



Lent 2018 Guide

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my
heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way
in me,
and lead me in the way
everlasting!

WHAT IS LENT?

For centuries Christians from many traditions have observed the season of Lent, modeled after Jesus' 40-day fast in the desert. It is a time of repentance and rediscovery of God's grace. This season helps to prepare us to better and fully celebrate Easter Sunday. Think of a wedding day, the days and weeks that are involved with planning the ceremony and reception. All that time, all those details come together for a full and rich day of celebration. For us, Lent does the same thing. It helps us to fully celebrate the gift and reality of Jesus' resurrection.

At CF, Lent is an opportunity for both personal and communal renewal and growth. Lent throughout history has been marked by three things: fasting, prayer, and generosity. Individual believers are encouraged to withdraw into the wilderness with Jesus by taking on a temporary limitation and adding spiritual practices to foster a deeper communion with God. We practice these things Mondays through Saturdays during Lent. The Sundays during this season are for us a "mini Easter" where we relax our fasting.

This season is a chance to take stock of your spiritual condition in light of the gospel and seek a greater influence of the Holy Spirit. For the whole congregation, it is a time of preparation for remembering Christ's suffering and death during the Holy Week and celebrating his victorious resurrection on Easter.

It is critical to keep in mind that the point of Lent is not to observe rituals or take part in programs. The goal is to pursue a deeper relationship with God. As a church body we want to use this season to slow down and reflect on what it means that Jesus died and rose again. This season can and will look different for each believer. It is not a strict adherence to a specific set of rules, but rather a season built in to the life of the church that helps draw us closer to Jesus and prepare our hearts to rejoice in the resurrection. To that end, we have provided resources to help us as a community participate in this time honored season of preparation.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday when everyone is encouraged to participate in a special evening service held at the church. As we enter into this season, we do so as individuals and a church to do what we always do, *Follow Jesus into Worship, Community, and Mission.*

Fasting

In its most basic and common form, fasting is total abstinence from food. It is an expression of humility before God and our deep dependence on him (Ezra 8v21-23). It often includes confession of sin and repentance (Nehemiah 1, Jonah 3). Fasting is also an expression of openness before God (Acts 13v2-3).

Fasting doesn't have to just be from food. Fasting can also be from media, games, candy, etc. The point is to limit yourself from something, not just for the sake of limiting but to free yourself up to pursue a relationship with God in a deeper way. As you think about what to fast from, ask yourself "What is God asking me to put down?" Pray and ask God for clarity on what to give up during this season. Once you find something, the next question to ask is "What does God want me to pick up?" What can you pursue that will bring you closer to God during this season? When you crave or desire that thing you are fasting from, how can you pursue God instead? For example: if you are giving up sweets, every time you crave a cookie use that to remind you to pray to the God who you have tasted and seen is good (Ps 34).

Fasting isn't merely an act of self-deprivation, but a spiritual discipline for seeking more of God's fullness. Which means we should have a plan for what positive pursuit to undertake while we give something up.

When you feel tempted during your fasting don't be content to let your mind dwell on the fact that you haven't had the thing you are fasting from. If you make it through with an iron will that says no to your stomach, but doesn't turn your mind's eye elsewhere, it says more about your love of other things than your love for God.

Christian fasting turns its attention to Jesus or some great cause of his in the world. Christian fasting seeks to take the pains of hunger and transpose them to longing for a greater taste of Jesus. (Fasting for Beginners, David Mathis)

Tips for Fasting

- When you fast, do not draw attention of others to your piety but focus on God (Matthew 6:16-18).
- Keep yourself hydrated. Drink plenty of water, juice, or herbal tea.
- If you are currently taking medications do not do anything that would go against your doctors directions.
- Make sure to rest during this time.

Prayer

Fasting and prayer often go hand in hand. During those times of fasting when it is difficult it provides us a time to trust and lean on God for our strength. Prayer is a vital element in the life of the church and the growth of a Christian. At CF we deeply value prayer. We anchor everything we do in prayer. In this book is a series of daily prayers to help you focus on and speak with the God who knows you, made you, and loves you. He wants to speak with you during this season and prayer is one of the ways he does that. We also have a weekly prayer service before our normal Sunday gathering. It is held at 10:00 every Sunday in the upstairs lounge and all are welcome to join. How different would your Sunday worship experience be if you began it with spending time in prayer?

