

LENT

A SEASON OF
SPIRITUAL
PREPARATION

*a guide to
spiritual growth
this lenten season*

W H A T I S L E N T ?

On Ash Wednesday, which marks the first day of Lent, Christians around the world are encouraged to observe a *holy Lent*: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word. While you may be aware of this season leading up to Easter, you may wonder how you might "observe a holy Lent." There is no one prescribed way. Instead, we are each encouraged to find our own method of confronting our sinfulness, remembering our mortality, and giving thanks for the gift of salvation we receive through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here you will find ways in which you may observe the 40 days of Lent. We encourage you to select at least one spiritual practice. If you are a "newbie" to spiritual practices you might consider doing one practice for one week then selecting another practice for the next week.

Note: the 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays. Sundays are considered mini resurrection celebration days. Therefore, whatever discipline you take up does not have to be observed on Sunday.

F A S T I N G

Fasting, in the biblical context, is the voluntary abstention from food, and sometimes drink, for a specified period, undertaken as a spiritual discipline. It is a practice intended to draw believers closer to God, enhance prayer, and demonstrate repentance and humility. Fasting is often associated with seeking divine guidance, expressing grief, or preparing for spiritual endeavors.

Fasting is not merely a physical act but a spiritual discipline that reflects a heart posture of humility and dependence on God. It is a means of denying the flesh to prioritize spiritual growth and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In Joel 2:12, the Lord calls His people to return to Him with all their heart, "with fasting, weeping, and mourning."

Fasting can take various forms, including complete abstinence from food, partial fasts (such as abstaining from certain foods or meals), or abstaining from non-food activities, such as social media, screen time, or activities that inhibit your ability to focus on prayer and meditation. The duration and type of fast may vary based on individual conviction and spiritual goals.

While fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline, it should be approached with the right motives. Jesus warned against fasting for outward show or self-righteousness, emphasizing that it should be done in secret, with a focus on God (Matthew 6:16-18). Fasting should not be seen as a way to earn God's favor but as a means to align one's heart with His will. Before taking on a food fast, it is recommended that you consult your physician if you are being treated for illness or disease.

R E A D I N G S C R I P T U R E

You cannot know God and Christ without reading, understanding, and knowing God's word. The 40 days of Lent are an opportunity to develop the habit of daily scripture reading.

The first step is committing to a set time and place for your Bible study. If you are just starting, try to schedule 15 minutes a day for Bible reading. Make this time with God more important than answering emails, returning texts, or scanning social media.

The second step is to select a reading plan. You might opt to read a Psalm a day, select one of the Gospels and read a chapter or select number of verses a day. There are many good reading plans available online. We encourage you to reach out to one of the pastors or Kim Anderson for suggestions on a 40-Day Bible Reading plan.

The third step is to not only read scriptures, but to contemplate what the passages mean. You might consider answering these questions after reading scriptures: What does this passage say about God/Jesus? What does this passage say about me or human beings? What does this passage say about the relationship between God/Jesus and me?

P R A Y E R & D A I L Y D E V O T I O N S

An integral part of Christian discipleship is spending consistent and quality time in prayer. In the busyness of our everyday lives, prayer can sometimes get squeezed out. Lent is a wonderful time to intentionally work toward finding more time in your life for prayer. You can experiment with different ways to pray during the season, or really delve into a new-to-you way of praying. Enriching your prayer life is a great way to spend Lent.

This Lent, Rev. Crismon will be emailing out a devotion each M/W/F. This is a great place to start your devotion time. Another resource is the Upper Room Daily Devotional - available at the Welcome Desk or at www.upperroom.com. Any of the pastors, Jenny Smith, or Kim Anderson would be honored to visit with you to answer questions and offer suggestions on understanding your prayer life. Call the church at 501-217-6700 to get in touch.

D A I L Y E X A M E N

This is a simple spiritual practice that helps us reflect on our day and to see God. Ask yourself these questions: When did I feel close to God today? When did I feel far away from God and why? When did I receive love today? When did I give love today? How did I witness someone living as an example of Christ today? How did I witness to others the love of Christ today?

A L M S G I V I N G

Almsgiving is a fundamental element of the Lenten spiritual discipline, alongside fasting and prayer. It is a practice of giving to those in need, rooted in the belief that helping others is a way to grow closer to God and live out the teachings of Jesus. Almsgiving involves sharing our resources, whether it be money, time, or talents, with those who are less fortunate.

During the season of Lent, almsgiving reminds us to be mindful of the needs of others and to be generous in our giving. It is a way to express gratitude for the blessings we have received and to show compassion to those who are struggling. By practicing almsgiving, we are called to put our faith into action and make a tangible impact on the lives of others.

When engaging in the spiritual discipline of almsgiving, it is important to do so with a pure heart and genuine intentions. It is not simply about giving for the sake of giving, but about giving out of love and compassion. Whether it is donating your money, volunteering your time, or simply helping a neighbor in need, every act of kindness and generosity is a step towards spiritual growth and deeper connection with our faith.

There are many ways to practice almsgiving during Lent, each offering a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Some meaningful ways to practice almsgiving include:

- Donate to the Mission Share Fund at St. James. This fund provides assistance to individuals, feeds the hungry, and supports other non-profit organizations in our community. Visit www.stjameslr.org/give to donate.
- Volunteer your time at a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, or other community organization. Visit www.stjameslr.org/serve to learn about opportunities with St. James.
- Share your skills and talents with others, such as teaching a class, or volunteering for Sunday School.

By practicing almsgiving, we are able to not only help those in need but also cultivate a spirit of generosity and compassion within ourselves. Let's embrace the practice of almsgiving during Lent as a way to make a positive impact on the world around us.