

**LENT SERIES**

THE SPIRITUAL RHYTHM OF REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

“O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen.”

HENRI NOUWEN

How much do you pay attention to the different seasons and rhythms of life? Think about the weather — what’s your focus in summer, winter, springtime and fall? Think about work — busy times, prep times, and slow times.

But this is also true for our worship. In God’s great story of salvation, we are now coming into a season before Easter called Lent. This 40-day period offers us an opportunity to establish a spiritual rhythm of reflection.

Our Church Engagement team of Chris, Janise, Sean, Greg, Philip, Chris Chase, and Amy are inviting you on a journey through Lent.

As you follow along, may you pause and ponder on God’s great work of reconciliation, forgiveness, sacrifice, victory and power in Jesus. May it lead us to see how life shared in God’s kingdom includes the works of mercy, generosity, love and hope.

**Written by Dave Morehouse, Strategic Advisor/
Spiritual Support, Church Engagement Team**

WEEK 1

THE HISTORY OF LENT

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

DEVOTIONAL

What is Lent? It is a 40-day season of prayer, fasting and giving; a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's resurrection at Easter.

Historians generally agree that the practice of Lent emerged around 325 AD, with the earliest observances of Lent focusing on the practice of fasting which would align with commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and being tempted by Satan.

Pope Gregory (590 – 604 AD) regularized the period of the fast church-wide. Lent wasn't optional; it was enforced. However, by the 800's, rules of fasting began to relax to one meal being allowed earlier in the day and a smaller meal at the end of the day. Luther, Calvin, and many other reformers rejected works-based, or showy, practices. For many of them, Lent smacked of righteousness by works. Eventually new practices emerged, like the idea of giving up some personal luxury or need as a personal sacrifice for the season versus fasting.

While Lent was traditionally observed for centuries by Catholics and the Orthodox, in recent years, Lent has seen a renewal among evangelical Christians as a

historical practice with spiritual benefits. For all faithful observers, Lent is about Jesus and what He did for us.

Eric Ferris, founder of the Lent Experience, said, "You can observe 1,000 Lents and it won't ever accomplish in your life what the cross of Jesus has."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you thought that Lent was just for people of other faiths? Consider how you could apply the principles of Lent to your life as the weeks lead up to Easter.
2. 40 days is a long time to go without food and be tempted, but that is what Jesus endured for us. Think of what you could give up for 40 days to remind you daily what Jesus did for you?

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to not participate in Lent for outward recognition or even for Your approval, because I know that You love me because of grace, not because of my works. May I acknowledge, instead, what You did for me on the cross. Amen.

Optional

Today I am choosing to give up _____ .
Every time I miss _____ , remind me to be grateful for your sacrifice and to pray for those in my life who do not know You. Amen.

Written by Janise Somer, Marketing Specialist,
Church Engagement Team

Lent is not about earning our salvation. Lent simply reminds us of the miraculous wonder of Easter. Without an empty tomb, our faith would be empty.



WEEK 2

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.

PSALM 103:8-14

DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a time of disheartened grief that leads to deep joy. It is a season that the Eastern Orthodox church describes as a “bright sadness.” On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, we contemplate the human reality that we are from dust. As a result of our sin, we will return to dust. It is a time for prayer, repentance of sins and surrender as we consider our brokenness and dustiness.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are mortal, and it reveals the brokenness of all creation. It begins a



season in which we allow the sufferings of the poor, the oppressed, and the vulnerable to penetrate our hearts as we cry out with the Psalmist, “O Lord, how long will this go on? Will you hide yourself forever?” (Psalms 89:46).

Participants of Ash Wednesday receive ash on their foreheads in the shape of the cross. The practice is often accompanied by the words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The ashes are prepared by burning palm leaves from the previous year’s Palm Sunday celebrations as a reminder that the crucifixion followed less than a week of the celebration. Ashes in Scripture speak of lament, mourning and repentance. Job “scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery as he sat among the ashes” to mark his sadness (Job 2:8).

We lament as we are reminded of our lostness, but we are also reminded that God loves us in our dustiness. Ash Wednesday begins a season of sorrow, but it will culminate with a celebration of the power of God’s love to transform this world.

Easter Sunday reminds us that not even death can keep us from God’s love. As we experience the life of Christ this Lenten season, may we live out His love by sharing in His beloved family around the world. May we actively participate in the movement of His love by taking steps to end injustice.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What can you bring before God for personal repentance?
2. Where is God leading you to demonstrate his compassion and mercy?
3. How can you participate in the global movement of God’s love to end injustice?

PRAYER

Lord, have mercy on me. I confess my sin to you. I have fallen short of your glorious standard for me. I would be lost without your mercy and love. Lead me beyond myself. Help me surrender to your Spirit. Break my heart and be near me as I bow before you. Thank you that Easter is coming, and that ashes are not my future reality. Amen.

Written by Sean Wood, Church Advisor for British Columbia

THE RHYTHM OF PRAYER

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever asked yourself, “How does God see me? What is my identity in His sight?”

