



## Lent Devotional

### Week 1

Wednesday, February 26, through  
Tuesday, March 3, 2020

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#### Wednesday, February 26 What is Lent?

Today is Ash Wednesday and the start of the Lent season. So just what is Ash Wednesday and Lent? It is not something even mentioned directly in the Bible. Lent is the 40 days before Easter and is a time of somber reflection and repentance observed by many churches worldwide. The 40 days is representative of the time Jesus was tempted in the wilderness.

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. Luke 4:1-2*

Forty days is a long time to fast. I would be hungry after 40 hours. Throughout history techniques of fasting were variable. It could be cutting out animal products, Sundays might be excluded, eating once a day, or shorter duration fasts. In modern times, many people choose to give up a luxury item or favorite food for the 40 day period to try to replicate the idea of sacrifice. Some just enjoy the challenge of discipline regardless of belief or purpose.

Ash Wednesday is a tradition in many churches and is a worship event where a priest or pastor dips a finger into ashes- often incinerate palm leaves, and spreads the ash across a person's forehead in the pattern of a cross. Sort of a symbolic way to represent wearing sack cloth and ashes like they did in ancient times to show repentance. Prayer, fasting and generosity are the primary exercises during this time. With a focus on our own mortality and sinful nature during

the Lent season, it can set the stage for the joy of the Easter message and Christ's victory over sin and death.

What is more important than any practice we choose to take on, is our attitude behind that practice. Whatever we do, there should not be any sense of superiority over others who chose to do things differently than we do. Jesus emphasized unity and love throughout His ministry. What would you consider giving up during the Lent season, if anything? Maybe any bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, jealousy, envy, or discord, would be a place to start. You could also emphasize more what you want to put on during this season like Paul instructs us in his letter to the Colossians:

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossian's 3:12-14*

Prayer - Father, as we approach the Easter season, we invite your Holy Spirit fully into every aspect of our lives. In whatever way we move through the season of Lent, we ask that you help us to be lights in this world showing your love and grace to all those around us such that we point the way to you. Amen.

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## **Thursday, February 27**

### **Guilt**

*"But I am a worm and not a man,  
scorned by everyone, despised by the people." Psalm 22:6*

It is estimated that the average brain has some 50,000 thoughts a day and perhaps 70% of those are negative. (from Psychology Today) You can see that there is a lot of room for improvement if we can harness the power of positive thinking. But if you are a follower of Jesus, it is better than that. We really can be free of the guilt that dominates and controls us.

Many of our actions result in guilt because we didn't measure up to the standards we had for ourselves, or someone else's standards, or the law, or because we hurt someone – often someone we love and care about.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could rewind or erase certain segments of our lives? And try again such that the outcome would be different? Then we would no longer carry the heavy burden of guilt

that drives those constant negative thoughts and that weighs us down and controls us. Maybe we can't relive the past again, but we can be free of guilt.

*Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. Romans 3:23-25*

If you are a follower of Jesus, we first acknowledge our sin.

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Romans 3:23*

And we confess our sin to God:

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

And make restitution to the person who we hurt.

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:23-24*

Don't miss this last part. Following Jesus with love in our hearts is not: "I hurt you, I asked God to forgive me, and now things are good."

Following Jesus is this: - I hurt you, I faced my guilt, I asked God to forgive me, and he gave me the forgiveness that I don't deserve, so the least I can do for you, is to give you what you actually deserve. (whatever restitution or forgiveness that might be)

Prayer - Father, thank you for the amazing gift of grace and forgiveness that you have given us. We are guilty, but not condemned, because Jesus took that guilt upon himself. We no longer even have the right to condemn ourselves. The guilt no longer defines us. You accept us and love us as though the sin never happened. How can we not now offer that same love and grace to all who you love in this world. Give us your strength and peace to live free of guilt, no longer a slave to sin and condemnation, because you have set us free. Amen

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## Friday, February 28, Anger

*“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.”*  
*James 4:1-3*

That sounds way extreme! I am only frustrated because my husband keeps leaving the toilet seat up. Or I am rightfully angry because my coworker got all the credit for the project, but I did all the work.

When you see yourself as a victim of unjust, unfair, manipulative, wrong, unethical, bad, unacceptable, or nonsensical behavior by someone else or even just the weather, anger can burn within you and control you. You might even find yourself becoming someone that you don’t even recognize or want to be. But if you can see your responsibility in the emotion, and see that you have choices, then you can start to take back that control, put things into better perspective, and not let that emotion have control over you.

James tells us that you want **what** you don’t have. But often there is a **"who"** to which you direct your anger, and you skip over considering your participation in the situation that makes you angry. If you really think through it, in every case it is because you are not getting what you want. It is not a **"who"** that ignites your anger, but a **"what."**

Like I am angry with ‘\_\_\_\_\_’ because he/she got the credit for my work. Take that a step further. I don’t have the recognition that I want and that I deserve. See that you are not getting **what** you want - recognition, and that people see that you deserve it.

