

*South Elkhorn Christian Church*

# LENT GUIDE

February 17 - April 3, 2021

## Entering the wilderness: reflection, repentance, and preparing for resurrection.



### **The Lenten Journey**

Lent is a 40 day season that invites you into the story of Jesus and his 40 days spent in the wilderness praying, fasting, and resisting temptation (Mark 1:12-13, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). During Lent you can connect more deeply with Jesus in prayerful self-examination, confession, and repentance. Jesus prepared in the wilderness for his public ministry and a journey that took him to the Cross. Lent invites

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each human heart to join with Jesus in journeying toward the Cross and preparing for the surprise of new life at Easter.

During Lent, people have chosen to “give up” something as a kind of fast, just as Jesus fasted in the wilderness. See below for ideas on what you might give up during Lent.

People have also chosen to “take up” something during Lent. Rather than subtract something (or in place of something given up), some people begin or expand a spiritual practice. See below for ideas on what you might take up during Lent.

Whether you give up, take up, or do both, the purpose of Lent is to prepare for Easter. What we do during Lent is a shared journey with Jesus meant to draw us toward new and everlasting life.

## **Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and emphasizes two themes: human sin and the reality of death. The sign of the cross is created with ashes and placed on the forehead (or alternatively on the hand) of those who receive it. The words from God to Adam in Genesis 3 are shared, “From dust you came and to dust you shall return.” Traditionally, palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday service are burned to produce the ashes.

The use of ashes is a sign of human mortality and repentance, and it has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship. Job repents “in dust and ashes,” and there are other associations of ashes and repentance in Esther, Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the 10th century, the monk Aelfric tied the practice to the period before Easter, writing, “Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent that we strew ashes upon our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten fast.” The practice grew and became widespread throughout the church. Then, in the 16th century, Martin Luther rejected the practice and it declined in Protestant circles for centuries. Recently, many protestant traditions are recovering the ancient practices and traditions of the church, discovering fresh meaning and inspiration.

While there is no mention of an Ash Wednesday practice or service in the bible, the ritual resonates profoundly with the story and journey of Jesus. Practicing Lent is a way of entering the story more deeply, growing in faith, and embracing the transformation that Easter Sunday invites.

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# 5 Questions to help you embrace Lent:

From Rachel Held Evans, <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/40-ideas-for-lent-2015>

1. When I wake up on Resurrection Sunday morning, how will I be different? What am I preparing for?
2. Is there something in my life—a habit, a grudge, a fear, a prejudice, an addiction, an emotional barrier, a form of excess—that keeps me from loving God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving my neighbor as myself? How might I address that over the next 40 days?
3. Lent is a time to listen to God, but sometimes God speaks through others, particularly the poor, oppressed, marginalized, and suffering. To whom should I be listening this season? How can I cultivate a listening posture toward others whose perspective and experiences might differ from my own?
4. Is there a spiritual discipline—praying the hours, lectio divina, the examen—that I've always wanted to try? How might I alter my daily routine to include one of these disciplines?
  - a. Praying the Hours:  
<https://www.asacredjourney.net/praying-the-hours/>
  - b. Lectio Divina:  
<https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide>
  - c. The Examen:  
<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>
5. The cycle of death and resurrection is central to the Christian faith. In what ways is that cycle present in my life right now? Where might there be necessary change, suffering, death and decay, and how might new life emerge from those experiences?

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# “GIVE UP”: ideas for a Lenten Fast

1. **Digital Fast** - Set aside screens. Be intentional in doing something with the extra time and attention you have. See the “Lenten Invitation: Digital Minimalism” guide available at [southelkhorncc.org/lent](https://southelkhorncc.org/lent). Consider doing this or one of the other ideas with a friend, with your family, or in a small group.
  - a. What about online worship? Sundays were often considered “mini-Easters” in Lenten practice and whatever was fasted would sometimes be indulged on these days in preparation for the big celebration on Easter Sunday.
  - b. The Digital Fast invites you to be intentional about your screen use. Given the realities of the pandemic and the need for screens to keep and deepen connections, the “Digital Fast” can be tailored to allow for these specific uses.
2. **A Grudge** - Pray daily about something you're struggling to let go; consider if there is a difficult but necessary conversation you need to have or an apology you need to give.
3. **All liquids but water** - Donate the money you would have spent on all the other drinks to a group that works to provide access to clean water to places in need
4. **Noise** - avoid turning on the radio in your car or anything around the house as background noise; use the silence to pray or think or notice things or have a conversation
5. **Stuff** - Find something in your house each day to give away (and don't let it all be stuff you won't miss).
6. **The need to have the last word**
7. **Extra purchases** - Buy only necessities (and if you have to question if something is really a necessity, it's likely not). Perhaps donate the extra money you would have spent.
8. **Skip a meal once a week or eat simpler meals on a designated day** - Give the money you would have spent to those helping address local or world hunger.

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# “TAKE UP”: ideas for a Lenten Practice

1. **Pray for your enemies each day**
2. **Keep a gratitude journal** - write down things each day for which you are thankful
3. **Read & reflect**
  - a. On a chapter or section from one of the gospels daily (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)
  - b. Or on one of the Psalms each day
  - c. Or on a section of the Sermon on the Mount each day (Matthew chapters 5-7); start over when you reach the end
4. **Join a weekly or regular bible study**
5. **Start attending Sunday School or a small group**
6. **Daily use an online devotional** or prayer guide
  - a. Richard Rohr’s daily or weekly meditations: [www.cac.org](http://www.cac.org)
  - b. d365 written for students: [www.d365.org](http://www.d365.org)
  - c. [www.commonprayer.net](http://www.commonprayer.net)
  - d. [www.sacredspace.ie/daily-prayer](http://www.sacredspace.ie/daily-prayer)
7. **Write a note of thanks** to a different person everyday: family, friends, fellow church members, neighbors, people from your past, public figures, community servants & workers
8. **Spend at least 10 minutes a day praying the news.** Use a paper or a news website. Notice stories that catch your attention & pray for those involved.
9. **Educate yourself about a justice need in the world.** Identify and do one thing to make a difference in that area. Examples: modern-day slavery & human trafficking, lack of access to clean water, criminal justice issues and reform, immigration issues, refugee needs in the world, racial reconciliation, homelessness, poverty.
10. **Seek to have a significant conversation** with someone very different from you each week. Differences might include religion, race, sexual orientation, politics, economic status,

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ethnicity, etc. Ask questions; focus on listening instead of talking, explaining, or defending your own views or perspectives. Focus on what you might learn or discover.

11. **Invite someone to a meal** with you at least once a week
12. **Give a genuine compliment** to someone each day. Take time to appreciate even the small things in others.
13. **Reach out to someone** who might be lonely at least 3 times a week with a visit or a phone call
14. **Say "I'm sorry."** Who needs an apology from you? How can you work to mend a broken relationship or heal a hurt?
15. **Practice the prayer of examen each day.** This daily spiritual discipline invites you to concentrate on the experiences of the past 24-hours through four prayerful stages: presence, gratitude, review, and response. Check out Ignatian Spirituality online for more.

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>