

FAITH · HOPE · LOVE

2021 Lent Devotional

A stylized landscape illustration featuring three rounded hills in shades of brown and tan. A large, solid orange sun is positioned behind the middle hill, partially obscured by it. The text "2021 Lent Devotional" is written in a brown, cursive font, arching over the sun.

H | O

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## Introduction

What is Lent?

The word lent stems from: (Middle Eng. lente, “spring,” from Old Eng. lengten, “to lengthen [daylight]”). Lent is a period of forty weekdays before Easter, beginning with Ash Wednesday. The number 40 has biblical significance as it reminds us of the waiting period found in biblical figures. God brought 40 days of rain upon the earth while Noah and his family were rescued in the Ark. Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law from God. Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness before entering the promised land. Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness before entering the promised land. During Lent, we prepare to commemorate and celebrate the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Why do we celebrate Lent?

The church has practiced Lent for most of its history starting at least by the 7th Century and most likely as early as the 4th Century. You will not find the term Lent in the Bible. While there is no Scriptural mandate to celebrate Lent, I believe it to be a helpful practice for a few reasons. While it is not biblically mandated, I think there is some wisdom to the practice of preparation and commemoration. Lent is an opportunity to remind us of our need for repentance. As we slow down to pray, read scripture, fast, and examine ourselves, we are aware of our need for forgiveness. We don't participate in these disciplines to earn forgiveness, for that is given to us by God's loving-kindness, his abundant grace, and rich mercy. This practice sharpens our sense of our sinfulness which makes us keenly aware of our need for God's forgiveness. Thus, we pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lent also heightens our awareness of God's grace. The disciplines don't earn us grace. They are diagnostic tools to show us where we need the healing balm of the gospel of grace.

How to celebrate?

Typically the season of Lent calls for a fast. Fasting can be from food, but you can also fast from other things during Lent. For example, you can refrain from sweets, alcohol, social media, etc. Self-denial is to remind us of the abundance we have in Christ. In addition to fasting, this time of preparation makes us aware of our struggles and temptations. As we fall short, we come to Christ to call out to Him in repentance and receive forgiveness found in his name.

Lenten Devotional

Our first devotional will be on Ash Wednesday, and then it will continue on each Friday up to Good Friday.

Will you join me?

I hope that this devotional will encourage you to join me as I prepare to celebrate Easter. If you are willing, you can join me as I fast on Fridays. I will break my fast at dinner time. Even if you can only commit to fasting one meal, I would love for you to join me. Pray that God will use this time to make us more dependent on him.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Porter J.C." in a cursive style.

## Ash Wednesday

Read: Isaiah 58:1-12

“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

Reflect:

As we enter into the Lenten season, it is essential to respond to this time with proper motives. In this passage, we see that God’s people were doing everything right on the outside, but inwardly, their hearts were far from God. We need to be sure that we are not guilty of the same sin. If you are approaching Lent as a time of preparation with proper motives, then go for it! If you are doing it to curry favor with God, then don’t do it. Therefore, it is vital to ask what are my motives for any Lenten practice. Is it to ready your heart to reflect on God’s goodness and grace found in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ? Or is it to try to reflect false piety? As you enter into this time of Lent, take some time to ready your heart.

Response:

Choose one practice to refrain from, or one practice to start for the next 40 days to serve as preparation for Easter.

## First Friday

Read: Psalm 95:1-11

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.” Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

Reflect:

Have you ever been a part of a church where the people always complained about the music? The music was too loud! Or the music wasn’t loud enough! The lyrics were too repetitive! A church in Southern California, North Coast Church, sought to mitigate worship dissent by creating different worship venues on their campus. They had a venue for traditional hymns, coffee shop style rock, rock music, and contemporary Christian music. I think verses 6-7 in Psalm 95 cut to the heart of worship. Worship is not about style but substance. When we worship, not just singing, but confessing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, and the Sacraments, we are ascribing worth, honor, and glory to the Lord. We are declaring Him to be our God, and we are professing to be his people. I don’t know about you, but I can’t think of a better way to do that than with my family and church family on Sunday afternoons.

Response:

How does your worship practice reflect God’s glory? When you worship the Lord personally or corporately, remember that you are before the Lord, our Maker.

