

2024 Lent Guide



***A reminder that you are dust;
And to dust you shall return.***

These words are spoken to us during the Ash Wednesday service as we receive the imprint of ashes on our foreheads. Sobering words to be sure, but they also invite us to recalibrate and re-center our lives around God and God's promises rather than our own security and resourcefulness. We are, all of us, creatures who are dependent upon our Creator, even for our very breath. (Indeed, we may even afford to laugh at ourselves: oh, how seriously the dust creatures take themselves!)

But lest we focus too much on our finitude, we look to the good news of Jesus: that God's most-central mission statement towards us is to do us good with all God's heart and soul. As we redirect our attention to God, we find that there is only good news for us. This redirection is the central invitation of Lent. "Come," Jesus says, "and follow me."

In the following pages, you'll find three things:

1. Background information about Lent
2. A guide to some spiritual practices you may wish to try
3. A calendar with ways you might experiment with different spiritual practices each week of Lent leading up to Easter

We pray God's blessings on everyone as we journey towards Easter.

Nate Salinas,
Associate Pastor

Upcoming Events at Sunset Church:

Lenten Prayer Room, February 14–March 29, 9 am–8 pm

Good Friday Service, March 29, 7 pm

Easter, March 31

Breakfast, 10–10:50 am

Egg Hunt, 10:25 am

Worship Services, 9 & 11 am

Part 1: Background Information about Lent

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40-day period beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending the day before Easter. The 40 days reflect the 40 days of Jesus' fasting in the desert (Luke 4) or the 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the desert (Exodus through Deuteronomy). Traditionally, Lent is a season of intentional spiritual practices like prayer, fasting, and giving money to those in need. You could think of it as a 40-day exercise program, but instead of physical exercises, we're engaging in spiritual exercises to welcome Jesus' life and presence. Often, people will give something up for Lent, not as a means unto itself, but instead to help them push into spiritual practices and reflection.

We think of Lent as a season to be intentional about connecting — connecting with God, ourselves, and the world around us. Sometimes we notice things in our lives that seem to be getting in the way of connecting, and the season of Lent invites us to consider putting those things aside and leaning into connection.

But why does it include 46 days?

Good counting! During Lent, there are six Sundays that traditionally don't count as part of the 40 days. They don't count because every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' resurrection, and the spirit of celebration doesn't quite resonate with the Lenten spirit of repentance, reflection, fasting, and self-denial.

Fun Fact:

The word "Lent" is an abbreviation of an Old English word meaning "lengthen," related to the lengthening of daylight in spring.

Why do the dates change each year?

Easter corresponds to the Jewish Passover which is based on both solar and lunar cycles. Easter can fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25, and then Lent falls into place accordingly. This year, Easter is March 31. (And not to over-complicate things, but different church traditions have different ways of calculating when Easter falls. That's a whole other story)

So, what can I do for Lent?

The whole point is to engage in practices that are meaningful and life-giving. These practices will be different for everyone. Like physical exercise, everyone has a different zone of comfort and development. And like physical exercises, we can stretch ourselves a bit, which may not feel pleasurable in the moment, but it leads to good growth. So, we recommend experimenting and seeing what happens. If you're stuck, check out the calendar below for more practical ideas. Finally, if you have young children, invite them into a practice with you. They will likely have their own ideas of how to connect meaningfully with God and others during Lent.

Church tradition lists **“Three Pillars of Lent,”** which are from Jesus’ **Sermon on the Mount** in Matthew 6:

1. Prayer
2. Fasting
3. Giving to those in need

Part 2: Spiritual Practices

Below is a short list of the many spiritual practices some people enjoy as meaningful ways to connect to God and others. We suggest trying one or two throughout Lent. Check out the Lenten Calendar on pages 6–8 for more practical ideas.

Prayer

- **Listening Prayer:** Listening to what God might be saying alone or with others.
- **Immanuel Prayer:** A type of inner-healing prayer done with others.
- **Intercessory Prayer:** Praying for other people's needs.
- **Contemplative Prayer:** Thinking about God while being near God.
- **Silent Prayer:** Being silent while being near God.
- **Breath Prayer:** Meditating on a particular word or phrase with each breath.
- **Liturgical/Fixed-Hour Prayer:** As Pastor Steve has encouraged us, pray three times a day (*morning*—The Lord's Prayer, *midday*—for five people you know to come to Christ, *evening*—Gratitude).

If you need a template or a place to start with prayer, you might try some of these prayers from the Bible:

- Matthew 6:9–13 (The Lord's Prayer)
- Ephesians 3:14–21
- John 17
- Psalm 130

Fasting

- Skip one or more meals and use the time for prayer, reflection, or serving others.
- Lay aside technology and use the time to connect with others in person (e.g., put away the phone and computer in the evening).
- Do not consume a particularly enjoyable food or beverage for some time and observe what is made possible, or impossible, by this (e.g., abstain from chocolate, coffee, or alcohol during Lent).
- Do not make any unnecessary purchases during Lent.

