

The background of the image is a close-up, abstract view of stained glass. The glass is composed of numerous small, irregularly shaped pieces of translucent blue and teal glass, set in a dark, possibly black, frame. The light filters through the glass, creating a play of light and shadow that highlights the geometric shapes of the glass pieces.

A GUIDE TO LENT

SAC
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A Brief History of Lent

Lent is a season in the liturgical church calendar and typically is associated as a Roman Catholic practice. Historians generally agree that the 40-day period before Easter, known as Lent, emerged shortly following the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. However, Lent is an ancient church practice that was used before this, but it did not look the same.

Justo Gonzalez writes in his historical record of the church, *The Story of Christianity*,

“Part of what took place at Easter was the baptism of new converts and their being added to the congregation. . .In preparation for these events, that usually took place at Easter, there was a time of fasting and penance. This is the origin of our present-day Lent” (111-112).

We also know the early church practiced this from a letter written by Irenaeus (c. 130-202), an early church father, who was writing about a dispute in regard to how this preparation was practiced.

Lent was officially formalized by Pope Gregory I (590-604) as a 46-day season beginning on Ash Wednesday. The fast is for 40 days because Sundays are not days for fasting but looking ahead to the coming day of Easter and are mini-celebrations for the resurrection of Christ.



What is Lent and why is it important?

Lent is a time of preparation before Easter Sunday. A time to return to the wilderness where Jesus spent forty days readying for his ministry. Lent, like any other spiritual practice, does not change us or make us more holy. Lent is an invitation to make more space for God in our lives so that He can transform us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not a requirement for following Jesus, but historically followers of Christ have found the season of Lent to be a transformative practice.

Lent is a time for personal reflection on the Christ's journey to the cross. It's a time to die to our sin and pride, to see how our sin has played a role in Jesus needing to go the cross. It's a mixture of gratitude, lament, and joy that Christ has come to us, died for us and declared us righteous by His gracious sacrifice. The weight of our sin should lead us to the cross where the love of God is available as we confess.

During Lent, people typically practice fasting, prayer and giving. We start by observing our own lives in prayer with help from the Holy Spirit. A helpful way to pray, is what is pulling me away from loving God and loving others? How can I incorporate fasting, prayer, or giving in such a way that will help me love as God loves? With any of these practices, we learn what it means to say no to our desires and in turn by God's grace, we are filled by anew by the presence of God, His love, joy, and peace.



How do I practice Lent?

During Lent, Jesus followers throughout history have typically chosen three ways to practice Lent: fasting, prayer, and giving. We have provided some ideas in this guide and would encourage you to prayerfully reflect on how God may be inviting you to participate in Lent this year. If you have never practiced Lent before, it would be a good idea to start small. You don't have to do everything! This is simply about creating space in your life to open yourself up to God.

FASTING

Fasting is the spiritual practice of abstaining from something in order to connect with God in a posture of surrender, remembering that only God can satisfy your deepest longings. This can include food, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, or meat, social media, TV, sports, news, shopping, etc. The key to fasting is not just saying no, but to replace time that you would've spent on the thing you're fasting from to be with God.

Often when people fast from a meal during the day, they will take that time to read Scripture and pray in solitude. During the season of Lent, Sundays are not fasting days because the Sundays leading up to Easter are mini-celebrations of Resurrection Sunday, so feel free to break your fast on Sunday and then start again on Monday.

Choose one of the following ideas or feel free to come up with your own. Please remember to check with a health professional if you are participating in fasting from food or water that could impact your health.

- Start a digital fast and refrain from using screens in the evening (TV, tablets, phone). Use the time to meet with friends, go for a walk, or read one of the resources listed at the end of this guide.
- Give up fast food, caffeine, nicotine, sugar, or chocolate and use your cravings as a prayer prompt.
- Choose silence during your morning commute and instead spend time in observation, reflection, and prayer. What do you see? How do you feel? Who can you pray for?
- Give up complaining or sarcasm or criticism as you look to become more attentive to others. Reflect on how Jesus may desire to reshape how you treat others.
- Refrain from purchasing anything new during Lent. What do you discover and learn about personal contentment?

