

What is Lent anyway?

Lent is the season leading up to Easter. The name Lent comes from the Old English word for Spring, and it reminds us of new growth. Lent is a period of 40 days of fasting before the great feast of Easter.

We fast—let go of something—so we can better appreciate the amazing good news of Easter. If you pay close attention to the calendar you'll notice that the period from Ash Wednesday to Easter is 47 days, not 40. That is not a mistake, the seven Sundays are not part of Lent—we don't fast on Sundays, we feast! EVERY Sunday is a way to remember Easter, even (or especially) in the middle of Lent.

Why is fasting important? Fasting is letting go of something so we can hold onto God more closely. Fasting creates space in our lives to say yes to God. We are *very* used to saying yes to whatever whim crosses our mind, whether it is good for us or not. Fasting is a way of reminding ourselves that we can say no sometimes. Reminding ourselves that we can live God's way instead of being blown about the winds of fashion, culture, fads, or envy.

What is fasting? It is refraining from something for a period of time so that we can pay attention to God instead. It is a way of telling ourselves to STOP. To take a break from the craziness. People often fast from food (certain meals or certain kinds of food), but we can also fast from anything that distracts us from God—TV, social media, whatever. Perhaps it is deciding to only look at Facebook at certain times in a day. Perhaps it is choosing to not look at your phone until after you've read Scripture and prayed.

Have you ever tried to have an important conversation in a room where the TV is playing loudly? You really want to turn off the TV or move to a different, quieter place, right? It is the same with our relationship with Jesus. Our world is full of distractions, many of them pinging us from our phones. We need a way to “turn off the TV” (or the phone) so we can really listen to our conversation with God. That is what we try to do during Lent.



Ways to Connect with God Each Day

Each Sunday during Lent we will have a week's worth of daily devotions for you. I hope that you use them or some other way of intentionally stopping, quieting down, and connecting with God each day. It is a great habit to build!

Here are three options you can consider.

The One Minute Pause This is an app for your phone (yes, that is ironic!) that will help you stop and pause for a minute (or 3 minutes, or whatever) twice a day and turn your worries over to Jesus. It is very easy to use and a powerful habit to practice.

Common Prayer this Book (Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals) and App (by the developer School for Conversion) offers a wonderful daily prayer practice. Pastor Steve and Alice love it!

Daily Prayer App (subtitled a guide to spiritual rhythm) is also a wonderful and short way to develop a habit of daily prayer.

All three let you set times to be reminded to pray or be quiet with God. Using technology designed to distract us (our phones and apps) to instead connect us with ultimate reality is very subversive! I hope you will experiment with some of these.