Prayer can be an overwhelming concept. Where do I start? What do I say? How do I do it? These questions and a lot more can creep in and distract us speaking with God. When these things come to us we need to take these moments captive. It is strangely encouraging to be reminded that our temptation toward distraction from prayer for the sake of seemingly “more productive” tasks is not unique to the digital age.

The problem of our prayerlessness is not simply with our smartphones or schedules. The problem is with our hearts. So, if we really want to grow in our prayer life, we must take aim at something much deeper than surface distractions: our most inward affections and desires. During Lent we want to pursue Christ in prayer, we want to eliminate distractions to allow ourselves to speak with and hear from Jesus.

Tips for pursuing God in prayer

-Journaling prayers can help you clarify the words you want to use. It is also a great way to look back and see how God has answered prayers in your life.

-Commit to pray at the same time as other. Accountability is a great way to help us pursue Christ together.

-Keep a prayer list. It's easier to pray when we have a plan beforehand. What people or situations do you want to pray for? Keep a list and add to it as you go through Lent. Use the CF prayer email as a starter!

-Set an alarm on your phone to regularly remind you to pray during the day.

-Pray as things come to your mind. You don't have to store everything up till later, pray as you go. As things pop into your head pray!

Generosity

We serve a loving and generous God who gives and blesses out of his rich abundance. Because of this reality, we as Christians are called to be a generous people also. We know and trust that when we die we will spend eternity in heaven with God. If we believe that he will provide for us then, we should be able to trust that he will provide for us now in our earthly needs. The season of Lent can be for us an opportunity to practice being a generous people.

If you don't already give a regular offering or tithe, you can try and practice this act of worship during Lent. If you already give, can you give above and beyond your normal amount? It doesn't even have to be at CF, is there an organization or missionary that you can bless financially during this season?

There are other ways to be generous during this season. You can be generous with your time for others. You can be generous with your space. What gifts or talents do you have that you can bless others with?

2 Corinthians 9:11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Organizations you can give to during Lent

- ReachGlobal: The EFCA missions organization we support
- Kato Family: Missionaries in Cameroon, Africa. More information can be found at <https://africansandinourshoes.com>
- Doris Abruzzi: Local missionary in Skokie, IL serving with Life in Messiah International
- Common Pantry: A local food pantry serving our neighbors

Tips for practicing Generosity during Lent

- Set up automatic giving to be sure you won't forget to give during this season.
- Sign up for a daily generosity tips from <https://40acts.org.uk>
- Volunteer to serve at CF
- Invite people to have a meal with you

Ash Wednesday

Lord, as I enter into this Lenten journey I pray that I focus on you. I want to remember how much I need you in my life and how much my life needs redemption. I want to remember it clearly and in the background of my day today and all through Lent. On this special day, may my small sacrifices in fasting be a way to clear away the clutter in my life to see you more clearly. Let me be aware of those who are in so much more suffering than I am and may I be aware of them as the brothers and sisters you have placed in my life. Lord, as we head toward Easter, prepare my heart and mind.

The First Four Days of Lent Thursday

Lord, let everything I do this day and in this season of Lent come from you, be inspired by you. I long to be closer to you. Help me to remember that nothing is important in my life unless it glorifies you in some way. It's so easy to get caught up in the day to day of my life and keep saying, "Tomorrow, I will spend more time in prayer," but I don't want to wait for tomorrow. Help me to know you deeper today!

The First Four Days of Lent Friday

Lord, I know how much you love me. It's hard for me to feel it sometimes, but those moments are because of me not you. I know your love is always with me. Help me to use your love as a way to persevere in my Lenten intentions. I am weak, but I know with your help, I can use these small sacrifices in my life to draw closer to you.

The First Four Days of Lent Saturday

Loving creator, I am not asking to overcome my weakness, but to use it in some way to glorify you. Let me be aware of the many ways you reach out to help me today and let me stand in awe of the power that you use in such loving ways. I know that in my weakness, you step in and reveal your power. Help me to trust you.