## Second Friday

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reflect:

As followers of Christ, we are called to forgive because we have received forgiveness. What does it mean to say that we forgive? To forgive means we release people from the consequences of their sin against us. Author Chris Brauns reminds us that forgiveness means, "We release them from moral liability and this leads to reconciliation." Just as the Lord graciously provides forgiveness when we respond to the gospel through faith and repentance, we too need to forgive when others ask for our forgiveness. This pattern is rooted in our own experience of the gospel. Are you holding on to bitterness? Is there someone you need to offer forgiveness to? I encourage you to always be in a posture that is ready to forgive.

Response:

If you have knowingly offended someone, go and be reconciled. If you have withheld forgiveness, then forgive those who have asked for it.

## Third Friday

Read: Genesis 32:22-32

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Reflect:

This wrestling match puts any MMA title fight to shame. Here you have an all-night wrestling match. As we read the passage, we realize that this is no ordinary battle. Jacob is wrestling someone who is more powerful than he is, his hip is dislocated by a mere touch. We also see that Jacob is a changed man after this encounter. He was a man who was conniving, deceptive, and striving. God gave Jacob a new name to represent a new identity. If you are in Christ, you too have been delivered and been given a new name, a new identity. This passage encourages us to live according to our new identity in Christ.

Response:

As we reflect on our new identity, take some time to praise God for His faithfulness found in Jesus Christ's finished work. Prayerfully ask God to remind you of your identity in Christ.

## Fourth Friday

Read: Psalm 56

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Reflect:

The Psalmist responds properly to the grace given to him. Observe that there is a refrain two times in this passage. He says, “In God I trust, I shall not be afraid.” He refers to his enemies as flesh (v. 4) and man (v.11). In essence, he says that God, the creator is more powerful than his strongest enemies because they are mere flesh. They are only creatures. Though we too face enemies, whether it be our struggles, the trappings of the world, or the temptation of the devil, these three do not stand against the Almighty God. He is not only capable, but he will rout our enemies! God, likewise, has delivered our soul from death in Christ. Our response is to walk with God!

Response:

Spend some time meditating on the love God has poured out on you through His Son Jesus Christ.

## Fifth Friday

Read: Exodus 1:8–14, 22

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

Reflect:

In Genesis 3, we see a cosmic battle between the Seed of the Women (the people of God) and the Seed of the Serpent (the faithless). The Serpent strikes quickly ending Abel’s life by his brother’s hand. It seems like the Serpent won. However, God will not lose because He cannot lose. He made a promise that the Serpent one day would be crushed. Even when things look grim, God comes through. At the beginning of Exodus, the Israelites situation seems bleak. They are enslaved in a foreign land. They will have to work harder while they mourn as Pharaoh seeks to reduce the population through genocide. But the story does not end there. He redeems His people from the Egyptians. We, too, were enslaved by a foreign power. We were enslaved by sin, but if you are in Christ, you also have been liberated by God’s saving grace. As we are just a little over two weeks from Easter, remember Jesus’ resurrection is your liberation!

Response:

Though we have been freed from sin’s enslavement, we still struggle with remaining sin. Spend some time confessing your sins to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness.

## Sixth Friday

Read: John 15:1-16

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Reflect:

I have good news for you. Jesus is a friend! He refers to his disciples as his friends. This is not a platonic friendship either. This is a friendship that is rooted in a deep and abiding love. Love that is willing to sacrifice everything for those whom he loves. That can be a struggle for us because we often do not feel worthy of God’s love. Many of us struggle with guilt and shame for sins we have committed. While it is true that we are not worthy of God’s love on our own, we are loved in spite of our sin. God, who is rich in mercy, pours out his mercy on us so he can truly be our God and we can be his people.

Response:

Spend some time meditating on the love God has poured out on you through His Son Jesus Christ.

## Seventh Friday

Read: Genesis 22:1-18

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.” And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Reflect:

Easter is right around the corner, so what do Abraham and Isaac have to do with Jesus Christ? We may be tempted to think that this story is just Old Testament stuff and has no relevance to Jesus Christ. When we look at this story through the work of Jesus Christ, we see the significance. It is a story of sacrifice. Abraham was ready to trust God’s promises concerning his son Isaac and believed God to such a degree that he knew that

God would raise his son from the dead. That is how much faith Abraham had in God's promise. God told Abraham to stop, and he provided a ram as a sacrificial substitution. God spared Abraham's son, but God did not spare his own Son. Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" In his grace, God provided something better than a ram. He gave something more permanent than the entire Old Testament sacrificial system for His people. He gave His only Son!

Response:

Good Friday is meant to be a solemn day as we remember that it was our sins that put Jesus Christ on the cross. Spend some time today in silence and reflect on Christ's sacrifice.

