

The Season of Lent



Aim : To increase our reliance on God, spend more time in prayer, focus more on Jesus as our role model for life

By : 'Fasting' from daily topics for prayer, but having instead a weekly focus to encourage more prayer throughout the day, while thinking about how we live our lives.

Don't give up :

Each week during Lent, if you find the suggested action difficult, or find that you not able to do it all of the time – use that to help you reflect again on what Jesus did for you, and give thanks to God that Jesus didn't fail ! Then, don't give up on what you started – ask God to help with the suggested action, and start again.

Ash Wednesday Preparation

Read : Isaiah 58: 2 - 11 *God says : "What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Then when you pray, I will answer. You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.' If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people's sins, if you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, I will always show you where to go. You'll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry."*

Although this passage was originally directed at the Israelites, could God be saying these same things to us today ?

During this season of Lent, ask God to show you what He would have you change in your life, and how you could make a difference to those around you.



Week 1 Fasting

Read : Matthew 3: 16 - 4: 3 *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven opened, and he saw God's Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him." Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. After this, he was very hungry. The devil came to Jesus to tempt him, saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell these rocks to become bread."*

After 40 days of fasting, the first temptation of Jesus that Matthew records, involves freshly baked bread. Imagine the intense hunger, then the wonderful smell of hot bread. I wonder how many of us could have resisted that ?



Many people give up something for Lent in remembrance of Jesus' 40 days of fasting. But Jesus gave up far more than just 40 days of food for us. He gave up everything in to be born and live among us sharing our experiences. And then He gave up his life too, on the cross, all so that our sins could be forgiven. All because he loves us so much that he was prepared to do anything, everything, so that he can spend the whole of eternity with us.

And we give up - a few bars of chocolate or glasses of wine ?

Reflect on things that you would find really hard to give up – What about your mobile phone ? Internet ? Television ? Car ? Email ? Would you, could you give these up, if Jesus asked you to ? Pressure of work, etc, may mean that it would not actually be possible for you to give up something like this for the whole of Lent - but could you give up one really big thing, just for one week ? Or perhaps you could give it up for one day of each week, between now and Easter ?

What will you give up, in remembrance of what Jesus gave up for you?

Week 2

Foot washing

Read : John 13: 4 - 17 During the meal Jesus stood up and took off his outer clothing. Taking a towel, he wrapped it around his waist. Then he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the followers' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and sat down again. He asked, "Do you understand what I have just done for you? If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet. I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater than his master. A messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

In Jesus' day, foot washing was performed by the lowliest servant in a household, as an act of hospitality to guests. Cool refreshing water for hot, sweaty, smelly, dusty feet. A wonderful welcome for guests, but a very dirty, unpleasant, and demeaning task for the servant involved. Yet Jesus washed the feet of each one of his disciples. He knew Judas would betray him, knew Peter would deny him, knew the others would abandon them - and yet he still washed their feet.



For each person with whom you interact during this week, ask God's blessing on them, and then try to imagine washing their feet (or performing some other, equally menial and unpleasant, yet intimate, task for them).

Is this harder to do with some people than others? Where you find it difficult, ask God to show you why. Try to pray about it, and for that person, each day until you can imagine performing your task for them.

Week 3

'I will come back and take you to be with me'

Read : John 14: 1 - 3 Jesus said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. After I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am.

Jesus promises his disciples, and through them, us, that we will not always be separated from him. He will return and take us to be with him. Jesus' early followers believed that his return was imminent, and that influenced everything they did in their lives. Two thousand years later, it is more difficult for us to share that same level of anticipation, and yet the reality is still, that Jesus could return at any time !



Imagine that you knew exactly when Jesus would return. What if it was this year ? Or this month ? Or this week ? What difference would it make in your life ? What would you want to do before then ? How would it affect the decisions you make ? During this week, try to live it as though Jesus' return was imminent, and let that influence everything you do.

Week 4 Unity

Read : John 17: 20 - 26 *Jesus prayed : "I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them."*

The old adage says "If you can't say anything good, don't say anything". Jesus' prayer goes beyond even this. He prays for his followers "to be one", because he knows that only "Then the world will believe". Consider the church today - how many of its problems stem from internal division, strife, disharmony, disunity, between those professing to be followers of Christ? What if the unity of the church is necessary, before the world will believe that Jesus is God, and was sent by God?

How much difference would it make if each one of us, looked for the things we have in common with others, rather than for the differences? What if we tried to build people up, rather than tearing them down? To compliment, rather than criticise? To focus on the positive, rather than the negative?

During this week, ask God to help you do this. Keep asking him to help you, especially when you find yourself with someone with whom you disagree, or with whom you find it difficult to get along!



Week 5 Take up your cross

Read : John 13: 37 - 38 *Peter said "Lord, I am ready to die for you!" Jesus answered, "Are you ready to die for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will say three times that you don't know me."*



Are we sometimes tempted to read the accounts of Peter's denial of Jesus and think 'I wouldn't have done that'? Peter feared that if he admitted knowing Jesus, he would receive the same treatment. If he was lucky he might have just been flogged - although if severe, that alone could kill a man. At worst, he would receive a slow agonising death by crucifixion, accompanied by the belief that such a death meant he had been abandoned by God. Faced with that, how many of us would really have had the courage to behave any differently to Peter?

Month by month in the Prayer Diary we read about the persecuted Christian church in different parts of the world, and how much other Christians suffer. Do we, who have no impediment to meeting and worshipping together, really appreciate how fortunate we are? As we pray for the persecuted church, do we also thank God for our freedom?

Although we may not face death or persecution as a result of our faith, there is probably still a limit to what we are willing to do for God. Are there things that we do (or don't do) that in effect, deny our faith in God? Pray about where we 'draw the line' and why. Reflect on where God is, and where he draws the line.

During this week, ask God to show you if there is something he wants you to do that you have been avoiding or putting off, for some reason. Ask him to help you find the courage and strength to do it.

Holy Week Pain and Suffering

Read : Mark 14: 32 - 15: 39 Jesus called out with a loud voice “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

There is so much anguish in Jesus’ cry.

He had borne so much already, without a sound, why did he cry out now ? Was this the moment when the darkness of the world’s sin closed around him, and for the first time in his life, he felt the pain of separation from God that sin causes ?



Yet we live with the pain of that separation all of the time, and are probably barely aware of it. How far must we be from God, to feel so little of that pain? What might our lives be like if we were more aware of God’s presence, more aware of God’s love ? If we were closer to God ?

There is so much pain and suffering in our broken, damaged world.

During this week, pray for people in pain. For those known to you; for people around you; for people in the news; for people whose lives and hearts are broken; for people with shattered hopes and dreams; for families torn apart; for people who are ill, abused, persecuted.

During this week, reflect too on all that Jesus endured for us – and that he did it willingly – he did it for you, he did it for each person you’ve prayed for these last weeks, he did it for the whole world. He did it because he loves us, because he wants to spend eternity with us, with you. Ask God to help you to become more aware of his love for you, to become more aware of his presence in your life, and to help you to become closer to him.

Easter Day Worship and Celebration

Read : Matthew 28: 1 - 10 “He has risen from the dead !”

After traumas of the last few days, can you imagine how the women and Jesus’ disciples felt on hearing the news the angels brought ? Jesus was no longer dead - God had raised him - Jesus had defeated death - God’s salvation plan for the world was complete !

Reflect again on what Jesus did for you, and give thanks to God that Jesus didn’t fail !

Jesus died but God raised him - Jesus defeated death - God’s salvation plan for the world is complete ! Try to make this a week of celebration, a week spent in joyful praise and worship of the risen Jesus.