Giving

- Gift your money to those in need (e.g., skip one coffee or latte each week and give the cash to Helping Hands or Beaverton Resource Center).
- Gift your encouragement (e.g., write an encouraging note to someone needing encouragement).

Tips for choosing **Spiritual Practices during Lent:**

1. Pick one or two.
2. They almost always work better with others, so invite a friend or family member to do it with you.
3. If you have young children, involve them in the process. They will have great ideas — trust them!

Bible Reading

- **Study:** Spend an hour (maybe with others) on a short passage of scripture, looking up words and historical information.
- **Lectio Divina:** Listen for God’s voice as you read a passage of scripture several times.
- **Savoring and Listening:** Dwell on a single word or phrase from the passage you’re reading.
- **Reflective:** Read the Bible and look for how it may be meaningful.
- **Prayer:** Pray the scriptures.

Sabbath

- Set aside one day of the week to rest, play, and pray.

Journal Writing

- Reflect on your life.
- Jot down sermon notes, meaningful quotes, Bible passages.
- Sit in silence for a few moments, and then say the name of a person you love — offering that person to God and asking God’s blessings on that person.
- Record of all kinds of prayers and interactions with God.

Some other resources:

- *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton
- *A Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Grieving

- Reflect on losses you've experienced this past year and bring them before God.
- Meet with a friend or loved one to name losses together.
- Light a candle and mourn things that have been lost.
- Lament something in our world that brings you pain or causes others pain and suffering.

Part 3: Lenten Calendar

Some practical suggestions for each week of Lent:
Ash Wednesday, February 14 — Saturday, March 30

Try a practice of mourning or remembering your mortality.

- Read Psalm 39.
- Visit the grave of a loved one or write a letter to a loved one who has passed away.
- Walk through a cemetery and look at the names of the people buried there.
- Pray the words of the Ash Wednesday service twice each day, once when you wake and once when you go to sleep: "God, I remember that I am dust, and that I am filled with your breath."
- Gift your time (e.g., volunteer to serve in the church or Helping Hands).
- Gift your presence (e.g., visit a friend for no particular reason, or visit someone that does not often receive company).
- Process through troubling or inspiring nighttime dreams.

Week 1: Sunday–Saturday, February 18–24

Try a practice of fasting or abstinence.

- Abstain from food for one day during the week, OR abstain from one meal (i.e., breakfast, lunch, or dinner) and take time to pray.
- Refrain from using an important technology for a day or a week (e.g., social media, TV, email).
- Avoid spending money for the week by cooking from your pantry/refrigerator and staying away from stores or online shopping.

Week 2: Sunday–Saturday, February 25–March 2

Try a giving practice if your budget allows, or volunteer if not.

- Clear out your pantry and donate to Helping Hands.
- Give a financial gift to a local nonprofit that does justice in work in our community (ask Pastor Nate, natesalinas@sunset.church, if you need help finding a good one!).
- Volunteer some time to support a group that reaches those in need or addresses systemic issues.

Week 3: Sunday–Saturday, March 3–9

Try a prayer practice.

- Use fixed-hour prayers for morning (The Lord's Prayer), noon (pray for the five people as Pastor Steve invited us), and evening (Prayer of Gratitude).
- Wake up early and spend time worshipping God with music.
- Come to the **Lenten Prayer Room** at Sunset Church and spend time engaging with the prayer material that has been set up there (in the South Lobby).
- Write out goals and record progress toward those goals.

Week 4: Sunday–Saturday, March 10–16

Try a gratitude practice.

- Draw a picture or create art of waiting for Easter.
- Make a list of things you are grateful for.
- Refuse to think about the future for one day. Every time a plan comes to mind, set it aside mentally, refocus, and re-center on today. Just be present as best as you can.
- Tell a loved one what you appreciate about him/her.
- Take a walk through your neighborhood and be thankful about the things you observe and take for granted.

Week 5: Sunday–Saturday, March 17–23

Try a Bible-reading practice.

- Make a plan to read the Bible every day this week.
- Memorize a meaningful psalm or prayer (e.g., Psalm 130).
- Read the whole gospel of John (you can do this in about 45 minutes).
- Try Lectio Divina with a section of scripture you haven't read in a while.

Week 6: Sunday–Saturday (Holy Week), March 24–30

Try a practice related to Holy Week.

- Read and reflect on stories of Jesus' final days before his crucifixion and resurrection (e.g., read a chapter from John 14–19 each day of the week leading up to Easter).
- Reflect on the crucifixion and its meaning for you.
- Walk through and experience "The Way to the Cross" as portrayed by "Scott the Painter" in Sunset's Lobby.
- Attend Sunset's Good Friday service on Friday, April 7 at 7 pm.

Easter Sunday is March 31!

Practice resurrection.

— Wendell Berry



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