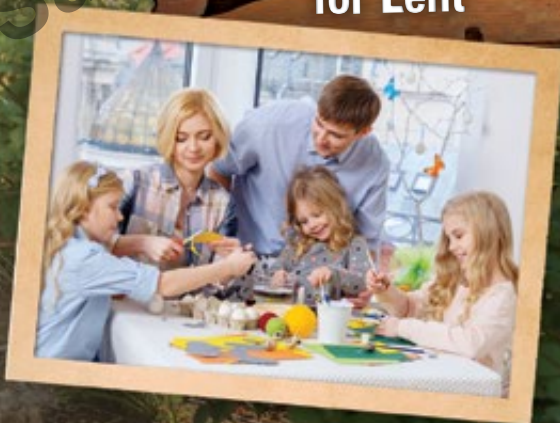


Together In His Footsteps

Creative
Communications
Sample

Family Devotions
and Activities

for Lent



Michelle Van Loon



Lent offers our family a special opportunity to walk together in the footsteps of Jesus. Though we'll be talking about some serious things during this season, Lent is also a joyful time as we'll discover how to follow Jesus more faithfully.

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, where we reflect on the things that separate us from God. Starting on Ash Wednesday and continuing through the Lenten season, many people choose to begin a fast from something fun or pleasurable as a way to help focus their attention on God. Some may choose to abstain from certain foods or sweets, and others may choose to fast or cut back on digital screen time. Lent is also a time to be intentional about finding new ways to serve others as a way to follow Jesus together. He showed us through his ministry how much he valued serving others. Perhaps your family may wish to talk about a way to serve together such as caring for an elderly neighbor, visiting a nursing home or lending a hand at a food pantry—the options are limitless!

We'll move through Lent tracing the footsteps of Jesus through the Beatitudes, the "Blessed are..." statements found in Matthew 5:1-12. The Beatitudes are part of a longer teaching he shared with his disciples called the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lenten journey together will carry us from Ash Wednesday all the way to the incredible celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning.

Each day, we'll have a Bible verse to hear, a short devotional thought based on that verse to ponder and a family prayer prompt. This booklet also contains some additional optional activities designed to enhance our journey through Lent this year.

As we begin our journey, let's rejoice that we are walking in the company of Jesus...together!

Ash Wednesday

Lent's Invitation

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matthew 4:17

The word repent means “to change your mind.” This change of mind is something far greater than putting on green socks, then deciding maybe your red socks might look better with your outfit. Repentance is a change of direction. Jesus was asking people to turn away from the things that were keeping them from loving God wholeheartedly and to turn toward God. The 40 days of Lent give us time to experience Jesus’ invitation to repent. And, if we are open to his grace, we will discover the blessing it is to follow him each day of our lives.

Dear Jesus, thank you for calling us to repent. As we begin this Lenten journey, please help us change our direction so we can follow you...together.

TOGETHER IN HIS FOOTSTEPS ACTIVITY

Through love, serve one another



As we begin our journey through Lent, one way in which to practice the idea of walking in his footsteps is to work on a household cleaning project as a family. Jesus served those around in practical ways! Work together for a half hour or more on a project you can all do together. Perhaps each member of your family already has a set of specific household chores to do. Turn off the TV and turn on some lively music to get everyone in the family working together! If your house is not in need a family cleaning session, consider offering your family’s cleaning services to an elderly family member or friend.



Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Turning Away, Turning Toward

**Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.**

**Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory.**

Psalm 24:9-10

When Jesus preached about repentance, he told people that repentance was the way they could get ready to welcome the one and only good and perfect leader into their lives. Imagine throwing open the doors of your home to invite the most important person in all history inside. You'd clean your house from top to bottom. And then you'd wait at the door to greet this wonderful guest. Repentance is more than turning away from sin. It is turning toward God our king to welcome him into your life, home and community.

O God, you are a great King!
We welcome you into our lives,
our family, our home and our
community as we move into our
Lenten journey.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Come to Him, Burdens and All

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Sometimes we get so used to carrying our worries, our struggles and our sins that we don't realize how much they weigh us down. Imagine for a moment what it would be like to walk a mile carrying a 25-pound bag of dog food. It might not seem like much when you begin your journey, but with each passing step, it would feel heavier and heavier. When you got to your destination and were able to set down the weight, your arms would feel light as a feather. What is the heavy weight you are carrying with you today? As you come to Jesus in prayer, offer it—and yourself—to him and receive his promise of rest.

