

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS

L E N T E N G U I D E

THE SEASON OF LENT

Lent is a special season in the Christian year that begins with Ash Wednesday (Feb 17) and ends with Easter (April 4). Lent is a time of year where we prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter by clearing out space in our lives and our hearts for God to work.

The season of Lent gives us an opportunity to recognize the parts of us and our world that are broken. Taking time to recognize our brokenness clears the way for us to celebrate the hope of Easter: that sin and death do not get the last word because Jesus has defeated the power of death.

Lent is an invitation to die...so that we can begin really living. The season of Lent is about recognizing and laying down the things that hold us back from being completely open to God.

During the season of Lent, Christians all over the world give up something in their lives (TV, movies, dessert, meat, alcohol, food in general, eating out, video games, non-essential spending or shopping, etc.) in order to be more present, open, and available to God.

Often, Christians will add something to their lives to be more faithful to God (more time in prayer, prayer walks, more reading of scripture, giving more money away, spending more time serving others, etc.).

***How do you think God is calling you
to walk through Lent this year?***

This packet includes some suggestions for how you can lean into God during Lent this year.



LENT & EASTER EVENTS:

Ash Wednesday - Wednesday, February 17
@ 8-10am - Join us in the sanctuary for a season of prayer and reflection.

Easter Egg Hunt - Sunday, March 28 @
1:00pm - Join us at Couch Park for our annual Easter Egg Hunt.

Maundy Thursday Service - Thursday, April 1st @ 6:30pm - We will observe the Lord's Supper and remember the experiences of Jesus and His disciples on the night before He gave His life as an atonement for our sin. (We will use sealed, individual packets containing the communion elements.)

Good Friday Tenebrae Service - Friday, April 2nd @ 6:30pm - Our traditional "Service of Darkness" where we extinguish candles while reading the passages describing Jesus' betrayal, trials, and crucifixion.

Easter Services - Sunday, April 4th - On Easter we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus - God's coming to rescue broken people living in a broken world. Christ Is Risen! He Is Risen Indeed!

FASTING 101

A Starting Place: If fasting is new to you, or you just haven't done it in a while, it is a good idea to ease in slowly. Try each step for several weeks before moving to the next one.*

1. Partial/Normal Fast for **24 hours** Each Week - (often lunch to lunch) - no food, & only water to drink (or juice if a partial fast).
2. Normal Fast for **36 hours** Each Week - (often skipping a full day of meals from dinner day 1 to breakfast day 3) - no food, only water to drink.
3. Longer Fasts - After several months of weekly fasting, you may want to begin praying about whether God might be calling you to do a longer fast. **3-7 days** is a good next step. More research & preparation are advisable for a longer fast.

*A doctor's input is recommended - there are health reasons why some people should not fast, or should do so under a doctor's supervision.

Other Ways to Fast:

- No sweets & desserts
- Sunrise to Sunset
- "Daniel fast" (eat only fruits & vegetables, drink only water)
- No alcohol
- Non-essential spending or shopping (it is important to define this well)
- Media (go without TV, internet, magazines, social media, computers, radio, etc - except for work requirements)

Tips & Reminders:

- If your daily responsibilities allow, use the time you would be eating to spend with God - read your bible, meditate, etc. If your daily responsibilities prevent meal-time flexibility, consider setting aside another time during the day to spend with God.
- Direct your attention to bringing God into your everyday tasks and activities.
- Do everything as if to the Lord. There's no need to call attention to what you are doing, but feel free to share with friends who would offer good support as you fast.
- Hunger pangs are not due to true starvation (unless you are around day 21 of a fast). Your stomach is simply accustomed to taking in food at certain times.

(Much of this information regarding fasting is taken from Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* - an excellent resource for learning about spiritual disciplines.)

LENT WITH KIDS!

There are a number of ways to include your kids in celebrating the season of Lent. Here are a few ideas:

* Choose a children's bible and make a weekly or daily reading plan that will begin with Jesus' birth and end with Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday.

* Light a special candle at a meal time and talk about what Jesus did in the story you read today or how you've experienced Jesus today or this week.

* Set aside a quiet time each week to draw or write prayers. You may find that playing quiet music during this time is also helpful.

* Make a "prayer tree" with branches in a jar or a paper version and add pictures or notes to the tree of people to pray for - then pray over these together each night or morning!

* Brainstorm ways to serve people around you at the beginning of Lent and then do it!

* On Good Friday, turn off all the lights and don't turn them on again until Easter morning. Have a song ready to sing together as you flood the house with light!