The First Week of Lent Sunday

Lord God, you who breathed the spirit of life within me. Draw out of me the light and life you created. Help me to see you clearer, to know you better. Help me to use my life to reflect your glory and to serve others as your son Jesus did. Give me clarity in how to best honor you with my life.

The First Week of Lent Monday

Loving God, you have been calling creation back to yourself since the fall. I felt the call in my life and I am so thankful that you called me to yourself. Lord, as I pursue you give me the wisdom to know how. Make my journey of walking in the light one of grace, forgiveness and gentle love. Reveal in me the areas that I can grow and the humility to do so.

The First Week of Lent Tuesday

I know your love for me is limitless beyond imagining. You care for me as a loving parent. Through my smallest Lenten sacrifices, help me to become less selfish and more aware of your ways. Fan the flame of my desire to draw ever closer to you. Guide me to seek your love.

The First Week of Lent Wednesday

Dear Lord, let me be inspired by your words and by the actions of your son, Jesus. Guide me in this season of Lent to have a greater attention to you and to those around me. I don't want to glide through life, not paying attention, I want to live fully engaged with your creation around me.

The First Week of Lent Thursday

Lord, I'm not always eager to do your will. I'd often much rather do my own will. Please be with me on this Lenten journey and help me to remember that your own spirit can guide me in the right direction. I want to "fix" my weaknesses but the task seems overwhelming. But I know that with you are shaping and molding me. With a grateful heart, I acknowledge your love and know that without you, I can do nothing.

The First Week of Lent Friday

Creator of my life, fan the flame you set in me. Help me to rediscover the Gospel. To remember my need for you and the love, grace, mercy, and joy that is found at the cross. Help me to see your love in the passion, death and resurrection of your son. Help me to pursue you during Lent in a way that allows me to celebrate that love. Prepare me for these weeks of Lent as I feel both deep sorrow for my sins and great joy for your undying love for me.

The First Week of Lent Saturday

Loving God, sometimes my heart turns in every direction except towards you. Please help me to turn my heart toward you, to gaze upon you in trust and to seek your kingdom with all of my heart. Soften my hardened heart so that I might love others as a way to glorify and worship you. Grant me this with the ever-present guidance of your spirit.

The Second Week of Lent Sunday

Loving God, where there is darkness in my life, take my hand and lead me out of the shadows of my fear. Help me to change my heart. Bring me to your truth and help me to respond to your generous love. Let me recognize the fullness of your love which will fill my life. Free me from the darkness in my heart.

The Second Week of Lent Monday

Lord, your commandment of love is so simple and so challenging. Help me to let go of my pride, and live as Christ showed us, with humility as a servant. I want only to live the way you ask me to love, to love the way you ask me to live. I ask this through your son, Jesus, who stands at my side today and always.

The Second Week of Lent Tuesday

God in heaven and in my life, guide me and protect me. I so often believe I can save myself, that I can “do better” and it leaves me exhausted and broken. Lead me with your love away from harm and guide me on the right path. May your Spirit inspire the church and make us an instrument of your love and guidance. Thank you for your care for me.

The Second Week of Lent Wednesday

God of love, through this Lenten journey purify my desires to serve you. Free me from any temptations to judge others, to place myself above others. Please let me surrender even my impatience with others, that with your love and your grace, I might be less and less absorbed with myself, and more and more full of the desire to follow you, in laying down my life according to the example of Christ.

The Second Week of Lent Thursday

Loving God, my heart longs to love and serve you more. Help me to avoid the distractions and instead focus on you. Lead me this day in all that I do and send your Spirit to guide me and strengthen my faith.

The Second Week of Lent Friday

Loving God, caring parent, I am a child who so often turns my back on your love. As I pursue knowing you deeper, please answer when I knock. As I journey through Lent, let me remember the feast you have prepared for me in the resurrection and let me be filled with thanks to you.

The Second Week of Lent Saturday

God of infinite love, you shower me with limitless gifts in my life. In my every thought and action today guide me to the bright and loving light of your kingdom. Help me to be aware of the many ways you allow me to share in your life so intimately today. Thank you for the gifts you have placed in my life. Let me be grateful every moment of this day.

