



LENT 2017

Part I



VINTAGE**CHURCH**

INTRODUCTION

Lent is historically a time of repentance; by reading scripture, fasting, and praying, we want to dig up things in our heart that we need to repent of and trust all the more in the Lord. Our goal in observing Lent is not to earn favor with God by fasting and praying, but to allow us a season to reflect on the reality of the darkness that surrounds us and the light available in Jesus. Our hope is that this Lent devotional guide will help us as we pursue what God would have for us as a church this season.

As we journey through Lent together, there will be views each week of our own sin. The point of this isn't to berate ourselves, but to truly grasp our need for the death of Jesus on our behalf. When we understand the weight of our sin and the depths of our need for mercy, we truly understand the monumental nature of what was accomplished on Calvary. And as we look at our sin each week we'll have opportunities to worship the Lord for his endless grace and steadfast love towards us despite our sin.

We encourage you to dive deep into Lent. Use this guide to work through areas of your life that distract you from the Lord and clutter your life. Traditionally Lent observers pick something to fast from throughout the 40 days of Lent. We'll be observing these fast days on Thursdays, but participate in whatever way is most helpful for your spiritual growth this season. Consider what will allow you to draw closer to God the most, and exercise courage in your decisions to fast.

Going through this guide as a family

This guide has been written for individuals to walk through Lent and prepare for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. We want to invite you as parents to lead your kids in this journey. We are excited about the idea of Vintage families sitting with their kids each day during Lent and opening the word, talking about their relationships with Jesus, and praying together. Maybe your family already does this, or maybe you've never done anything like this. This guide has been designed with a supplement for families to implement this guide for family discussion. Here are some helpful tips as you help your kids in this journey:

- **Lead** - The family supplement will help in applying this guide to children, but you as parents will have to apply it to your specific children. We encourage you to dive in; it's not unrealistic to lead preschoolers in spiritual discussions, bible reading, and prayer each night. This guide will work best if you as parents prayerfully engage in the guide personally before leading your children.
- **Pick a time** - Choose a time that will work for your family during the week. The guide is designed for 5 days each week and will take around 15 minutes with kids.
- **Make it a priority** - Communicate to your kids that this is a priority. The exercise of fasting during the week and putting things on pause once a day communicates to our kids that we value Jesus more than anything else.
- **Get in a rhythm** - This guide will lead you to Easter. Our hope and prayer is that your family will develop a rhythm of being in God's word and praying together, and that it will continue well past Easter Sunday.

1

INTRO

Wednesday, March 1 - Friday, March 3

ASH WEDNESDAY

Read Matthew 16:21–17:9

Lent is a powerful tradition within the Church that dates back more than 1700 years. It lasts forty days (minus Sundays, which are set aside for celebration) not without reason. The number 40 is a number that typically represents extreme discipline on the part of God's followers. Here are a few of the many examples found in Scripture:

- Moses went up to the Mountain of God for 40 days (Exodus 24: 15-18).
- Elija fleeing to Horeb (1 Kings 19).
- After his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days (Matthew 4:2).

When Jesus climbed the mountain with three of the disciples, he had a deep conversation with Moses and Elijah, each of whom had experienced 40 days in search of or in communion with God. Have you ever thought about what God might say if you were to listen to him for 40 days? Lent is associated with fasting, and the heart behind this is to quiet the noise, reduce the clutter, remove what we look to for comfort in order to listen. Our hope through Lent is to re-orient our hearts and minds towards the Kingdom of God, which is truly reality.

"By denying ourselves something we enjoy, we discipline our wills so that we are not slaves to our pleasures...By disciplining the will to refuse pleasures when they are not sinful, a habit is developed which allows the will to refuse pleasures when they are sinful. There are few better ways to keep one's priorities straight than by periodically denying ourselves things of lesser priority to show us that they are not necessary and focus our attention on what is necessary." -James Atkin

Listen to God today. To do so, try carving out some time where you retreat to a quiet place. Pray, relax, and listen. It's not easy, and at times your mind will wander. Ask God to speak, and to calm your heart. Allow him some time before you give up! The next way to listen is by checking in throughout your day. At moments throughout the day, whatever you're doing, stop and ask God if He's speaking to you. You'll be surprised how often the answer is yes.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Merciful God, you called us forth from the dust of the earth; you claimed us for Christ in the waters of baptism.

Look upon us as we enter these forty days bearing the mark of ashes, and bless our journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth.

May our fasting be hunger for justice;

our alms, a making of peace;

our prayer, the chant of humble and grateful hearts.

All that we do and pray is in the name of Jesus,

for in his cross you proclaim your love

for ever and ever. Amen.

Family discussion:

- Talk about how you plan to participate in Lent together as a family.
- Talk about what you want to gain from Lent together.
- Read Matthew 16:21-17:9. What does it mean to "deny" yourself?
- Read the quote from James Atkin above. How does discipline help us enjoy God more?
- Pray as a family that you would enjoy Lent together. Ask the Lord to reveal himself to your family and that you would grow closer to him in this season.

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

"One of the goals of this season is to reveal habits or mindsets that may be preventing us from experiencing true freedom and wholeness. The restrictions imposed by the Lenten fast seek not to deny the goodness of the many blessings we enjoy in this life, but rather to remind us that they are, in fact, gifts. Above all, a fast is intended to nurture a sense of gratitude to the giver and to encourage us to share these gifts with those in need." - Beth Bevis

Traditionally, people have fasted by eliminating luxury items from their diets, but the nature of your fast is up to you. If you're new to fasting, just leave an item or two you'd normally eat each day out of your diet. Every time you start to get a craving for those items, you will be reminded of your fast, and then you can take the initiative to pray instead of eat.

If you're unsure about whether or not denying yourself something you're used to has any real value, read the following quote. It might help you see why so many practice this discipline.

“The normal ‘food’ that we eat (distractions, busyness, entertainment, ordinary life) works to shield us from the deeper chaos that lurks beneath the surface of our lives.

Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give [God] a chance to feed us.” - Ronald Rolheiser

In whichever way you choose to fast, whether daily or weekly, from a food or a habit such as social media, a critical part is prayer. Whenever you have a craving for the item(s) you’ve given up, it’s a great idea to pray and to talk to God about it. Each time you talk to God during your fast, listen for his response. God is thrilled to be in a relationship with you where you share openly and honestly what’s on your heart and in your head. Let him share the same with you.

Listen to God’s love as he shares.

Family discussion:

- Read Joel 2:12-13.
- Read the included material about fasting. Remind your family that fasting is not just a crash diet; it’s, but is something you give up to sharpen your focus on God.
- Discuss something from which you as individuals or you as a family will fast during lent. It may be something you abstain from until Easter, or maybe something you fast from every Thursday during lent.

FRIDAY

At the end of this first week we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

“[Repentance] means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God.” -John Piper

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

As we close the first week of Lent, write down what you hope happens as a result of this 40 day journey. Write down the steps you’ll take to quiet the noise, reduce the clutter, and remove what we look to for comfort in order to listen. Finish with a time of prayer, asking your Father in Heaven to hear and help.

Family discussion:

- Read and discuss Revelation 3:19
- What does it mean to repent?
- What kinds of things do we repent of?
- Why should we repent?
- Take a moment to talk about things in your life of which you need to repent. As parents, lead in this discussion by being honest.
- Pray that the Lord would help you repent of sin throughout Lent.

2

HUMILITY

Monday, March 6 - Friday, March 10

MONDAY

Read Job 42:3-6

Last week we celebrated Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent. For hundreds of years believers have gathered together on Ash Wednesday to start the Lenten season of fasting and repentance. Typically this gathering involves pastors or priests placing ashes on the heads of believers and quoting from Genesis 3, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Wearing ash and dust are ancient symbols of mourning. Throughout scripture we see examples of believers wearing ashes as a sign of repentance and humility, and we see an example of this in the book of Job. Job lost his entire family and livelihood to disaster. Later on, Job demanded an answer for why God could have allowed this misfortune. "Oh that I knew where I might find [God], that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments." (Job 23:3-4) Job had lived an upright and wholesome life. It made sense to him that disaster should happen to the wicked, but not the righteous like him. Job was incredulous.

In turn, God rebuked Job for his pride, saying, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer." (Job 40:2) Job confesses, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:3-6) This time Job wears ashes not as a sign of loss, but as a sign of repentance.

The story of Job isn't really fun to read, if only because it communicates the uncomfortable truth that every one of us, even a respectable man who lost everything, has to repent of pride. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis says it this way:

"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free...pride. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride."

Take a moment today to grapple with that truth. We all have pride to repent of. Start this season by humbly admitting your utmost need for God and trusting that he is mighty to save.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Father, I know that I have sinned and fallen short of your glory. I know that I have sinned intentionally and in ways I have been blind to. I know that in my sin I was separated from you and without hope, and in my pride I have often refused your help. But I also know that you are merciful, that on the cross these sins were paid for and I was made clean, and that you are my loving Father.

Will you help me this week to trust in you and not in myself?

Will you help me look boldly at the areas of pride in my life and confess that pride to you?

Will you help me to repent of my pride and worship you alone?

Will you help me be humble with you and draw near to your throne of grace?

Family discussion:

- Talk as a family about the C.S. Lewis quote above.
- Why do you think pride is something God doesn't like in us?
- Read Job 42:3-6. What was Job's new attitude towards God after he realized he had sinned against him?
- Pray together as a family that God would show you how great He is during these next few weeks, and that a better view of God would give us a better view of ourselves - from dust to dust.

TUESDAY

Read Ecclesiastes 16:5-6, James 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:6-7

God hates pride. He absolutely hates it.

In Proverbs 8:13 he says, "Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." That's some strong language from the Lord. But why does God hate pride so much? C.J. Mahaney, in his book *Humility*, explains it this way:

Pride is when sinful human beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon Him.

Mahaney explains that this description recalls the cosmic rebellion of Satan. Isaiah 14:13 elaborates Satan's prideful desires this way: "You said in your heart 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high.'"

Simply put, your pride is similar to Satan's. It's not just a bad habit or a character flaw. It's insurrection. God directs his forceful language at our pride not to scorn us but to show us just how insidious pride is. He hates it because 1. it robs him of glory and 2. it twists our hearts away from the right, healthy position of worshiping God in favor of worshiping ourselves.

Pause and take a moment to reflect on the severity pride. Pray that God would open your eyes to areas of pride in your life and help you regard it as seriously as he does.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Almighty Father, I confess that I am prideful. In ways I'm aware of and in ways I'm not, I seek my own glory over yours. I have rebelled against you as king and tried to wear your crown. Forgive me for the pride in my heart.

I submit to you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Help me do so wholly and completely.

I long to seek your rule over my life. Help me do so faithfully.

I believe that you alone are worthy to be worshiped. Help me keep my eyes fixed on you.

I trust you as the sole source of goodness. Help me desire you above all others.

I see the cross and know that in Jesus I am forgiven. Help me not forget this.

Amen.

Family discussion:

- Talk as a family about C.J. Mahaney's definition of pride.
- Read James 4:6-7. What does it mean that God "opposes the proud"?
- Why does God dislike pride so much?
- How do we go about getting rid of pride in our lives?

WEDNESDAY

Read Philippians 2:1-11

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis spends a chapter talking about pride, which he calls “the great sin.” In it he says:

“Pride...has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.”

Our prideful actions towards God might be hard to uncover, but our pride towards others isn't. Think of the last time you felt disrespected, underappreciated, or offended by someone. Odds are your pride was injured. Pride accounts for the vast majority of our temper flare ups, outbursts, and arguments. Pride creates enmity between us and others, and that enmity boils over into strife.

Now, take a moment and reflect on Philippians 2:1-11. Paul admonishes us to “in humility count others as more significant.” If you want to put enmity to rest, count your enemy as more important than yourself and you'll find the fires of your enmity doused.

But where do we get the example for counting others as more important than ourselves? In Jesus, who “emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.” The God of the universe came in the form of a servant to die a sinner's death for us, his enemies. Romans 5:10 says “while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son.” That truth should amaze us anew every morning.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Thank you Father for sending Jesus to live the obedience I couldn't live, to die in my place and to pay for the sin I've committed against you. Thank you for the perfect picture of humility I have in Jesus, who came to earth as my servant even though he was God. Help me Father as I try to walk in obedience and put away my pride. Help me look to the humility of Jesus and remember that you alone are worthy of all glory and honor and praise. Amen.

Family discussion:

- Talk as a family about how pride harms your relationships with others.
- How does pride harm your relationship with God?
- Read Philippians 2:1-11. How does God want us to behave towards one another?
- How can we be more like Jesus' example of humility in this passage?

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

"One of the goals of this season is to reveal habits or mindsets that may be preventing us from experiencing true freedom and wholeness. The restrictions imposed by the Lenten fast seek not to deny the goodness of the many blessings we enjoy in this life, but rather to remind us that they are, in fact, gifts. Above all, a fast is intended to nurture a sense of gratitude to the giver and to encourage us to share these gifts with those in need." - Beth Bevis

Traditionally, people have fasted by eliminating luxury items from their diets, but the nature of your fast is up to you. If you're new to fasting, just leave an item or two you'd normally eat each day out of your diet. Every time you start to get a craving for those items, you will be reminded of your fast, and then you can take the initiative to pray instead of eat.

If you're unsure about whether or not denying yourself something you're used to has any real value, read the following quote. It might help you see why so many practice this discipline.

“The normal ‘food’ that we eat (distractions, busyness, entertainment, ordinary life) works to shield us from the deeper chaos that lurks beneath the surface of our lives.

Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give [God] a chance to feed us.” - Ronald Rolheiser

In whichever way you choose to fast, whether daily or weekly, from a food or a habit such as social media, a critical part is prayer. Whenever you have a craving for the item(s) you’ve given up, it’s a great idea to pray and to talk to God about it. Each time you talk to God during your fast, listen for his response. God is thrilled to be in a relationship with you where you share openly and honestly what’s on your heart and in your head. Let him share the same with you.

Listen to God’s love as he shares.

Family discussion:

- Read Joel 2:12-13 again.
- Read the included material about fasting. Remind your family that fasting is not just a crash diet; it’s, but is something you give up to sharpen your focus on God.
- Discuss something from which you as individuals or you as a family will fast during lent. It may be something you abstain from until Easter, or maybe something you fast from every Thursday during lent.

FRIDAY

After four days of prayer, examining our hearts, and confessing our sin, today we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

Throughout the season of Lent we progress towards celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which we find a source of humility and repentance. John Stott said this:

Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to be saying to us, “I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.” Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.

Read through the lyrics of Isaac Watts’ hymn “When I survey the wondrous cross” below. If you know this hymn, dare to sing it aloud in worship:

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

As we close the week, take a moment to consider areas of your life where you have been prideful. Write these down. Consider areas of pride you need to confess to others, and seek forgiveness. Finally, as you list out these areas and start working on them, trust that God is pleased with you because of Jesus, not based on how good you are at being humble.

Family discussion:

- Read and discuss Revelation 3:19
- Read the quote and discuss: "All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size."
- As this week ends, talk about ways that you each can work on practicing humility and confessing our pride to one another.

3

IDOLATRY

Monday, March 13 - Friday, March 17

MONDAY

Read Romans 1:21-25 and Matthew 6:24

The word “idolatry” may seem like an outdated, ancient, even confusing word. What does it mean, exactly? The New City catechism, a tool for parents and children alike, defines idolatry as this:

Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

While we may read scripture and look down on people in ancient times for bowing down to a golden calf or other such idol, we are no less guilty of idolatry today. In fact, it may be safe to say this is the original and foundational sin: ascribing glory to anything other than God, the only one deserving of it. Because the issue lies not with the item but the heart of the idolater, it takes humility and honesty to identify and admit our idolatry. As we’ll see this week, it also takes God’s help in order to turn from our comforting idols to God. For example, work is not a bad thing. But pouring our identity into our career can turn it into an idol. Food and drink are gifts of God, but looking to them for our comfort turns them into idols as well.

Our prayer for this week is that God would both reveal our idols and graciously remove them from our tight grip. **A warning: this takes courage.**

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

God, my Father, I have a problem. I may not even know it, or if I do, I've not had the courage to admit it. Like a child with a pacifier, I've been looking to this for comfort, and refused to give it up. I admit that I don't want to give it up. I would never say that your gifts are more satisfying than knowing you, but that's what the evidence of my life shows.

God, will you help me this week?

Will you decisively pull the idol from my tight grip?

Will you help me trust you for my fulfillment, my joy, my comfort?

Will you help me see, feel, and accept your love?

I want to grow in my knowledge of your love and forgiveness, and through that knowledge, worship you alone.

Family discussion:

- What is an idol?
- Where in the Bible do we see idols?
- Read Romans 1:21-25 and Matthew 6:24 together.
- Read the New City Catechism definition of idolatry from the guide.
- Pray together that God would both reveal our idols to us and graciously remove them from our tight grips.

TUESDAY

Read Deuteronomy 7:6-11 and 30:15-20

What does God say in his word about our worship of him and our worship of other things?

As you read these passages, take note of the following:

What reasons God gives for choosing and sustaining his people

What causes God grief

God tells us we are choosing between life and death. Why would we choose things other than God to fulfill us? Justin Buzzard, in his article "Idolatry Is Like a Pacifier" writes these helpful words:

This is why the allure of idolatry is so strong in our lives. We attach our attention, affection, and assurance to created things rather than the Creator because of the sin in our own hearts and because of the many ways other people have sinned against us. There's a double power at work here. When we were young, probably without even knowing it, many of us determined to never again experience the hurt and shame that came from the hands of another person. So we selected a pacifier of self-protection to carry with us at all times.

Some of us chose to not feel. Some chose to always be in control. Some chose to hide. Some chose to be religious. Some of us chose to run away.

Now we've grown older. And in rare moments of honesty we're able to admit, or start to admit, that we have a problem. The pacifier that we thought would protect us and satisfy us, has only hurt us. It's actually caused us to hurt other people too. This is what always happens when we let something be for us what only God can be for us.

Today, take an honest look at your life (not your intentions, but your actions) and determine how you have or have not honored God. Tomorrow we'll spend time confessing these things and receiving God's mercy, but for today examine your heart. Listen to God - as a loving Father, his desire is to free us from foolishly seeking fulfillment where it cannot be found.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

God, I have read your words in which you reveal your reasons for choosing people, for disciplining people, for caring for people. I have read what the results of my actions deserve. When I pause and reflect honestly, I see my guilt. I have spent most of my life justifying my actions, ignoring my treason, and downplaying my sin. I compare myself to others and find comfort in being better than some and making excuses for why I'm not as good as others. This game of comparison is not found in scripture, but is what I think and do in order to feel good about myself, rather than confess my sin to you and repent, turning back to you and your commandments.

Father, over this next day, will you help me see my actions and what my heart has loved? As you do this, will you also hold me tight so that I may know your love amidst seeing my brokenness?

Family discussion:

- Read Deut. 7:6-11 and 30:15-20
- Why does God choose and stay faithful to his people?
- What makes God sad about idolatry?
- Think about ways in your life that you have not honored God. Pray together that, as a family, you would help one another honor God.

WEDNESDAY

Read Hosea 11:8-9 and 14:4-9

In light of yesterday's readings and your contemplation, write down what the evidence of your life shows regarding worshiping God faithfully vs. turning to anything other than him for comfort, identity, fulfillment, or worth.

This is between you and God, so be strikingly honest.

A HELPFUL TOOL

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hello-i-am-an-idol>

or go to gospelcoalition.org and search "hello i am an idol" to bring the June 23, 2015 article by Nicholas McDonald.

Reading this may be a helpful exercise to see what you turn to for comfort, fulfillment, pleasure, or identity.

Spend time confessing to God how you have turned from him, stating specifically what you look to instead of him. You can pray silently or aloud, and don't worry about using the exact right words. His receiving of your confession is not based on how articulate your presentation is. 1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (ESV)

After confessing, read these passages:

Hosea 11:8-9 and 14:4-9

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

God, you are faithful, forever keeping your promises and covenants. You are faithful in love, never ceasing in your love for me. Like Gomer, I am the unfaithful bride who continually seeks fulfillment, satisfaction, and pleasure outside your arms. I've confessed my sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness, God, and now I gratefully pray what you have said in Hosea 11 and 14:

You have not given me up or handed me over.

Your compassion grows warm and tender.

You are God, the Holy One in our midst, and you will not come in wrath.

You will heal my apostasy, my abandonment of your ways.

You love me freely.

You will ground me and root me in your love, drawing me back to dwell in your presence.

You answer my prayers.

You look after me.

Grant me wisdom and understanding, and discernment to walk in your ways.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Family discussion:

- Remembering what we talked about yesterday, share the thing ways in your life in which you worship God faithfully.
- Share the ways that you turn to things other than God for comfort or for encouragement.
- Read 1 John 1:9, then Hosea 11:8-9 and 14:4-9.

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

"One of the goals of this season is to reveal habits or mindsets that may be preventing us from experiencing true freedom and wholeness. The restrictions imposed by the Lenten fast seek not to deny the goodness of the many blessings we enjoy in this life, but rather to remind us that they are, in fact, gifts. Above all, a fast is intended to nurture a sense of gratitude to the giver and to encourage us to share these gifts with those in need." - Beth Bevis

Traditionally, people have fasted by eliminating luxury items from their diets, but the nature of your fast is up to you. If you're new to fasting, just leave an item or two you'd normally eat each day out of your diet. Every time you start to get a craving for those items, you will be reminded of your fast, and then you can take the initiative to pray instead of eat.

If you're unsure about whether or not denying yourself something you're used to has any real value, read the following quote. It might help you see why so many practice this discipline.

“The normal ‘food’ that we eat (distractions, busyness, entertainment, ordinary life) works to shield us from the deeper chaos that lurks beneath the surface of our lives.

Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give [God] a chance to feed us.” - Ronald Rolheiser

In whichever way you choose to fast, whether daily or weekly, from a food or a habit such as social media, a critical part is prayer. Whenever you have a craving for the item(s) you’ve given up, it’s a great idea to pray and to talk to God about it. Each time you talk to God during your fast, listen for his response. God is thrilled to be in a relationship with you where you share openly and honestly what’s on your heart and in your head. Let him share the same with you.

Listen to God’s love as he shares.

Family discussion:

- (You may have noticed by now that each Thursday is the same. That’s on purpose.)
- Read Joel 2:12-13 again.
- If you are doing this at the beginning of the day, remind your family that Thursday is a day of fasting from whatever you decided last week. Talk about strategies you can use throughout the day to turn fasting into prayer and praise.
- If you are doing this at the end of the day, share with each other the ways you used your time of fasting to pray or to think about Jesus. You can also encourage each other in the struggle, if it was a day of struggle.

FRIDAY

After four days of prayer, examining our hearts, and confessing our sin, today we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

“[Repentance] means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God.” -John Piper

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:17 that the Bible is the weapon and tool of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as we read scripture we trust that it is the Spirit of God himself that teaches, comforts, and convicts us. Be encouraged by the verses below, reading them and then declaring the truth of that scripture to yourself.

Many pains come to the wicked, but the one who trusts in the Lord will have faithful love surrounding him. (Psalm 32:11)

Declare aloud: I trust in you, Lord. I am surrounded by your faithful love.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Declare aloud: I have confessed my sins. You are faithful and just, you have forgiven my sin and cleansed me from all unrighteousness.

“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25)

Declare aloud: You are my God. You blotted out my transgression for your own sake. You do not remember my sin.

“O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” (Psalm 130:7-8)

Declare aloud: I have put my hope in you. You have loved me with a steadfast love, and your redemption is plentiful, even redeeming me from all my iniquities.

As we close the week in confidence of God’s mercy and assured of his forgiveness, consider taking a step towards ongoing freedom from idolatry, or worshiping the gift rather than the Giver. This is not to add to the complete work of forgiveness given to us by the grace of Jesus Christ, but a step of wisdom. For example, who can you tell about your struggle with sin, so that they can join you in prayer and encourage you towards holiness? Are there practical steps to help you remove yourself from an idol that seems particularly difficult to resist?

Paul’s description of a life surrendered to Christ is found in Philippians 3:8:

“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”

Regardless of the discomfort, don’t let idols rob you of the joy and freedom found in worshiping and following Jesus.

Family discussion:

- Encourage your family in repentance. Read the verses above and talk about the beauty and joy in repentance.
- Talk as a family about wise action steps that can be taken toward continued joy and freedom as you receive grace from Jesus.

4

TRUTH IN LOVE

Monday, March 20 - Friday, March 24

MONDAY

Read Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Peter 3:15, Ephesians 4:11-16

Did you notice the similarity in all three passages?

Each one directs us to speak the message of God to others. This was essential to Jesus, who gave what we now call The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. It is through his followers that the gospel, or “good news”, is spread and the fame of Jesus spreads. And while our actions certainly matter (1 John 3:18), we have been tasked and equipped to declare aloud the news of God’s Kingdom, which has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These passages have two different audiences in mind: first, Jesus directs his followers to share the gospel with doubters and seekers. 1 Peter 3:15 also has this audience in mind, predicting that the life of hope we live will produce questions from the unbelieving world around us. Our sharing of the good news does not stop once we are around brothers and sisters in Christ’s church. Our sanctification, or maturing of our faith, is a continual process until we are in God’s presence in Heaven, and we are instructed in Ephesians 4:11-16 to speak truth to one another for encouragement and correction.

What we are considering during this third week of Lent is this:

Do we speak the truth to those around us, or do we allow the world to speak?

Our prayer for this week is that God would give us clarity on the role of the gospel, the Spirit, and ourselves as bearers of the good news.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

God, my Father, you loved the world so much that you sent your only Son, not to condemn the world, but to save us. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for the people you used in my life to show me the truth of the gospel, such as _____ and _____.

As I enter this week of Lent and consider your calling on my life to speak the truth of your love, please show me where my beliefs are not in line with truth and where my actions are not in line with your will. Where I have fear, give me courage. Where I have weak faith, strengthen me. Where there is shame, free me by your grace.

Will you help me know your love for me even more? Will you help me see more clearly your love for those around me?

Thank you for hearing my prayers.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Family discussion:

- Read Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Peter 3:15, and Ephesians 4:11-16
- Talk about the things these verses have in common.
- We will never talk about Jesus with nonbelievers if we don't talk about Jesus with other followers of Jesus. Share with your kids the people in your life who introduced you to Jesus, and how thankful you are for them.
- For the first day of this week, discuss the value of reading God's word as a family each day and talking about Jesus together as a family.

TUESDAY

Yesterday we considered the call and command for us to speak the freeing truth of the gospel to one another in the church and to the world around us. These verses today will allow us to contemplate on the “why” and “how” of this call.

Read Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

First, we read in Romans 1:16-17 that the gospel is the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” 1 Corinthians 1 tells us the gospel is the “wisdom of God.” God has provided for us in our faith and also in our mission as his ambassadors through the message of the gospel. There is power in it to change hearts for all of eternity.

2 Corinthians 5 sheds light on our role as followers of Jesus. We are not simply sent out with a book to read to people. We ourselves are “new creations” who have been given the “ministry of reconciliation.” We are God’s ambassadors, and God makes his appeal through us. God’s power, plan, and wisdom are of vital importance to him, because they mean the display of his glory and the rescue of his lost daughters and sons.

If this message and mission are so important to God, would he not support us, use us, and by the Holy Spirit use our words?

Consider these questions in light of what we’ve read in the Bible yesterday and today:

- Do you believe God has called you “out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Do you believe those around you are still in darkness?
- Do you believe God’s word is powerful enough to change the heart and mind of your friends?
- Do you have love for your neighbor?
- Do my friends, neighbors, and co-workers know I’m a follower of Christ?

Spend time today taking an honest look at your life (not your intentions, but your actions) and determine how you have or have not shared the hope you have in Jesus with others. Tomorrow we'll spend time confessing these things and receiving God's mercy, but for today examine your heart. Listen to God - as a loving Father of you and those who are not yet saved, he will graciously guide and strengthen you.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Good Father in Heaven, you have called me out of darkness and brought me into your marvelous light. I was dead in my sin, walking in lies and was without hope. You brought me from death to life, by the power of your Holy Spirit and faith in the good news of Jesus Christ. While I believe this for my salvation, there are areas of my life where I do not believe in your power, your plan, and my privileged role as your ambassador. Over this day, please reveal to me my lack of belief. Give me the courage and faith to hear and receive this. As you do this, will you also encourage me with the truth of your love amidst seeing my brokenness?

Family discussion:

- Read the 3 passages from the guide together and explain where needed.
- The questions for today are hard-hitting, but incredibly revealing. As you discuss these questions as a family, take the lead as parents in sharing honestly and vulnerably with your children your answers.
 - Do you believe God has called you "out of darkness into his marvelous light"?
 - Do you believe those around you are still in darkness?
 - Do you believe God's word is powerful enough to change the heart and mind of your friends?
 - Do you have love for your neighbor?
 - Do my friends, neighbors, and co-workers know I'm a follower of Christ?

WEDNESDAY

Read Acts 17:16-18

As Paul walked through Athens, he was disturbed by the idolatry he saw. This was first because he worshiped and loved Jesus; he was grateful for what Jesus had done and desired that only God receive adoration and glory! His heart also broke for the people of Athens who were walking in darkness. Ephesians 2 reminds us that without Jesus, we are spiritually dead and in our own strength possess no hope. Paul saw the reality around him: people seemed happy enough, but they were in a cycle of seeking fulfillment where it can never be found and their destination was eternity apart from God in Hell.

We have many reasons cited for not sharing the hope we have found in Jesus. Perhaps you feel inadequate in your knowledge of Scripture, or intimidated by the intellect of those around you. Maybe you don't want to be associated with ignorant people who abuse others through the misuse of Scripture. You may be an introvert, do not like conflict, or fear rejection. Maybe you don't know how to bring it up in conversation. While all of these reasons are real, there are deeper beliefs at play.

What lies beneath, down at the heart level? Why are we opposed to sharing the good news about Jesus? In your prayers yesterday and in this moment now, what do you think those reasons are? Perhaps it is an idolatry of people pleasing. Is there a lack of love for your friends and neighbors? Is there a lack of love for Jesus? Do you doubt the power of the gospel?

Pray this prayer of confession, silently or aloud:

Dear Heavenly Father, I confess that I have too often forgotten that I am yours. you have called me your child, I am a part of the Body of Christ, your Bride the Church.

Sometimes I carry on my life as if you were nonexistent or simply my insurance for going to Heaven when I die. I have fallen short of being your ambassador and witness to the world around me. I have kept my mouth shut in fear instead of speaking out in faith. For these things I ask your forgiveness and I also ask for your strength. Give me a heart of childlike faith, restore to me the joy of my salvation, and give me a love for your lost children so that I can't help but share the hope I have in you. Remind me who I am in Christ regardless of what I am doing or who I am with. As you have commanded me to make disciples, please use me to spread your fame and the good news of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (ESV)

Family discussion:

- Read Acts 17:16-18
- Revisit the questions from yesterday, and ask "why" for the reason to each one.
- Pray through those things together.

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

"One of the goals of this season is to reveal habits or mindsets that may be preventing us from experiencing true freedom and wholeness. The restrictions imposed by the Lenten fast seek not to deny the goodness of the many blessings we enjoy in this life, but rather to remind us that they are, in fact, gifts. Above all, a fast is intended to nurture a sense of gratitude to the giver and to encourage us to share these gifts with those in need." - Beth Bevis

Traditionally, people have fasted by eliminating luxury items from their diets, but the nature of your fast is up to you. If you're new to fasting, just leave an item or two you'd normally eat each day out of your diet. Every time you start to get a craving for those items, you will be reminded of your fast, and then you can take the initiative to pray instead of eat.

If you're unsure about whether or not denying yourself something you're used to has any real value, read the following quote. It might help you see why so many practice this discipline.

"The normal 'food' that we eat (distractions, busyness, entertainment, ordinary life) works to shield us from the deeper chaos that lurks beneath the surface of our lives.

Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give [God] a chance to feed us." - Ronald Rolheiser

In whichever way you choose to fast, whether daily or weekly, from a food or a habit such as social media, a critical part is prayer. Whenever you have a craving for the item(s) you've given up, it's a great idea to pray and to talk to God about it. Each time you talk to God during your fast, listen for his response. God is thrilled to be in a relationship with you where you share openly and honestly what's on your heart and in your head. Let him share the same with you.

Listen to God's love as he shares.

Family discussion:

- Read Joel 2:12-13 again.
- If you are doing this at the beginning of the day, remind your family that Thursday is a day of fasting from whatever you decided last week. Talk about strategies you can use throughout the day to turn fasting into prayer and praise.
- If you are doing this at the end of the day, share with each other the ways you used your time of fasting to pray or to think about Jesus. You can also encourage each other in the struggle, if it was a day of struggle.

FRIDAY

After four days of prayer, examining our hearts, and confessing our sin, today we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

“[Repentance] means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God.” -John Piper

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

What actions do you need to take in order to not only confess your sin but to repent, turning back to God? Here are a few things to consider that may help in taking a step:

In a survey of 2,000 unchurched people, Lifeway Research found that 79% of people agree with this statement: “If a friend of mine really values their faith, I don’t mind them talking about it.” Do you operate under the assumption that your friends are adverse or hostile to any conversations about Jesus and Christianity? If so, is there any foundation to this belief? The manner in which we speak the truth to others is directed as well: in love, with gentleness and respect. Jesus was loving in his encounters with each person, so we should be. Who will you pray for opportunities to share your faith with? Consider planning

a meal or outing with the intent to share your hope with a friend. Who can you ask to join you in prayer and encourage you in speaking of the hope you have?

Take a look at your social media from the past six months. What does it reveal about your interests, your passions, and your beliefs? Would someone see evidence that you are a “new creation” and “called out of darkness and into his marvelous light?” Would they see a hope in and love for Jesus? Would they know God loves them as well when they read your social media posts? Are you “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15)?

Consider actions you may take to use the platforms you have been given to speak of the hope you have in Jesus. This may be fasting from social media and repenting of the way you use it for your own gratification. Or try an experiment: for one week use it only for encouraging others and speaking the truth of scripture. If you’re not sure how it comes across, ask an honest friend to help you see what you’re communicating!

As we close the week, rest in confidence of God’s mercy and assured of his forgiveness. Spend time now thanking him for his love and grace, both for you and for the world.

Family discussion:

- Reread the verses from Monday
- At Vintage we talk about “love one” - praying about one person in your life who needs Jesus and loving them with the love of Christ. As a family, have a discussion about people you can pursue with the love of Jesus. Plan a first intentional gathering with those people - dinner, game night, etc.