" comes from the Saxon word that means "spring" and has roots in the Germanic word related to "lengthening" (since in springtime days start getting longer)."

In many languages, the word for "Lent" is connected to "forty": Cuaresma coming from cuarenta in Spanish, Quaresima deriving from quaranta in Italian, and Carême deriving from quarante in French. "

The Bible describes a number of 40 day fasts: Moses fasted for 40 days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28), Elijah fasted for 40 days on his way to meet God at Horeb (1 Kings 19:8), and Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert before being tempted (Matthew 4:1-11)."

Until the 600s A.D., Lent began on a Sunday, but Gregory the Great moved its beginning to a Wednesday (now called Ash Wednesday) so that there were exactly 40 days in Lent—not counting Sundays, which were feast days."

Gregory the Great was the first to commemorate the beginning of Lent by marking the heads of Christians with an ashen cross. This was to remind them of repentance (often symbolized by sackcloth and ashes) and mortality (referred to as dust in Genesis 3:19)."

Because the Council of Nicea was an ecumenical council (taking place before the split of the Eastern and Western churches), Lent has been celebrated by both Catholics and Protestants.

Compiled from various resources including "
The Village Church, Imago Dei Community,
MinistryPass.com

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