The Third Week of Lent Sunday

Loving Father, so many times I turn away from you and always you welcome me back. Your mercy and love gives me confidence, thank you for the invitation to share, fast and pray so that you can form a new heart within me. Your powerful compassion for my weaknesses leads me to ask for mercy and await with great hope the Easter joy you share with us.

The Third Week of Lent Monday

Merciful God, free your Church from the sins of this world and protect us from evil we see and the evil we prefer to ignore. We need your guidance, Lord for we cannot do this alone. Only with your help can we be the lighthouse you have called us to be. Give us new eyes and new hearts for Roscoe Village. Open the doors for us to love and save this place you have called us.

The Third Week of Lent Tuesday

God of infinite love, I thank you for this reminder of your love and your call that we be more patient, gentle and compassionate with others. Here in the middle of Lent, I turn to you to beg for your help. Please soften my heart. Help me to let go of the things that hold me back from fully following you.

The Third Week of Lent Wednesday

God, you love me as your own child. May I bend my life and will toward you so that I might accept your teaching and guidance. I am so grateful for your support in my life, now and in the eternal life you are preparing for me. I beg for your help and Spirit in my life today.

The Third Week of Lent Thursday

Lead me this day to see the areas of my life I must give over to you. Send your Spirit to guide me and strengthen my faith. I ask you bring to light the areas you want to refine. Help me to repent and turn toward you.

The Third Week of Lent Friday

God of Mercy, I feel my heart overflowing with your tenderness. I sense your loving touch deep within my soul. I ask for your help in my weakness that I might be faithful to your word and I am so grateful that your mercy for my failings is as strong as your unbounded love for me.

The Third Week of Lent Saturday

God of mercy and understanding, I know that with help I can open my heart more fully to the mysteries of the suffering and death of your son. Help me to be humble in this journey and remember that any mercy and compassion I feel is a gift from you. I await the joy of Easter with new longing and patience.

The Fourth Week of Lent Sunday

Loving creator of mine, I am filled with joy as I move toward Easter and the promised reconciliation with you. Teach me to follow the example of your Son, to be worthy of being called your child. Help me to live each day as Christ did turning hatred to love and conflict to peace. I await the arrival of Easter with eagerness, faith and a deep gratitude.

The Fourth Week of Lent Monday

God who created me, you offer me new life through your Son and gave us the gift of your church. While I see new life all around me, I don't always recognize the new life you offer me. Help me to grow this Lent in an awareness of the gifts you place in my life and in a greater appreciation for your care. Give me the courage to ask for help.

The Fourth Week of Lent Tuesday

Joyful praise in Lent? I'm not sure I always feel that. I ask you to help me prepare to understand and embrace the paschal mystery in my life. I don't always see the beauty and mystery of this season and often I run from the pain. Help me to see how your saving grace and your loving touch in my life can fill me with joyful praise of the salvation you have sent to me.

The Fourth Week of Lent Wednesday

Loving and merciful God, I am so aware of my sins and weaknesses. But as painfully aware of my faults as I am, Let me also remember your tender love, your gentle and limitless forgiveness. I come before you with nothing but my sin and look into your eyes and see the forgiving love I so long for in my life. Help me to forgive the same way. Teach me to love as you love.

The Fourth Week of Lent Thursday

Merciful Father, I know that the tiny sacrifices I make this Lent are but a faint shadow of the sacrifice Christ made on my behalf. Help me to make my whole life one of following your Son. I am filled with your love. Let your love shine out from within me and guide my life in this sacred journey toward the Easter joy you offer me.

The Fourth Week of Lent Friday

Loving God of forgiveness, I hold out my hands as a petitioner would, asking for mercy. It is then that I feel you reach out and take my hand in your loving grasp. Thank you for the love you pour out on me so lavishly. Help me to follow more closely in the path you have set for me, the path of your Son.

The Fourth Week of Lent Saturday

Lord, what you ask of my life seems so right. It is how I want to live, following your Son, Jesus, so closely. And yet I fail so often to stay on that path. I cannot do it alone, loving Lord. I need your help and guidance. I need to remember your love for me and I want to remember how very much I need you in my life.

