

Lent

a guide for your journey



what is lent?

Lent is the period of 40 days (not including Sundays) between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Lent has long been known as “**Bright Sadness:**” a time of sorrow, but also a time in which darkness is overshadowed by Light.

We often associate Lent with Roman Catholic tradition; however, for most of the first sixteen centuries of Church history, Christians universally participated in this season of penitence and self-examination, which imitates, to some extent, Jesus’ forty days of fasting and resisting temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

During the Reformation of the 1500’s, some prominent Protestant church leaders began to oppose Lent because of the many rules and regulations that had become a part of its observance. Today, many churches are once again seeking to capture the spirit of Lent: giving intentional time to prayer, sacrifice, and generosity, and asking God to change, confront, and heal us.

We want to walk through Lent first with honest reflection, acknowledging our sin as it shows up in our actions, attitudes and aspirations. Then we will complete the act of repentance by turning toward Christ for forgiveness and strength, asking him to change our hearts.

We trust that the Spirit will intervene, making real life-change possible, knowing that the sadness of Jesus’ journey to the cross promised to end in the brightness of victory.

a general approach to lent

Following the ancient tradition, we will choose to focus on the disciplines of **prayer, sacrifice, and generosity** and we will consider these things in terms of both inward, personal disciplines and outward, social actions.

The following pages offer suggestions to assist you along the way. These are not to be taken as legalistic instructions; we all just may need a little guidance to approach these weeks differently. Use as much of this as makes sense for you. Pick a new emphasis each week, or concentrate on just one week out of the 40 days. This is your tool to use as best fits you.

accountability

Consider sharing your intentions for Lent with your family, friends, or small group. Keep a journal of what you decide to do during Lent, and how it affects you.

families and lent

Many of these ideas can be incorporated in what you do as a family. We also have Lent ‘table cards’ available at the welcome desk in the lobby; these are specifically for family worship times during the Lent season.

Inward, Personal Disciplines

Prayer

During the weeks of Lent, try praying differently than you normally do; keep a journal of how you're praying and what happens as you pray.

- pray in a different location, or at a different time of day
- use different postures: kneeling, standing, walking,
- write your prayers; keep a journal of your prayer concerns and questions; pray outloud if you usually never do
- pray for a different family member or friend every day
- make a list of people to whom you need to be reconciled; pray for them and let God help you heal what is broken
- pray that God would break your posture of pride so you can be ready to reach out to people who are in pain

Sacrifice

Could you give up something important to you for part, or all, of this season? Consider *fasting* (voluntarily giving something up) during Lent. Keep a journal of what happens.

Fast from sweets, treats, self-indulgence:

Avoid foods that are treats (you know what they are!). Spend nothing on yourself beyond what is necessary. The money you save... save it, or give it away. *What is it like to deny yourself something you crave?*

Fast from food or meals:

Pick a type of food to fast from or a meal to skip each day. (As with all physical fasts, please consider your health and consult a doctor if you have any concerns about fasting.) If you're skipping whole meals, use this time to pray. *What is it like to assert mastery over your body in this way?*

TV, music, media:

Consider fasting from TV viewing for a week... drive without the radio... exercise without your iPod. *What does this silence do to you and for you?*

Social Media & Internet:

Turn off twitter, facebook, blogs, news. Use email for work only. *Do you feel disconnected, or free?*

**follow the 'Lent' link at firstmbchurch.org
for guided prayers.**

Outward, Social Disciplines

Generosity

Time:

Don't indulge yourself time-wise; instead, bless someone else through your words or actions. Listen instead of talking. Commit to helping someone with a project. Serve at a soup kitchen or food bank. Give your time as a family. *What happens when you spend your time on other people?*

Permission:

Set aside your pride to give someone the "gift of going second." Let go of your "Sunday face" and be honest about how you are really struggling with something. This act of going first gives others permission to be honest as well. *What is it like to take this kind of a risk and see others do the same?*

Resources:

Share whatever you have to share. Give extravagantly to a cause that captures your heart. Commit your talent to help build a ministry or relief organization. *What is it like to release what you have rather than hold it tight?*

Readings

Read Jesus' words... ask God to show you how to put these words into action.

Matthew 6:19-34 Simplicity

Luke 12:13-21 Greed

John 15:9-17 Relationship

Matthew 18:5-9 Sin

Matthew 23:23-24 Rules

Luke 6:37-42 Judgement

Matthew 9:35-38 Compassion

Luke 12:22-28 Worry

Luke 6:37-42 Hatred

Matthew 9:9-13 Friendship

John 14:15-27 Fear

Mark 10:35-45 Status

Luke 20:45-47 Pride

Mark 3:1-6 Criticism

Matthew 12:33-37 Results

Luke 12:29-34 Generosity

John 13:1-7 Service

Try YouVersion.com for online Bible reading, study, and journaling. Also available as an app for most smartphones.

This guide to Lent was written by firstMBchurch staff, with excerpts and inspiration from The Lent Prayer Guide by Milestone Church (themilestone.org).