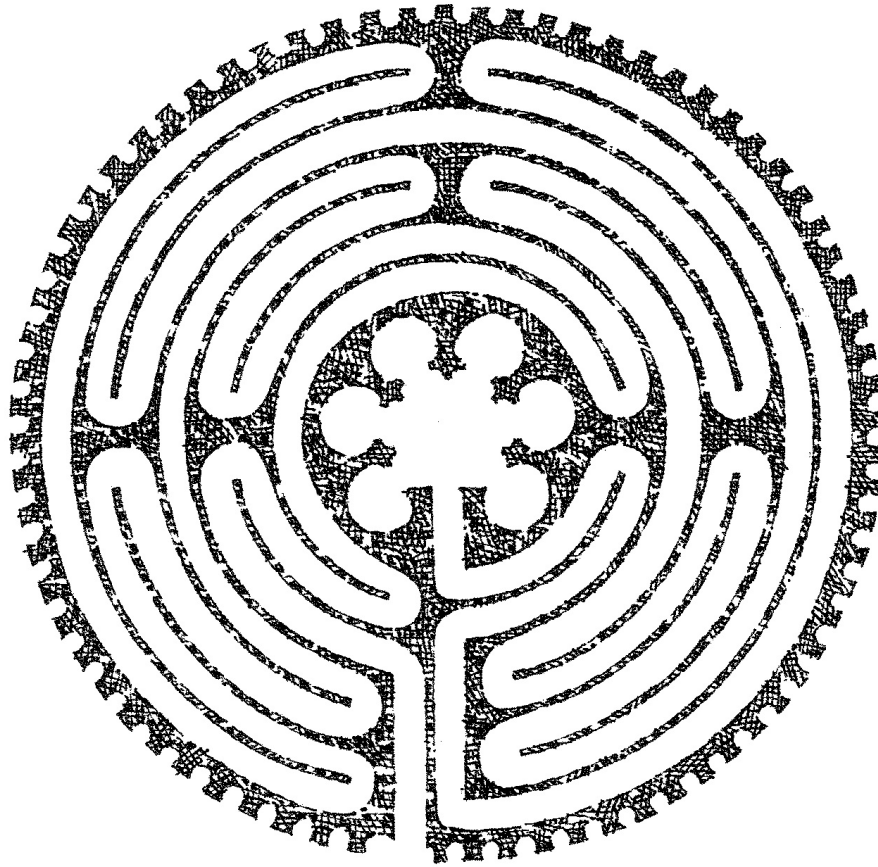
* Talk together about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

PRAYER EXPERIMENTS

Prayer is a learning process - we are learning to think God's thoughts - to desire what God desires and to mourn what God mourns. Before beginning any of these, take a few minutes to breathe deeply and center your attention on God's presence.

- **Story Meditation** - Choose a story from the bible - perhaps a story about Jesus, a Parable or a story from the Old Testament (children's bibles are great places to get ideas for this activity). Read the story through several times. Now, listen to the story in your mind and re-tell the story with images and color. Listen to God as you walk through the story and let God place you in the story (you may find yourself identifying with a particular character) or God may direct your thoughts in other ways, so give attention to the images that come to mind as you open yourself to what God might say to you through the story.
- **Palms Down - Palms Up** - Begin by taking a few minutes to breathe and listen for God. Invite light and love of Jesus to surround and fill you. Place your PALMS DOWN and tell God the things that you need to release into God's care (ways of thinking that have become destructive, worries or concerns that are weighing on you, anything that begins to feel out of place as you sit with God a while). Release these things to God. Try not to ask God for anything yet - simply focus on surrender and letting go. Now, turn your PALMS UP and ask God to fill you. To give you patience, hope, peace - whatever you need. Before you finish, take a moment to sit with God in silence.
- **Prayer Walk** - Take a walk through your neighborhood, church, workplace, school - any place that is weighing on you - and pray. Pray for the people who will walk through the doors, pray for protection and peace, pray for hope and light, etc. This is an incredible gift Christians can offer our world and it will change the way you see and experience the world around you.
- **Prayer Journal** - Make a practice of writing out your prayers. This can be an especially meaningful practice if you keep the same notebook for a period of time and record and date your prayers. Read through old prayers from time to time and listen to how God continues to work in your life.
- **Centering / Breath Prayers** - Form a simple phrase to pray to God using this formula: A (name for God you are comfortable using) + B (simple, direct request). As you breathe in, call to God and as you breathe out repeat your request. Repeat this as long as you like, breathing slowly in and out.
- **Flash / Arrow Prayers** - As you go about your day - endeavor to see each person as God sees them and pray for them! Some of these prayers are often quick, concise, but listen to God's Spirit as God may nudge you to pray more specifically and earnestly for someone along the way.
- **Praying with Imagination** - Ask God to fill your mind with the possibilities that God sees - allow images of God's light and joy and peace to wash over the world around you and/or the people for whom you are praying. Listen for God's Spirit to give you ideas, pictures, and words to pray for.
- **Lectio Divina** - (divine or spiritual reading) This is a methodical, contemplative way to pray through scripture. Begin by choosing a portion of scripture to focus on. Once you are settled, read the text slowly, listening for God. Next, meditate on whatever portion of text stands out to you. You may want to memorize it and repeat it slowly in your mind or simply let whatever thoughts or images God gives you simmer as you rest with God. As you feel ready, respond to God with words or images,

PRAYER PRACTICE: FINGER LABYRINTH



Adapted from the book *The Awkward Season: Prayers for Lent* by Pamela C. Hawkins, pgs. 111–112. Copyright © 2009 by Upper Room Books.

FIRST MOVEMENT: RELEASING (CONFESSION)

Place your finger at the opening of the labyrinth. Pray silently or aloud a prayer of confession. When finished, slowly move your finger forward along the labyrinth. Move at your own pace toward the center. Let the words of the prayer stay with you.

Quiet your mind as you move through the labyrinth. Make room for emotions and stirrings that arise. What needs to be changed, forgiven, cleared, confronted, or healed in your life? Offer these situations to God as you move forward.

SECOND MOVEMENT: RECEIVING (CENTERING)

When you reach the center, rest your finger there for a moment before you read a scripture reading for the day.

When you are ready, read the passage slowly, as if you have never read it before. Center on God's Word and be open to what God reveals to you through the reading. Return your finger to the center of the labyrinth and reflect on the passage and what it holds for you.

THIRD MOVEMENT: RETURNING (INTERCESSION)

As you prepare to leave the labyrinth, place your finger at the same opening in the center where you entered. Now lift up your intercessory prayers for the day and when finished, begin to move your finger back along the same path on which you entered.

Let the intercessory prayers stay with you, and add to them as you make the turns and move along the pattern back out of the labyrinth. Be mindful of people and circumstances in the world that are in need of your prayers. Hold each one in your heart for a part of the journey outward.

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED: As you lift your finger from the labyrinth's end, offer thanks to God.