The Fifth Week of Lent Sunday

My loving Lord, it's so hard to love the world sometimes and to love it the way Jesus did seems impossible. Help me to be inspired by his love and guided by his example. Most of all, I want to accept that I can't do it alone, and that trying is an arrogance of self-centeredness. I need you, dear God, to give me support in this journey. Show me how to unlock my heart so that I am less selfish.

The Fifth Week of Lent Monday

God of love, I know that you are the source of all that is good and graced in my life. Help me to move from the life of sin to which I so often cling, into the new life of grace you offer me. As I look toward Easter I anticipate the excitement and joy that Sunday will bring!

The Fifth Week of Lent Tuesday

Loving God, You have heard my complaints, my impatience. Sometimes I feel like a broken record when I move away from you. Guide my heart back to you. Help me to think beyond my own wants and to desire only to do you will. Thank you for the many blessings in my life and for the ways I feel your presence.

The Fifth Week of Lent Wednesday

Loving Creator, you know and see all of me and yet you still love me. Hear my prayers, I want to know you deeper. I want to grow in my trust in you. Be with me in both mind and heart as I renew my life in your spirit.

The Fifth Week of Lent Thursday

Lord, all I want is to be faithful to you in my life, but so often I fail. Free me from my sins and guide me to the life I will share with you. As I think about Good Friday I'm reminded that Jesus' death, though so ugly, produced so much beauty. Help me to fix my mind and heart on the sacrifice of Christ. Let that be my motivation.

The Fifth Week of Lent Friday

Most forgiving Lord, again and again you welcome me back into your loving arms. Grant me freedom from the heavy burdens of sin that weigh me down and keep me so far from you. Help me to throw off these chains that I might run full speed toward the life you have laid out for me.

The Fifth Week of Lent Saturday

Loving God, Your eternal watchfulness keeps me safe from harm. I am filled with a great happiness when I feel your endless love for me. Thank you for your care for me, one of your children. I ask you to protect from harm those who will soon be your children, joined in the joy of your church.

Holy Week Sunday

Loving God, I am overwhelmed by how much you love me. Your son, Jesus was humble and obedient. He fulfilled your will for him by becoming human and suffering for us. I want to be more humble so that my own life might also bear witness to you. I want to use the small sufferings I have in this world to give you glory. Please, Lord, guide my mind with your truth. Strengthen my life by the example of Jesus. Help me to be with Jesus in this week as he demonstrates again his total love for me.

Holy Week Monday

God of love, My prayer is simple: Your son, Jesus, suffered and died for me. I know that I cannot have real strength unless I rely on you. I cannot feel protected from my many weaknesses until I turn to you for forgiveness and your unalterable love. Help me to share this strength, protection and love with others. Not just so I'm a "better person" but because you are good and awesome and I want to know you more.

Holy Week Tuesday

God of such unwavering love, how do I "celebrate" the passion and death of Jesus? I often want to look the other way and not watch, not stay with Jesus in his suffering. Give me the strength to see his love with honesty and compassion and to feel deeply your own forgiveness and mercy for me. Help me to understand how to "celebrate" this week. I want be able to bring my weaknesses and imperfections with me as I journey with Jesus this week, so aware of his love.

Holy Week Wednesday

Please stay with me as I struggle to see how accepting the crosses of my life will free me from the power of the one who wants only to destroy my love and trust in you. Help me to be humble and accepting like your son, Jesus. I want to turn to you with the same trust he had in your love. Save me, Lord. Only you can save me.

Holy Week Thursday

Loving Provider, you gather me in this upper room with your son, to be fed by your love. At that supper, Jesus told us to "love one another" and I know that is the heart of his gift, his sacrifice for me. I ask that I might find the source of my own heart, the meaning for my own life, in that Eucharist. Guide me to the fullness of your love and life.

Holy Week Friday

My Lord, your son has suffered so much, shed so much blood. I was born with so many faults and my nature is so full of weakness, and yet your son Jesus has died on the cross. For *me*. I know your grace has the power to cleanse me of my many sins and to make me more like your Son. Thank you for your goodness and love for me. I ask you, Father, to watch over me - always.