Lent, the season of the church year which follows the Epiphany Season, is a time we set aside each year to remember the love of God that is poured out through Christ Jesus on the cross in His death. We see His defeat of death, sin and Satan, and His resurrection that brings Eternal Life to you and me. Lent has a penitential and solemn nature. This is to help us remember to be repentant and remind us of our sins and our mortality.

In this reflection, as we focus on our need to repent from our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness, the devil will always play with our minds, telling us that our sins are too great for God to forgive. This contortion of God’s truth may be lingering in your mind, with the false message, “How could God ever forgive me with all I have done?”

Have you experienced hopelessness and regret, realizing the darkness in your heart? Has your pride, selfishness, cruelty, greed, and lust seemed so overwhelming as to block out God’s true love for you and His merciful care for you? I want you to know that, not only is this feeling common, but it is a natural response from those who authentically encounter the perfection of God’s love for them. These feelings are evidence that God, in His great love, has been revealing Himself to you and that He loves you. It is in focusing on our need for God’s forgiveness and repentance (turning away from our sins) that we receive God’s mercy and love.

Who was the first person recorded in Scripture to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection? It was none other than Mary Magdalene. When you consider Mary’s past, you might question why Jesus appeared to someone who was once possessed by seven demons? Prior to Jesus freeing her, Satan and His demons had completely taken over her will by her free submission to evil. And yet, it was to her, a woman with such a horrible past, that Jesus chose to give the honor of His first appearance!

Sin is demoralizing. When unrepented, it leaves a loss of dignity and integrity. However, even after one has repented, some people will continue to struggle with unhealthy guilt and shame. For some, these struggles can become a weapon by which the evil one tries to discourage them from feeling worthy to serve our Lord with zeal and passion. The Devil delights in pointing out our pasts and using it as a tool of self-condemnation. But Scripture tells us: “If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.” (1 John 3:20)

The truth in the mind of God is that repentant sinners are true jewels and beautiful in the eyes of our Lord. We are worthy of the greatest honours. God does not dwell on our past sins when we repent and are forgiven. Instead, they become an eternal sign of God’s love and mercy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you deal with your past sins? Take some time today to reflect upon the most severe sins you have committed. If you have not yet confessed to them, then it is important to do so as soon as possible.
2. Have you repented and sought forgiveness from the Lord for your past mistakes? If so, do they still haunt you? If you have already confessed, try to see yourself from God’s perspective, knowing that you are righteous in his eyes. Remember that He no longer holds your sins against you and that you have been forgiven. You are now a child of God with a pure and clean heart.
3. Does the evil one still try to remind you of your past and strip away your hope in the mercy of God? Remember, Psalm 103:12 says, “. . . as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

PRAYER

My most merciful God, You love the sinner and hate the sin. You love me in ways that are beyond my understanding. Help me to understand how deeply You love my heart when I completely repent. And help me to see my heart only through Your eyes. I thank You for Your love and mercy, dear Lord. Help me to love You all the more. Jesus, I trust in You. Amen.

Written by Philip Gai, Church Advisor for Ontario

WEEK 4

THE RHYTHM OF FASTING & SACRIFICE

Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. Bring the leaders and all the people of the land into the Temple of the LORD your God, and cry out to him there.

JOEL 1:14

DEVOTIONAL

I remember the first time I fasted. I was looking for direction in my life and my thought was that fasting would provide the breakthrough I so desperately desired. And so, for a period of time in a day, I abstained from food.

It was the first time I had ever done this and the sensation, the awareness that I wasn't eating, was something I had never experienced before. I was hungry, yes, but in another way, I was satisfied, and I experienced a peace while I fasted that is hard to describe.

My hope was, during fasting or immediately after, I would receive some revelation from the Lord as to what He wanted me to do. But nothing really happened. I had peace, yes, but no clearer sense from Christ as to the direction that I should go.

However, in that moment, I realized that though fasting is an incredible spiritual discipline that we can employ for breakthrough and direction from God in our lives, the ultimate benefit of fasting is drawing near to God. That He alone is enough.

In Joel 1:14, the prophet Joel admonishes the people of God to fast together, and, in doing so, they should,



“Bring the leaders and all the people of the land into the Temple of the Lord your God, and cry out to him there.” We cannot miss this: The people chose to fast in the Temple where God himself lived. They were sacrificing something to deeply enter into His presence.

When I think of the word ‘sacrifice’, I think of something given up to gain something greater. This is how we should think about the spiritual discipline of fasting. We are giving up something, whether it be food, or social media, or screens, for example, so that we can take the time we would have used for those things and, instead, be intentional about focusing our hearts and minds on God.

My prayer for myself, and all of us this Lenten season, is that we would intentionally take time away from doing certain things to focus more on Jesus... to talk with Him, think about Him, and commune with Him. And, in doing so, we will likely find that what was gained was far better than anything we sacrificed to gain it.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever given up anything in your life, for a period of time, or even completely, so that you could grow deeper in your walk with Christ?
2. Have you ever fasted from food? Would you be open to exploring that spiritual discipline this Lenten season?
3. What is something you could sacrifice over Lent so that you can spend that extra time growing in your relationship with God?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be willing to sacrifice certain things in my life so that I can focus on You more. Give me the desire, Jesus, to give up, even for a period of time, those things that distract me from hearing Your voice, learning more about You, and seeing Your beauty all around me. Amen.

