

This week begins the season of Lent. These 40 days are set apart for intentional spiritual discipline in preparation for Easter. They reflect the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness and help us to ready our hearts to experience anew the Cross and the Resurrection. In worship, churches who practice Lent choose not to sing hymns with the word “Alleluia” from this Sunday until Easter morning. The joy of God's redemption is more poignant when we take time to remember our human frailty, our weakness, and our mortality. A thousand resurrections will ring hollow if we cannot tell the truth about the crosses of this world. As the beloved song says, “We are weak, but God is strong.”

I encourage you, this Lent, to spend quiet time in a new spiritual practice or fast from something that distracts or discourages you. As you consider what path you might take, here are two pairs of guiding questions that have been helpful to me:

“When I wake up on Resurrection morning, how do I want to be different? How can I get there over the next 40 days?”

And, “What does God want to hand me? (For example, hope, peace, joy, rest). In order to receive it, what do I need to lay down?”

The following are two opportunities for spiritual practice this season. Consider choosing one. The first is a prayer practice and the second is a program of scripture study.

#### The Examen

The Examen is a nearly 500 year old practice of reflection at the end of the day that originated with the monk, St. Ignatius. This model of reflection gives you serious pause to consider where God was in your day and how you were in response to God.

Each evening, find a spot where you are not likely to be interrupted. Sit down and settle down. Relax. You may want to light a candle or dim lights just to mark a transition into prayer time.

1. Recall that you are in the presence of God. No matter where you are and no matter what you are doing God is present. God's voice speaks through the beauty of the things God has made. God brings you messages upon the lips of friends, family members, and sometimes even total strangers. God whispers quietly through the Holy Spirit within you. God is here. God is now.
2. Spend a moment looking over the activities of the day with gratitude. In your mind move through the events of the day. Revisit concrete moments, paying attention to all that your senses can re-summon of those moments.
3. Ask God to send you the Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions and attitudes and motives with honesty and patience, to look on your actions with grace that you might learn from them and grow more Christ-like.
4. Now review your day. You are examining the internal movements and motivations that occurred within the activity of the day. Who did you interact with, why and how? What did you do? Why did you make this choice and in what spirit did you behave? When were you motivated out of the faithful response of God? When were you driven by your own desire? Consider when and where the Word and Christ influenced the choices you made throughout the day. What other influences motivated your actions? The more you examine yourself in this manner, the more you will become aware of both your own spirit and God's Spirit within you.
5. Now that you have thoroughly considered the day from a faith filled perspective, discuss your day in prayer with Christ. Ask forgiveness for the wrongs that you regret. Ask for strength to change and for God to pour forth the Spirit and soften your heart. Give thanks for God's grace

throughout your day. Praise God for blessings or the moment you sense that God offered guidance or intervention. Resolve from what God has revealed to you through the Holy Spirit to move forward in whatever action is appropriate. You may want to conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

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## The Bible's "Top Forty"

The following list is a compilation of 40 core passages from the Bible. This list was taken from the book, *The Disciple Making Church*, by Rev. Glen McDonald. If you read one of the selections each day during Lent, then by the time Easter comes you will have experienced a good overview of the Bible. If you miss reading don't try to play catch up just start where you left off and keep moving. Pick-up a missed reading on one of the lighter days of reading.

1. Creation, Eden and the Fall (Genesis 1-3)
2. Noah and the Ark (Genesis 6-8)
3. Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22)
4. The Story of Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 37-45)
5. Moses in the Nile and at the Burning Bush (Exodus 1-4)
6. The Ten Plagues, Passover and the Red Sea (Exodus 7-14)
7. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)
8. Joshua Confronts the Walls of Jericho (Joshua 1-6)
9. The Misadventures of Samson (Judges 13-16)
10. The Love Story of Ruth (Ruth 1-4)
11. David vs. Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
12. Job's Plight and God's Response (Job 1-3, 38-42)
13. The Shepherd's Psalm (Psalm 23)
14. David's Personal Confession (Psalm 51)
15. Psalms of Worship and Praise (Psalm 93-100)
16. God's Intimate Love and Care (Psalm 139)
17. Soaring on Wings like Eagles (Isaiah 40)
18. The Messiah as Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53)
19. The New Covenant is Predicted (Jeremiah 31)
20. Three Men in the Oven (Daniel 3)
21. Daniel and the Lion's Den (Daniel 6)
22. The Story of Jonah the Reluctant Preacher (Jonah 1-4)
23. The Christmas Story (Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2)
24. The Word Became Flesh in Jesus (John 1)
25. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
26. Jesus Feeds 5000 and Walk on Water (Mark 4)
27. Jesus Talks to Nicodemus (John 3)
28. Parables of the Good Samaritan & Lost Son (Luke 10,15)
29. Jesus' Prediction of the End of the World (Matthew 24)
30. Palm Sunday, Last Supper, Trial and Crucifixion (Mark 11- 15)
31. Jesus Rises from the Dead (Luke 24, John 20)
32. The Holy Spirit Arrives on Pentecost (Acts 2)
33. Paul Meets Jesus on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9)
34. Nothing Can Separate Us From God's Love (Romans 8)
35. Love is the Greatest Quality (1 Corinthians 13)

36. The Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5)
37. Rejoice in the Lord Always (Philippians 4)
38. The Hall of Fame of Faith (Hebrews 11)
39. Because God is Love, We should Love Each Other (1 John 3-4)
40. A Heavenly Vision (Revelation 21-22)