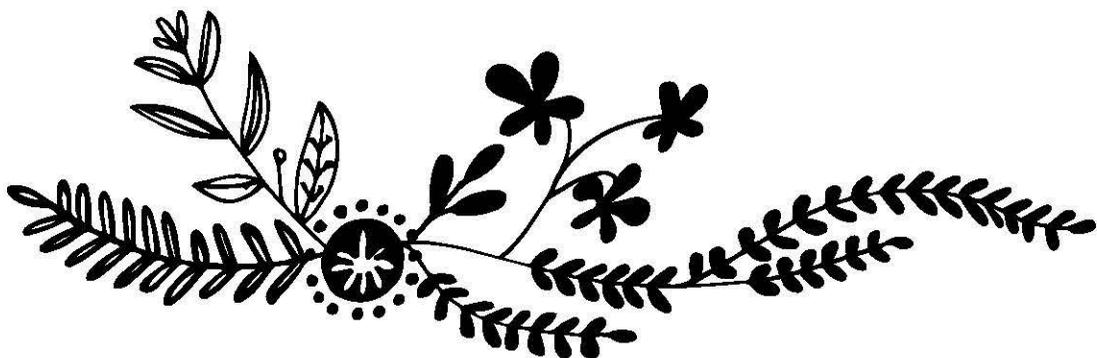




Practicing
Lent



Introduction

The name “Lent” comes from an old English word for “lengthening,” referring to the gradually longer days of springtime. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, what was cold becomes warm. What was dormant awakens. Just as green shoots break through the winter earth, so the church stirs into action to proclaim the Easter mystery: in dying, God destroys death, and in rising, God delivers and proclaims newness of life.

What follows are six weekly Lenten practices, each one designed to deepen your journey through these 40 days of lengthening light. Practice them alone, or with a partner, friends, or family, sharing experiences and insights as you travel.



First Week of Lent

READ

Matthew 4:1-11

MEDITATE

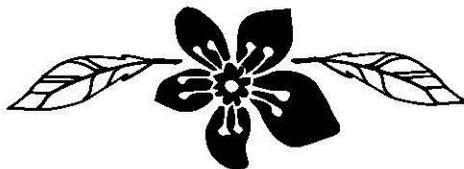
Jesus answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

PRACTICE

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." - *Helen Keller*

This week, focus on our most basic routines: eating, drinking, and washing. Try a new pattern of life for a day, a week, or the whole Lenten season. For example, adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet, with every bite reducing suffering and caring for creation. Or, whenever you wash your face, your body, the dishes - whenever you encounter water, intentionally recall the waters of baptism. Remember Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and hear again God's voice proclaiming the truth of the Gospel to you: "You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

Whatever new pattern you choose, let your goal be to bring to your life a fresh mindfulness of God's tender presence all around.



Second Week of Lent

READ

Matthew 17:1-9

MEDITATE

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."

PRACTICE

"Live to the point of tears." - *Albert Camus*

This week, try letting your heart break for the world in a new way, knowing that God will transfigure and transform every valley, every sorrow, and every cross.

Read the news as a spiritual practice, praying for all of us caught up in webs of violence, poverty, injustice, and war. Like so many of our ancestors, we can pray prayers of lamentation: "God of Moses and Elijah, come heal our world! Come mend our broken hearts! Come with your love, peace, and justice - let them flow like a mighty stream!" And we can also pray prayers of gratitude and celebration for what God is already doing to transfigure despair into hope, mourning into dancing, hate into love.

Whatever prayer practice you choose, let your goal be to deepen both your compassion for the world and your trust in God's transforming presence all around.



Third Week of Lent

READ

Psalm 95



MEDITATE

In God's hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are God's also.

PRACTICE

"Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart." - *Confucius*

This week, try clearing space in your life for being in solitude with God. Like clearings in a forest, where suddenly the stars and moon above come into view, such solitude can rejuvenate and strengthen us for full-hearted life.

Be ambitious: remove every obstacle in your path. Turn off the TV, unplug the radio, shut down the computer, put away your phone (especially at mealtime!), light candles, revisit your favorite music, read aloud your favorite poem, or take a walk in the woods under the night sky.

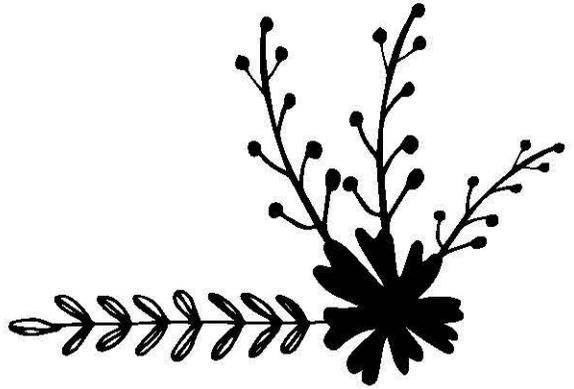
Whatever clearings you choose, let your goal be to deepen your awareness of God's companionship and serene presence all around.



Fourth Week of Lent

READ

Psalm 23



MEDITATE

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of God my whole life long.

PRACTICE

"Dwell in possibility." - Emily Dickinson

This week, try being especially alert to God's enlivening activity in the world. Look for signs of spring in the most unexpected places, even in the valley of the shadow of death. Bring pussy willows and forsythia branches into the warmth of your home, and enjoy new life as they bloom. Listen as every branch and petal proclaims the good news of the Gospel: that life has put death to death, love has conquered violence, God is our shepherd and a whole new world is possible.

As you notice the Spirit's activity near and far, let your goal be to dwell in God's green possibilities all around.





Fifth Week of Lent

READ

John 11:1-45

MEDITATE

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

PRACTICE

"Be the change you want to see in the world." - Mohandas Gandhi

This week, try practicing the change you wish to see in the world. Start with what you long for: What change is your deepest prayer for the world? What resurrection, what new birth? And then: What concrete step can you take this week? Clean up an abandoned lot; give someone a gift of flowers, a home-cooked meal, or an unexpected note of appreciation. Use your hands and heart to their fullest, trusting that God can use even the smallest actions to unbind life and set it free.

As you become the change you seek, let your goal be to participate in the many resurrections God unleashes all around, today and tomorrow.



Sixth Week of Lent

"Truth crushed down to the ground will rise again."
- *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The three days of Easter, counted from sunset to sunset, are days of death, rest, and resurrection. On these three days, pray without ceasing:

GOOD FRIDAY

Let me enter your heart, O God.
Let me see what breaks your heart.
Let my heart be broken too.
Amen.

HOLY SATURDAY

But all shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well.
Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Today, O God, I say YES!
To you, to life, to all that is true
and good and beautiful, I say YES!
Alleluia! Amen.



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