

What is Lent?

Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread. He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, you shall not put the Lord, your God to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him, and behold angels came and ministered to him.

Lent is an invitation for followers of Jesus to walk alongside Jesus in the desert for the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, where we search our hearts for the depths of our sin and remember and experience the heights of God's love.

With Holy Week (the week preceding Easter) approaching, we stand in the juxtaposition of our sin and Jesus' atoning blood. We recognize that we are indeed sinners and remember that in just a short time, God will pour out his mercy on us through Christ on the cross.

During Lent, the people of God participate individually and corporately in practices that deepen our dependency on God, expand our humility of self, and grow our expectancy of His Spirit. We bring ourselves low, temporarily shedding parts of our life for the sake of Christ in the hope that we will find more of him. We achieve this through spiritual disciplines (addition), fasting (subtraction), and repentance (introspection). We are not meant to do this alone! As you engage in these Lenten disciplines, bring in others around you for support and accountability.

While by no means an exhaustive guide, we hope that this material provides you with some ideas and direction to participate in the Lenten season. We pray that the Lord would meet you in powerful and unique ways, and that as you walk with Jesus in the desert, you remember that his spirit is never far and his grace is never-ending.

Addition - Spiritual Disciplines

Matthew 26:36-39

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Spiritual disciplines like prayer, reflecting on and memorizing scripture, and serving others are vital for Christians in their walk with the triune God.

In and through prayer, we seek God and he meets with us. He hears the cries of our hearts (Psalm 34:15, Jeremiah 29:12-13) and draws near to those who seek him (Psalm 145:18, 1 Peter 3:12). We converse with God, sharing the troubles of our hearts and praising him for all he has done in our lives. Prayer is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God and invite him and his power into our lives.

Through reflecting on his word, we learn more about who he is and what his character is like, and we are filled up like a tree planted beside the water (Psalm 1:3). In his word, there are stories of wisdom for us - so that we may better love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

Serving others is an often-neglected spiritual discipline. Jesus consistently served others throughout the Gospels, and we should seek to do the same. When we serve others with our time and resources, we grow in humility, compassion, and love - and we end up looking more like Jesus.

During Lent, we are purposeful about adding spiritual disciplines to our lives. Maybe it's praying five minutes extra in the morning, adding extra Bible reading or journaling, or volunteering. We don't do this extra work to prove anything to God, but rather to bring ourselves closer to looking like Jesus!

Here are some ideas of what addition could look like:

- Reading and praying through one Psalm a day (1-10, 90-106, 120-134)
- Memorizing meaningful scripture
- Committing to praying for someone every day
- Responding to scripture creatively (painting, drawing, writing etc.)
- Volunteering at Church or in the community
- Cooking a meal for a family in need

Subtraction - Fasting

Matthew 4:1-2

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards was hungry.

The practice of fasting is one that is prevalent in scripture. Throughout the Old and New Testament, we see fasting used to gain focus on God by resisting temptation and growing in humility, spiritual strength, and dependence (Acts 13:2, Acts 14:23, Daniel 10:3, Esther 4:16).

We grow in dependence on God by making a choice to remove earthly practices and turning to God for the strength and comfort we need. Fasting can also be used to gain spiritual clarity for decisions or direction in life. Although we fast, we still feast - on the presence and power of God.

Fasting in scripture was often abstaining from food or drink, but it can look a lot of different ways. Start by asking yourself the question, "What am I partaking in regularly that gives me comfort outside of Christ?"

This could be social media, certain foods, television, caffeine, or video games. The spiritual purpose of subtraction is that we would turn away from earthly provisions for comfort and turn to the triune God to give us all we need. It's important to set an attainable goal.

Here are some fasting practices you could partake in this Lenten season:

- abstaining from social media
- fasting from caffeine, added sugar, desserts (some or all days of the week)
- fasting from red meat
- limiting or abstaining from TV, video games, other media

Ask God to search your heart and help you discern what could be the most spiritually profitable fast for you!

Introspection – Reflection and Repentance

In Psalm 139, David asks God-

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

During Lent, we deepen our intentionality about asking God for this kind of “searching” for ourselves! We approach the Lord through prayer and fasting and ask the Lord to reveal to us our true motivations, desires, and burdens.

We ask God to show us the shadows and wickedness in our heart, and he meets us with his unending grace and mercy. He will help and comfort you! In introspection, we ask God that our reflection would lead us to repentance. Whether that’s repentance before God or repenting to those around us, ask God for the humility and courage to ask for forgiveness. The blood of Jesus has been shed for our sin already and the victory is won! Nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38-39). If this is a regular practice for you already, Lent serves as a time to refresh this discipline. If this is your first time, how can you make reflection and repentance a regular part of your spiritual life?

When we reflect and repent of our sins, remembering the truth of the Gospel is vital. Here are some verses to pray as you reflect. These are great to memorize, as well!

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation. (Psalm 42:5)

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

As you participate in addition and subtraction this season, keep asking God to search and know your heart. As you pray, ask for his wisdom and vision for your life and where you can repent and receive his grace and mercy.



For additional Lent resources, visit briarcliff.church/lent