Have you asked God for it? What do you think his answer might be? What are my motives? Is what I want honoring to the Lord? Does what I want bring glory and honor to God, or is it just for my pleasure? Think hard about these questions and then see where your anger level is. Own your responsibility for the situation. **What** is it that you are not getting? It is always something. It is always more than the **"who"** to which the anger is directed.

Prayer - Father, I have given my heart to you. My work on this earth is ultimately for you. Help me to pause in my anger, not because it is wrong, but because I don't want it to control me. I want to guard my heart for you. Help me to see my responsibility in my anger, to see what it is that I want and am not getting. Help me to see my true motives and to turn to you first in prayer for all that I need.

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## **Saturday February 29**

### **Greed**

Moving into our new house was very exciting. We were practically moving into our dream home. Safer neighborhood, kind neighbors, more space and updated everything. Our kitchen had tile that looked like wood planks. The cabinets were dark and custom made and we now had granite counter tops. The kitchen was beautiful. The movers did a great job of bringing in the furniture and placed our kitchen table in the dining room right under the light fixture. It was in its place but completely out of place. You see, we had bought this table right before we got married, 14 years prior to moving into this new home. It was a beautiful, solid, oak table with 4 solid chairs. While it was a beautiful piece, it did not match my current love for the farmhouse kitchen design. In my heart I desired a handcrafted, wood table with a dark top and white or at least light-colored legs. A bench on one side and 4 chairs. Not having an extra \$700 laying around it continued to be a dream. We had a perfectly good table and a new table was just frivolous.

Fast forward 3 years. Our church started a capital campaign to update and expand on our different campuses. My husband and I were in the middle of a three-week fast, praying for direction on his job and our finances. We went to a dessert night, where they talked about future plans for our church and after praying we both felt led to pledge an amount that was nowhere in our budget. Funny thing was, the amount we shared we had each written on a paper and neither of us shared before writing it down. Guess what! It was the same amount! We had no idea where the money would come from. It was not in our budget or our long-term plan but we both knew we felt called to give this particular amount. We have two years to complete this pledge but our pastor encouraged us to give as much as you can, as fast as you can and see what God will do. So, the first weekend after the dessert night I was paying bills. I knew we should give our first part of the pledge. I told my husband what he should type in on the app and then I cringed. He doubled checked to see if that is what I wanted to do and as I said yes, my body tightened, my face winced and I hesitantly said yes. He clicked the button and our payment had been made. Oh my! What a leap of faith. I knew it was what we were called to do and yet **IT WAS NOT IN OUR BUDGET!**

After the initial fear, I was able to move on in my day and knew it was in God's hands. Six hours after we clicked the button, on our family group chat, my nephew and niece-in-law shared they were no longer going to use their table. It was too big for their new home but they wanted to keep it in the family. You will never believe what it looked like. Hand-crafted wood, with a dark top and white legs and it came with 2 benches. Oh, and it was **FREE!!!** Also, a few months later we found a buyer for our business, our business sold and as of next week we will be making our full payment of the remaining balance on our pledge for the capital campaign. Only 6 months into the campaign and our pledge has been met. God is good!!!

God delights in giving his children gifts. He loves you and knows the desires of your heart. I do not believe in the prosperity gospel. God does not want us to be rich with stuff. He wants us to be rich with faith and stories to share His goodness. Originally, I was going to move the oak table to the basement. I had so many plans for the old table. I would now have 2 tables. However, the very next day someone shared their family member was moving into a new home and needed a table. By the following Monday the old table had been placed into its new home. God does not bless so we can build more store houses and keep our things. He blesses us, so He can bless others and use us in the process. *We are given much and much is expected. (Luke 12:48)*

Prayer - Father, thank you for your goodness. We ask for our eyes to be open to the things we are holding onto that we should be using to bless others. Help to increase our faith and know you are a God who gives good and perfect gifts. Give us the peace that passes all understanding and know what you have called us to do will not fail as you go before us. Thank you in advance for the great things you will do through my obedience to release my “things” to you. All good things come from you. Help me to be the steward you have called me to be.

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## **Sunday March 1**

### **Envy**

*And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:4*

Have you ever watched a race or competition, and the person who came in second ran up and congratulated the winner with so much joy and enthusiasm, that it was hard to tell who really won if you had missed them crossing the finish line? You might also have watched the opposite scenario where the person who lost the race looked miserable, angry and depressed. Which scenario would you want to identify with? You may not be doing an athletic competition in your day to day life, but there are plenty of circumstances that happen daily where you have the choice to be content or miserable with where you believe you “placed” that day.

Comparison with others can lead to envy and jealousy. Envy and jealousy lead to self-centered thinking which makes it really hard to love others. We want to guard our hearts against this emotion. Nothing good comes from it.

King Solomon, who was the wisest and richest king ever, wrote Ecclesiastes after he had ‘done it all’ and ‘had it all.’ Solomon concluded that without the Lord, all this striving and toil to achieve is actually meaningless and empty. He calls it ‘chasing after the wind.’ You never arrive because there is always someone or something better, but you keep chasing after ‘it.’ And not

really knowing exactly what ‘it’ is. He calls it a “*miserable business.*” (4:8) Likely this is not how you want to live your life – chasing after the wind and finding life meaningless and miserable.

