

A Holy Lenten Invitation:

A look at different Lenten Practices

In a few weeks, we, as Episcopalians, and as Bishop Curry puts it, the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement will begin our Lenten Journey towards Easter in Ash Wednesday's service. In that service, we are invited to the observance of a Holy Lent. The invitation comes after the sermon and before the imposition of the ashes. Because I am both a self-professed History nerd and Jesus Nerd, I love this invitational part of the Ash Wednesday liturgy.

The invitation begins with a history of the beginnings of Lent, saying that our early siblings in Christ who "observed the days of our Lord's Passion and Death with great devotion, therefore, a season of penitence and fasting emerged. The invitation describes that the time was meant to prepare for baptism, reconciling sins, and restoring people to the community and life in Christ.

After this brief but beautiful history comes a look into early Christian lives that reminds us that we are part of something greater than ourselves. Further along, we are officially invited to an observance of a Holy Lent. If you are like me and have asked yourself, what does that mean, observe a Holy Lent? Fear not because, in great Book of Common Prayer fashion, the explanation is after the official invite. The invitation goes on to explain observance as "self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Word.

Growing up and into my young twenties, I usually gave up something like Coke or Chocolate for Lent. Perhaps you do or did the same thing? If so, do not worry, you are not alone.

According to Stephanie Hertenberg in her article on giving up in Lent, most Christians who participate in Lent deny themselves the pleasure of certain foods and drinks, particularly chocolateⁱ. While giving up chocolate or sweets is just fine as a way of observing self-denial in Lent, I think we can go a little deeper with what the invitation to a holy lent is asking us to observe. Self-Denial is only one piece of a Holy Lent. The Book of Common Prayer gives us six different practices for observing a Holy Lent; self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and reading and meditating on God's Word.

Part of the reason we give up chocolate and sweets or some other pleasure is that it is easy to think of and give up. But what happens if we challenge ourselves to go deeper, to reach for God a little more during these 40 days? I want to offer you some ideas for observing a Holy Lent that I have either participated in, want to experience, or have researched. I hope that the following list will allow for a fruitful discernment and observance of a Holy Lent as we prepare ourselves for the days of the Lord's passion and Death in Holy Week and Easter.

Observe a Holy Lent by:

1. Praying: These are a handful of prayer practices that may interest you in Lent.

- a. First of all, there is always the daily office we, as Anglicans, are rooted in. You can use your Book of Common Prayer and pray by yourself or go to our Facebook page and pray with us. If you want the ease of not pointing all your pages before prayer, you can go to the Venite app website, and the website will load a bulletin to follow. You can find it at the link below.

<https://www.venite.app/>

- b. Another way of praying the daily office that is rooted in our tradition is *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*. This publication of prayers, Scripture, and meditation

allows one with a busy schedule to find time to sit down and pray. The book follows our Church Seasons and the monastic Hours in shorter periods. You can buy the book or find it in PDF form at the link below.

https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/01/daily_prayer_all_seasons_eng_final_pages_0.pdf

- c. If you enjoy the outdoors, either by hiking in the woods or walking the neighborhood, a spiritual practice I enjoy is walking prayer or Holy hikes. The hike and walking is a time to be with God in God's creation. We do not always take the time to look and listen for God in these times, but it is important to listen for God in all of creation. I invite you to use this guide that I have linked to guide your prayers.

<https://buildfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Holy-Hikes-Adults.pdf>

- d. If in your prayers you enjoy the practice of listening and meditating, the Pray as You Go App. is a beautiful prayer practice. It is a practice that I have been participating in for a couple of years. The App consists of a reading from Scripture, a reflection, and music. It is a time to listen, reflect, and meditate.

2. Reading and Meditating on God's Word

- a. *The Way of Julian of Norwich: A Prayer Journey Through Lent.* By Sheila Upjohn. This book is one of my Spiritual practices for Lent this year. The book follows Julian's book, *Revelations of Divine Love* with Scripture, and offers meditation opportunities.

- b. **Creating a Lenten Prayer Space at Home.**

- i. Having a designated space to go and pray is a great practice all year round.

Take the time this Lent to find that perfect spot to be alone with God in prayer and meditation of God's Word. Here is an article on creating a prayer space at home.

<https://buildfaith.org/creating-lenten-prayer-space-home/>

- c. *Sense and Sensibility a Lenten Exploration* By Sam Portaro. I have not read this book, but it sounds like a good read and spiritual practice. Portaro explores our five physical senses in relation to ourselves and God by walking through the Lenten season to Easter. This book may be my practice for next year's Lent. Perhaps some of you would like to join me in that exploration?

- d. Here are a couple of other books for adults

- i. *Sticky Faith* by Kara Powell

Seamless Faith by Traci Smith

Welcome to the Book of Common Prayer by Vicki K. Black

- e. Here are a couple of other books for children.

- i. *When God Made You* by Matthew Paul Turner

Let Us Pray, A Little Kid's Guide to the Eucharist by Jennie Turrell

*Me and God, A Book of Prayer Partners*_by Deb Lund

The Clown of God, an old story told and illustrated by Tomie dePaola

Let There Be Light by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In God's Name by Phoebe Stone

The Tale of Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt and Tim Jonke

(Illustrator)

- 3. Fasting and Self-Denial:** Growing up Catholic, fasting, and self-denial was a practice observed every Friday when we would give up eating meat. As a lover of all food that comes from the life-giving waters, you would think this would be a great practice. It was not. I grew up with a mom that hated seafood of all kinds with a passion; therefore, it was usually Mac and Cheese. The point is that we are asked to fast as Christ did, to give up earthly things, and feast on the Word of God. This practice is probably the most difficult for us to participate in because we deny ourselves of life-giving sustenance. As I mentioned, this is a practice of giving up earthly things. Food is definitely an earthly thing that we love and need, but there are other non-food earthy items that we could deny ourselves. For example, technology, phone, iPad or tablet, t.v. these are all things on which we can fast. Whatever you choose, remember that you are fasting so that your focus is more on God than earthly things.
- 4. Micro practices:** Micro practices are a combination of small Lenten practices throughout Lent.
- a. **Lenten Calendar:** I have included the link to the Calendar. This is something that I have not done, but I am interested in doing this Lent. The Calendar used here is one made for families to incorporate faith and families. You can use this one or come up with your own.
<https://youngclergywomen.org/lent-home-spirit-filled-practices-families/>
 - b. **Forty days of giving:** This is for those who are looking for a practice of giving during Lent. I have enjoyed this practice with my family, especially the kiddos.

- i. Collect one can/box per day and deliver your donation to the Food Pantry at the end of Lent (or drop off some cans each week).
- ii. Or Pledge a dollar amount each day and submit your pledge x 40 at the end of Lent.

I hope that this list starts your curiosity of different spiritual practices not only during a Holy Lent but throughout the entire Holy year. I hope that these practices bring you and your family hope as we make the long journey through Lent to the Risen Christ. I am very interested in what practices you may be doing this Lent, either from this list or from your practices. I would love to see and hear about them.

Blessings this Lenten season,

Bryan+

ⁱ Stephanie Hertenberg. Giving up Chocolate, then you're doing Lent Wrong.
<https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/religious-observances/lent/giving-up-chocolate-youre-doing-lent-wrong.aspx>