Written by Greg Baker, Church Advisor for Alberta

WEEK 5

THE RHYTHM OF GIVING

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

DEVOTIONAL

At the tender age of 17, I found myself stepping into a dream that had been kindled in my heart since childhood. The journey began when I was only five years old as I watched World Vision advertisements showcasing the devastating famine in Ethiopia during the 1980's. With tears streaming down my face, I turned to my mother and earnestly declared, "One day, I'll go to Africa and help those children."

This aspiration seemed distant for many years, yet God had a plan. One Sunday morning, when I had just turned 17, I visited Smythe Street Church. Serendipitously, they were organizing a youth group mission trip to Africa. It felt like a divine appointment; the seed planted in my heart years ago was finally sprouting.

However, the financial hurdle seemed daunting. Fresh out of high school and earning minimum wage, the required funds for the trip were beyond my grasp. Despite earnest fundraising efforts, I was still \$500 short. Then, just a week before the trip, I received a mysterious envelope with no name attached, simply a note indicating that the giver felt moved by God to support me. Inside was exactly \$500.

This act of selfless generosity did not just fulfill my lifelong dream; it ignited a passion for a life dedicated to mission work, both foreign and domestic. It inspired me to sponsor a child through World Vision, and eventually, to work with the World Vision organization amplifying our collective impact for God's Kingdom.

That \$500 taught me a profound lesson about God's grace: like the biblical loaves and fishes, He multiplies our good deeds, turning small acts of obedience into

waves of enduring impact. God's goodness is indeed boundless, and through Him, our contributions, no matter how small, can yield immeasurable blessings.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can your act of giving this Lent reflect God's generosity?
2. In what ways can you incorporate the spirit of giving in your daily life, beyond financial contributions?
3. How can the practice of giving during Lent deepen your faith and understanding of God's love?

This Lent let's embrace the act of giving not just as a duty but as a privilege — an opportunity to share God's love and light in a world that desperately needs it.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season, guides us to be generous in our giving. Let our actions reflect Your love and compassion, helping those in need, and spreading hope in a world that yearns for Your grace. Amen.

Written By Amy Bragdon, Church Advisor for Atlantic Canada

WEEK 6

HOLY THURSDAY

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

LUKE 22: 19-20

DEVOTIONAL

There's nothing like walking into bad news.

A family conversation that has been long delayed, an assessment from a mechanic, diagnosis from a doctor... that feeling where you know the news will be bad and everything is going to change.

Holy Thursday is Jesus experiencing this over a meal with his closest friends. He knows in this room is the one who will turn him over to the authorities, the one who will curse aloud rather than admit knowing him, and the others who will scatter into the wind at the sight of the authorities. He knows that he'll be unfairly tried, questioned, beaten, denied... rejected.

Holy Thursday is when Jesus doubled down on staying the course, recognizing that it was not his will that must be done,

but His Father's. He walks into the worst news with a clear perspective — you and me and everyone else on the earth.

Holy Thursday reminds us of Jesus' example to focus on what matters when everything seems to be going wrong around us. To still be with people when they turn on you, to stand up for your beliefs when compromise is easier, and to pray through the hardest of times. May we go into this Easter weekend with a similar drive in our souls.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of a time when you had to get through a difficult moment when giving up would have been easier. Why did you hold on?
2. What did you learn about Jesus during that time? What did you learn about yourself during that time?
3. How can Jesus' example inspire your faith as you celebrate Easter weekend?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for staying on mission for me during the hardest of days. Help me to stay on mission for you, even during hard seasons. Amen.

Written by Chris Chase, Church Advisor for Ontario



CONCLUSION

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

ISAIAH 30:18 (ESV)

Dear Friend,

Easter, at its core, is a celebration of new life made possible through Jesus Christ. It is the miracle that catapults our faith, giving our life new meaning and hope in the midst of the realities and challenges that those we serve — and those who serve alongside us so deeply experience.

Our hope is that this journey together through Lent with our Church Engagement team at World Vision Canada has created space for you for reflection, from the initial encouragement by Dr. David Morehouse through the personalized expressions shared by our Church Engagement Team. Our prayer is that your heart has been prepared well for the upcoming Easter weekend.

It's time to pause and fully prepare our hearts for Easter. Praise God — the tomb is empty! Do you see Jesus? He is out in the world, in many different guises. Will you have the grace to see Him — and to serve Him — in the days and weeks ahead?

So, you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.

ROMANS 12:12 (ESV)

P.S. We appreciate your feedback! Please let us know how you engaged with these personalized devotions and feel free to reach out directly any time. Email churches@worldvision.ca — we welcome the conversation!



Chris Schroeder, National Manager of Church Engagement and Christian Partnerships

