

What is Lent?

Lent is the six-week period before Easter (Resurrection Sunday). These six weeks are called the “Lenten Season.”

The word Lent comes from a variety of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic words meaning “spring, or a time budding with new life and hope.” But for Christians, Lent is not a celebration of nature. Rather, it is a process of prayer and spiritual renewal. The Lenten season emphasizes one’s need to cultivate a deeper walk with Christ through spiritual exercises and disciplines.

In the Western Church tradition, Sunday is considered the day of the Resurrection and skipped over when calculating the length of Lent. Therefore, Lent starts on Ash Wednesday and extends for 40 days (Sundays excluded) before Easter. The Eastern Church tradition, on the other hand, does not skip over Sundays when calculating the length of the Lent. Therefore, Lent always begins on Clean Monday, the seventh Monday before Easter, and ends on the Saturday before Palm Sunday.

There are four things that we take part in during Lent. They are the 4 R’s:

1) REFLECTION

- Lent is a time to refocus and reflect on the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ.

2) REPENTANCE

- In the Lenten season, self-examination is crucial. As we reflect on the cross, it should expose our pride, our self-sufficiency, and our disobedience.

3) RESOLUTION

- One key component of Lent is to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting. It does not necessarily have to be food, but can be anything that clutters our lives or hinders us in our relationship with God. This will vary from person to person: For some it might be TV, for others it might be shopping, etc.

4) RENEWAL

- Lent is known as a time of spiritual renewal and growth. It is a time for people to experience and reflect on the sufferings of Jesus in light of our own personal sins and unrighteousness. Focusing on Jesus, who died so that we may live, will renew our passion and our first love.

Why should we observe Lent?

“Why should we observe lent? Shouldn’t we always have the death and resurrection of Christ in our hearts?”

- Setting aside special times to remember or to experience various things are good for us because we are forgetful people. Even though the death and resurrection of Christ should always be in our hearts, we forget as we try to live this life. If we use this argument, then we should not have retreats, revival meetings, or special church events. But this would be unreasonable because we need opportunities to set aside some special time to get away and renew our hearts with God.

“Why be so legalistic? Since we are now free in Christ, we don’t need to try to live a life of self-denial.”

- Legalism is taking something that is “God-centered” and making it “man-centered.” Legalism is binding and puts us in bondage, while doing things that are God-centered (i.e. spiritual disciplines) is liberating and releases us to love God more. Living a life of self-denial is not only a command of Jesus (Mark 8:34-35, Luke 14:25ff), but we find that those who practice this kind of living are truly “free in Christ”: Free to say “Yes” to God and “No” to the flesh and the things of this world.

“Isn’t Lent more of a tradition? Shouldn’t we do things more out of conviction?”

- Sometimes tradition is good. For example, some of us might have a family tradition of taking vacations together every year. This is a good thing because it re-emphasizes the value of family and of one another. Tradition becomes a burden or a strain when we lose the purpose of it. Once that happens, we just go through the motions, which always leads to half-heartedness. Conviction grows as we begin to pray and understand the purpose of why we do things.

In general, observing Lent will benefit our spiritual life. It will increase our passion for God and it will grow a heart of thankfulness for the cross. It is especially helpful when everything culminates in Passion Week and we have Good Friday service and Resurrection Sunday services. We will not regret it!

How should we observe Lent?

This is where our freedom in Christ comes in. Everyone is different; therefore we will observe Lent in various ways. There is no one right way to do things. But there are some ways for us to consider:

- Spend time deepening your walk and intimacy with God through reading the word and prayer
 - Scripture - What scripture did you read today? Pick a verse or a short passage that you believe God is using to speak to you or that you want to reflect on more
 - Observation - What do you notice that seems significant? What do you observe about what the passage says about God, people, or yourself?
 - Application - What do you believe God is speaking to you about? How will you apply this in your life today? What are some practical ways you can live this out?
 - Prayer - Try writing out a prayer in response to how God spoke to you through His Word
- Fast from something for the duration of Lent. Keep in mind that it should cost us something. What we mean by “cost” is this: If you never eat breakfast and decide to give it up for Lent, then it is not costing you anything. Consider fasting from something you know that at times will be difficult to give up. Here are some examples:

- Media or gaming
- Chocolates or coffee
- Eating out at restaurants
- Commit to praying for specific people in your life who do not know Christ. (*adapted from Lord, Help Me See Their Destiny by Garrett Kell*)
 - **God, help me see lost people as you do.** Help me to see them not just with my natural eyes (2 Corinthians 5:16), but as immortal image bearers who will either live forever under your wrath or forever in the joy of your presence.
 - **God, open doors for the gospel.** God, we believe that you are sovereign over all situations, circumstances, and people. Therefore, we ask you to arrange opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed.
 - **God, give me courage to proclaim Jesus.** God, help us not to be fearful of rejection, misunderstanding, loss of relationships or even retaliation because of our desire to share Christ with others. God, give us courage and boldness in declaring the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20). And as we share Jesus with others, we ask that your presence and assurance would draw them to yourself (John 6:27-29).
 - **God, let me see you transform the hearts of those who do not know you.** We ask that you open the hearts of those who do not know you and that you will remove the veil of unbelief that blinds them from seeing the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). We ask that you give us the privilege of sharing in the joy of heaven by seeing the lost come to repentance and salvation (Luke 15:7, 10).
- Prepare for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday through meditation and memorization of God's word.

Some things to remember in the midst of observing Lent:

- Remember not to judge. Don't look down on people who are not actively observing Lent. Remember, it does not make you more spiritual. If we are not careful, it can definitely lead to spiritual pride.
- Remember to give grace. There are times when someone you know who is fasting from something forgets and indulges. Some things are so much of a habit that we forget. This is when we should just encourage them to keep moving forward. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).
- Remember not to get discouraged. If you fail, pick yourself up and try again. Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again (Proverbs 24:16).
- Remember to focus on Jesus. It is all about what Christ did for us on the cross. May we never forget!