It is great to strive to do your best and ... “*do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for man.*” *Colossians 3:23*. But even if you win the Gold medal in the Olympics, there will always be someone who will come along and be better than you. Solomon suggests peace with “enough” and with whatever handful that you have in hand.

*Fools fold their hands  
and ruin themselves.  
Better one handful with tranquility  
than two handfuls with toil  
and chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 4:5-6*

So we don’t give up and do nothing, but we give thanks for what we do have. We remember that comparing ourselves with others and what they have, leads to chasing after the wind. If you feel discontent with your one handful, and then strive and toil in an attempt to have two handfuls, you must consider whether all that toiling brings you peace, contentment, and happiness. Did you have time to enjoy your one handful while pursuing the two?

We need to remember our most critical mission. We are to love others rather than compare ourselves with others. We can’t love others very well if we are in envy of them. If you feel envy, rebuke it, and tell yourself that you will not chase after the wind. Give thanks to the Lord for the handful that you have now and the incredible blessings and love that He has for you. Go a step further and congratulate and sincerely rejoice for the person who has what you wanted.

*A heart at peace gives life to the body,  
but envy rots the bones. Proverbs 14:30*

Which do you choose – A heart at peace, or rotting bones?

Prayer - Father, we want to guard our hearts against envy and jealousy. You have blessed us so much with your grace and love. Teach us to have that peace and tranquility with what we have now and where we are now. We don’t want to miss out on the life you have designed for us by letting envy control us and take away the joy that you have set before us. We don’t want to waste our time chasing after the wind and being miserable, and missing the opportunities that you give us right where we are today. Let us truly rejoice with others and love others the way you have shown us how to love. Amen

## Monday, March 2 Pride

*True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. C.S. Lewis*

How can I have pride? I don't really like myself. I put myself down. I find myself easily hurt by the remarks of others. I set high standards for myself, but I can't meet them. I find myself easily angered, hurt, or shamed. How is this pride? I thought pride was having a big ego and thinking highly of oneself.

One of the most clever places pride hides is in low self-esteem. It might seem the opposite of pride, but what word stands out to you most in the paragraph above? It is SELF. Low self-esteem is still focused so much on self, just like someone with a big ego who is totally self-absorbed. It is a tough thing to stomp down. Just when you think you might have it conquered, there it is.

*"If a man thinks he is not conceited, he is very conceited indeed."*  
— C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis had good advice – just don't think about yourself so much. Jesus had even better advice – *"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."* John 13:34. Paul put it this way : *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:3-4*

And then Peter writes this: *"In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*  
1 Peter 5-7

Why does God hate pride? Because He taught us the opposite. Jesus, God incarnate, came into this world as a helpless baby. He washed the feet of His Disciples. If anyone should be above washing people's feet as a servant, it would be Jesus. He could have used His position to great advantage. But he didn't. The greatest act of love that the world has ever seen is when Jesus came in human flesh, and in humility, died a death that we deserved.

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself*



*by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!" Philippians 2:6-8*

Humility is knowing our place before God. And our proper view of God should be reflected in our humble relationships with others for whom Jesus died.

Prayer - Father, we want to keep our focus on you. We get our worth and value from you, not from what we can dredge up from within ourselves or what we can get out of others. Let us humble ourselves before you, knowing how much you love and care about us. Teach us to follow your example to be humble servants to one another, to love one another the way you love us, and to forgive one another because you forgave us. Help us to see others the way you see them, to try to understand and listen, rather than to judge and be heard. Amen.

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### **Tuesday, March 3 Generosity and Guilt**

*"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17*

Lent is a time where people generally practice prayer, fasting, and generosity as the primary spiritual exercises. For myself I always want to modify it to say prayer, fasting, generosity, and guilt. Guilt because I believe I can never do the first three good enough. I pray, but I could always pray more. I try fasting but then can't function well at my job and have to stop. I give, but do I give enough? There are endless needs out there. How do I balance it all properly?

First remember that we are saved by God as a gift through faith and not by anything we can possibly do to earn it.

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8*

Did you know that Freedom Church takes 10% of the incoming budget to give to those in need in Los Alamos County? Don't have a couple hundred dollars to give away? Take the request to your Connect Group and start meeting some needs out there.

Realize there is way more to generosity than giving money. Be generous also with your attitude of heart. A smile, a caring word, a few minutes of your time offering a helping hand, or an encouraging note or text could make all the difference to someone having a bad day or shouldering an exhausting burden.

Prayer - Father, I want to know you more and live in the love relationship with you for which I

was designed. I know nothing else brings fulfillment and meaning in my life. Show me how to be generous with my heart, as well as with my money and the material things with which I have been blessed. You have modeled the ultimate generosity for us. You did not spare your own Son, but gave him up for us all. How then can we not trust you to graciously give us all things and in turn give to all those who you love.