PRAYER



Prayer is essential in our relationship with the living God. We speak, God listens, God speaks, we listen. Julian of Norwich writes, “The whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of him to whom we pray.” Prayer connects us to God and shapes us into the image of Jesus. Lent is a season to focus your prayers on the themes of Easter, including suffering, forgiveness, hope, peace, and resurrection.

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” **MATTHEW 6:9-13**

There are many ways to incorporate prayer into your Lent season which could include:

- **Memorize a passage and pray through it every morning (Psalm 130, Matthew 6:9-13, Romans 6:1-14)**
- **Write out a short 2-3 sentence prayer every evening before bed or use the Prayer of Examen.**
- **Start a gratitude journal. What are you thankful for in each day?**
- **Download and use the Lectio 365 app for daily prayers. (The app provides daily prayers for each morning, midday, and evening. Try one or try all three.)**
- **Choose the slow lane when you pick up groceries and say a silent prayer for the people in front of you.**
- **Set an alarm to remind you to pray at a set time (or times) each day.**
- **Pray through the Lord’s Prayer each morning before you start your day.**
- **Create a prayer list of people in your circle of influence (family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, etc.) and commit to praying for one of them each day through Lent.)**

GIVING

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The practices of giving or service is considering the reality that we have been given the ultimate gift of grace from God and in turn we want to bless others. Grace received becomes grace given.

For some this may look like financial giving to another ministry that is serving the poor or local community like NightShift, Union Gospel Mission, HaitiArise, etc. For others, this might be a contribution of time and energy by serving in an extra parachurch ministry during this season to those ministries.

One way to figure out how and who to give to would be to spend some time in prayer. Ask God what issues in the news strike a chord with you or leave you feeling like you want to help in some regard. Take some space below to think about what issues in the world are dear to you and then look for organizations or ministries that work to alleviate those issues. If you need help finding an organization to serve or give financially to, your pastoral team would love to connect you to an appropriate organization.

- Give to one of our Alliance International Workers or Projects. You can explore info at <https://thealliancecanada.ca/international-workers>
 - Make a financial donation to NightShift, Union Gospel Mission, or the SAC Benevolence Fund.
 - Make arrangements for you, your family, your small group, or some friends to serve at NightShift.
 - Offer to serve with SAC's Income Tax Ministry.
 - Have your small group offer to prepare and serve a meal or snacks for AWANA, Youth, or Young Adults.
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STATIONS OF THE CROSS



Another creative way to prepare your heart during Lent is to complete the Stations of the Cross which will begin on Sunday, February 22 in the SAC sanctuary. These Stations of the Cross were designed to act as an artistic pilgrimage to help us retrace Jesus' final steps towards His crucifixion and death.

You can arrive early at 10:00am before the service or feel free to stick around after the service and use the print and digital guides provided onsite to help you pray, reflect, and journal as you journey through each station. Should you desire to journey through the Stations of the Cross during the week, please contact the church office to arrange a time.

MAY YOU ENCOUNTER JESUS!



As a pastoral team, we hope that you will be able to find a new and meaningful way to participate in this season of Lent. We pray that you would encounter Jesus in a fresh way and that your hearts would be drawn to Him as you explore these practices.

If you have any additional questions or need help coming up with some practices for Lent, we would love to assist you. Feel free to email any of your pastors for help, and please share any stories with us about what God is doing in your life during this season. Blessings to you!



Additional Resources & Ideas:

- **Read through one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)**
 - **Commit to practicing a 24-hour sabbath at least once a week.**
 - **Listen to one of the following podcasts:**
 - Rule of Life
 - Bible Project
 - **Read one of the following books:**
 - Practicing the Way (John Mark Comer)
 - The Familiar Stranger (Tyler Staton)
 - Invitation to Solitude and Silence (Ruth Haley Barton)
 - God in My Everything (Ken Shigematsu)
 - The Spirit of the Disciplines (Dallas Willard)
 - Celebration of Discipline (Richard Foster)

Additional Notes: