

Welcome to a Journey of Discovery

Lent is the time in the Christian year that leads us to Easter and our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. For most of my Christian life, I was aware of Lent but didn't engage in the creative aspects Christians have participated in for hundreds of years. However, for the past several years, my engagement in Lenten exercises has provided water for my thirsty soul. Lent is usually a period marked by prayer, penitential activities, helping those in need and radical self-denial.

I have simplified those ideas in my own life focusing on three things. With the hope and expectation of participating in the resurrection, during Lent I will:

- add something,
- subtract something, and
- spend intentional time in self examination.

My hope is that this book would also guide you and whoever wants to join you in a journey of discovery by addition, subtraction and introspection.

The idea for this guide to Lent is that you will enter into this journey with your church, youth group, small group or family. This adventure of following Jesus through the desert to the cross and ultimately participating with Him in the resurrection is not to be done alone. I hope that this book you hold in your hand helps you and your community along the way.

Let's begin this amazing and deep journey through the desert to the cross, and ultimately be prepared to participate in the resurrection!

How to Use This Book...

A 40-day journey? That's a pretty long trek. If you've never heard of Lent before, you may be wondering what you're getting yourself into, or how this book will serve to guide you along the way. It's actually pretty simple. Here's how it works.

This book is comprised of scripture readings, reflections and questions for every day of the journey. So each day you'll engage the different readings with your family, your friends or maybe on your own. Our journey begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter, so think of those events as bookends. The 40 days in between are grouped into seven Lenten themes: Dust, Desert, Tempt, Aware, Desire, Crossed, and Approach. Each week you'll study and explore the given theme, drawing you deeper into the experience.

Every day of the week will start off with a Bible reading. This scripture has been intentionally left out of this book so that you can engage with the passage in your own Bible. Highlight the passage, take notes, doodle...use the physical pages in your Bible as part of the journey. It may be easy to skip over this part and head straight into the meditation. I encourage you to take the extra minute or two, sit down with your Bible and read the Scripture for the day. If you *only* do one thing, do this. After the Scripture, you'll find a brief devotional thought and then a meditation from a writer, scholar, thinker or interesting person. These meditations will help you think more deeply about that week's theme. They can be challenging—including some big theological words and maybe ideas you haven't thought about before—but don't be discouraged. If you don't understand something, ask someone in your community or a parent, and you can even email me (my information is included in the back of the book). I would love to listen to your questions and help you find answers.

On Sundays, you will find four Scripture readings from the Lectionary, a book of scripture readings churches all over the world use for their worship services. Reading the same Scriptures as thousands of other Christians around the world helps us remember that we are a part of something amazing and big. We are not alone on this Lenten journey.

We will also engage in three disciplines Christians have commonly practiced during Lent. I've phrased them like this: addition, subtraction and introspection. These practices are not mandatory, but they will help us to make the most of this Lenten journey, deepen our experience and go places spiritually that maybe we've never been before. Let me explain.

Addition

Often during Lent, Christians take on or add extra spiritual practices. It could be praying for an extra five minutes every morning when you wake up. It could be extra Bible reading or journaling every night before you fall asleep. It could be doing a daily act of kindness for someone or giving extra money to people in need around the world. Whatever it is, during Lent this "addition" to your life will help you open your heart and mind to the work Christ wants to do in your life.

Subtraction

You may have heard people talk about what they're "giving up" for Lent. I encourage you to "subtract" something from your life that you depend on or enjoy on a daily basis. Subtract listening to the radio, eating candy or playing video games. People often give up meat or caffeine. Giving up that Starbucks might be challenging, but it could be just what you need to do. Subtract checking Facebook, Twitter or one of your other daily internet habits. Giving up these things makes more time for God and every time you crave that thing, let prayer and dependence upon God fill that space in your life.

Introspection

Introspection means exploring your inner thoughts and feelings, taking time to stop and search your heart before God. We're often too busy to pause to think about our true motivations and

reactions, especially when it means awareness of our own pain and sinfulness. In the Psalms David asks God to search him and know him; during these 40 days that is exactly what we hope is happening. We invite God to search us and know us, reveal to us all the wickedness that hides in the shadows of our heart. Think deeply about where you are in life and in relation to God. He will help you. It might be uncomfortable, but you'll learn things about yourself that you didn't know before.

Again, if you are confused or struggling with anything during this Lenten journey, don't hesitate to get help. You're not in this alone.

Now, let's get started on the unforgettable road to resurrection!

The Lent Web Guide is a supplement to this book. There, you will find images and icons, videos, more great meditative quotes and Bible reading, as well as an opportunity to leave comments, ask questions and share a bit of your journey through this time of Lent.

www.LentWebGuide.com

As you're reading, look for one of these icons.

SNAP! There's a picture, image or Christian icon for you to check out!

You're only a click away. We've posted a link to a website, blog or something cool for you to look at!

We've got a great video, YouTube, Vimeo or other goodie for you to watch.

Listen up! We've posted an audio clip, sermon or message for you to listen to! We like the Bible around here! When you see this, we've got more Scripture for you!

Get ready to be inspired! We've posted a quote or meditation that you won't want to miss.

There's an app for that. We've provided a link to an app for your smart phone that might help you on this journey.

It's time to experiment! Get ready to experiment with living out what you're learning!

DESERT // DAY 6

READING :: Matthew 4:1-11

Did you know that Lent parallels the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness without food and while being tempted by the devil? For us, Lent is 40 days we spend in a metaphorical wilderness, or a desert as the Bible often explains it, with dry mouths, empty bellies and open hearts. A common Lenten practice is to deprive ourselves of some of our favorite and seemingly most important things for spiritual benefit. This might be a favorite food, caffeine, video games, or, if you're hard core, the Internet (it's hard—I tried it one year). Many people also add something to their lives during Lent: a daily Bible reading or devotional, a regular act of service, or giving an extra 10% of their income or allowance to the Lord's work.

Whatever it is that you subtract or add to your life, the point is that we spend these days in the desert, taking on extra prayer and meditation, giving up luxuries and distractions with Jesus right beside us. We remember that He too spent 40 days in the desert, fasting, praying, meditating and being tempted. We don't do this perfectly: In fact, we are like the generations and generations of people who have fallen and failed, who have succumbed to the hunger, the thirst, the temptation that the desert brings. Jesus is the only one who did not fail. That's important to remember as we journey for 40 days with Jesus in the desert of self-denial, temptation and self-examination.

Maybe you heard a sermon at church yesterday on Matthew 4:1-11 or a similar passage. (This verse was also one of our readings yesterday.) If you were able to listen to a sermon, I hope it centers you in this week of reflection on desert and temptation. If you weren't able to listen to a related message, check out the Lent Web Guide for some recommended listening.

What temptations have you encountered as you've been thinking and fasting?

TEMPT // DAY 15
READING :: James 1

In the desert, temptation is inevitable. Even Jesus faced temptation in the desert, which is a large part of what we are thinking about this week. But often we forget that we are not alone, that Jesus is with us even in the midst of temptation, that He understands. Instead, we feel buried and full of despair. It's easy when temptation is at its zenith (and you've most likely given in at least once) to forget the grace and presence of God. But remember, the Spirit of the Lord is with you and in you.

Meditation ::

"Have you ever watched a great burning furnace heaped up with ashes? Look at it some ten or twelve hours afterwards, and there will scarce be any living fire there, or only a little smoldering in the very heart of it. Nevertheless, if you can find that tiny lingering spark, it will suffice to rekindle the extinguished flames. So it is with love, which is the true spiritual life amid our greatest, most active temptation. Temptation, flinging its delight into the inferior parts of the soul, covers our soul entirely with ashes, and leaves but a little spark of God's Love, which can be found nowhere except far down in the heart and mind, and even that is hard to find. But nevertheless it is there, since however troubled we may have been in the body and mind, we firmly resolved not to consent to sin or the temptation thereto, and that delight of the exterior man was rejected by the interior spirit. Thus though our will may have been thoroughly beset by the temptation, it was not conquered, and so we are certain that all such delight was involuntary, and consequently not sinful."

— From *An Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales (Language slightly modified for the modern reader)

How do our temptations reflect our most inner weakness? What would change if we truly believed Jesus can meet us in even the most barren and dry parts of our lives, teaching us how to resist the devil and the temptations we face?

DESIRE // DAY 30
READING :: Mark 4:1-20

I'll be honest: I get distracted a lot of the time, and I can't just blame it on Attention Deficit Disorder. Mostly, it's the way I have ordered my life and the things to which I give my time and attention. The fact is there are so many things in life that distract us from the good gifts God has in store for us. Some of the distractions might even be good things. This meditation reminds us that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we must discern the desires that are good and from God and the desires that will only distract us from what is best.

Meditation ::

"Not every desire is of the Holy Spirit, even if it seems to a person right and good. It is difficult to judge truly whether a good spirit or an evil one drives you to desire this or that; or whether by your own spirit you are moved thereto. Many have been deceived in the end, who at first seemed to be led on by a good spirit. Therefore whatever occurs to the mind as desirable, must always be desired and prayed for in the fear of God, and with humility of heart; and most of all you must commit the whole matter to prayer, with special resignation of yourself, and you must say:

'O Lord, you know what is best for us, let this or that be done, as you will. Give what you will, and how much you will, and when you will. Deal with me as you think good, and as best pleases you, and is most for your honor. Set me where you will, and deal with me in all things just as you will. I am in your hands: turn me around and turn me back again,

which way so ever you please. Behold, I am your servant, prepared for all things, for I desire not to live for myself, but for you; and oh that I could do it worthily and perfectly!"

— From *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis (Some language slightly modified for the modern reader.)

What desires sidetrack you and choke out the good that God has stirred in your soul?
What are the primary ways you discern good desires from distracting ones?