We bring our worries, our struggles and our sins to you today, dear Jesus. Thank you for offering us your peace and rest in return.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Listening and Learning

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Matthew 5:1

As Jesus began his ministry, his words and his miraculous works brought him to the attention of people around him. Soon, crowds began flocking to hear and see him. He wanted to convey the heart of his message to those he'd chosen to share it with. He gathered them near on a steep hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee and taught them about the kind of kingdom to which he was calling them. As we continue our journey into Lent, we'll join those gathered on that hillside to listen and learn about the kind of life to which Jesus is calling us.

Holy Spirit, please open our hearts to the words of Jesus. Teach us to hear him more clearly as we journey through Lent together.

First Sunday of Lent

What Does It Mean to Be Blessed?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

Jesus began his teaching to the crowd gathered on that hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee with a series of statements that describe the kind of life to which he is calling us. These statements are called the Beatitudes. (“Beatitude” is the name we give to this group of “blessed are” statements.) Though some people use the word “blessing” to describe a gift or a delightful experience, Jesus was describing things that don’t sound like much fun. Jesus wanted his followers to know that life together with him carries the kind of happiness that doesn’t depend on our circumstances, but on knowing that his love for us never, ever changes.

We thank you, Jesus, for your perfect love for us.

No matter what is going on in the world around us, your love is the source of a blessed life.

TOGETHER IN HIS FOOTSTEPS ACTIVITY

Sunday pause



Lent is supposed to last for 40 days, but if you count the days from Ash Wednesday through Easter, you’ll come up with a total of 46 days. Why is this so?

From the earliest days of the Church, Sunday was the high point of the week. It was the day of the week when believers gathered to celebrate the resurrection. They shared communion, worshipped, prayed, and learned about their faith. As Lent became a practice of the Church over the next centuries, Church leaders excluded Sundays from their 40-day Lenten fasts.

Some believers choose to refrain from fasting on Sundays during Lent, trusting God to help them maintain their commitment to rid themselves of sinful habits. Others continue their fasts in hopes that they’ll build new disciplines. If you’re fasting, what will you choose to do on Sundays this year? Take a break or keep on fasting?

Monday, First Week of Lent

What Does It Mean to Be “Poor in Spirit?”

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Luke 18:13

In the Beatitudes, Jesus wanted his followers to know that those who are “poor in spirit” would be blessed (Matthew 5:3). At another point in his ministry, he gave us a perfect picture of what it means to be poor in spirit. He told a story about two men. One was a pride-filled religious leader who thought he had it all together before God. The other was a man who knew he didn’t have anything to offer God except his sorrow over his sinfulness. Guess which one Jesus celebrated in his story?

Lord, you don’t want us to perform for you. You call us to be honest about our sin before you. Help us to do just that today and every day.



Sunday

Tuesday, First Week of Lent

God Is Near to the Brokenhearted

**The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.**

Psalm 34:18

More than a thousand years before Jesus was born, David spent a long time on the run from King Saul. David had done nothing wrong, but Saul believed David was a threat to his power. David was weary, discouraged and didn't know if, or when, his circumstances would ever change. David wrote many psalms that were honest about his feelings while expressing hope in God during this time in his life. David knew what it was like to be poor in spirit. He also knew the blessing of knowing God was with him no matter what his circumstances were.

Heavenly Father, we are each facing challenges this day. We thank you for the blessing of your nearness to us in the midst of these difficulties.

TOGETHER IN HIS FOOTSTEPS ACTIVITY

Shhh!



Jesus told his followers that when they gave to the work of God, they were supposed to do it in secret. To explain the level of secrecy he wanted them to use, he told them, "Do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3).

Throughout Lent, watch for ways you can serve others without drawing attention to yourself. It can be as simple as picking up a sibling's toy and putting it away when no one is watching, or paying for a cup of coffee or a cold drink for the next person in line behind you at a fast-food restaurant. When you do a small act of kindness in secret, just remember—it's never really a secret. God sees your efforts. But not drawing attention to yourself when doing them is a lovely act of worship just between you and your heavenly Father.

Wednesday, First Week of Lent

He's Worth Pursuing

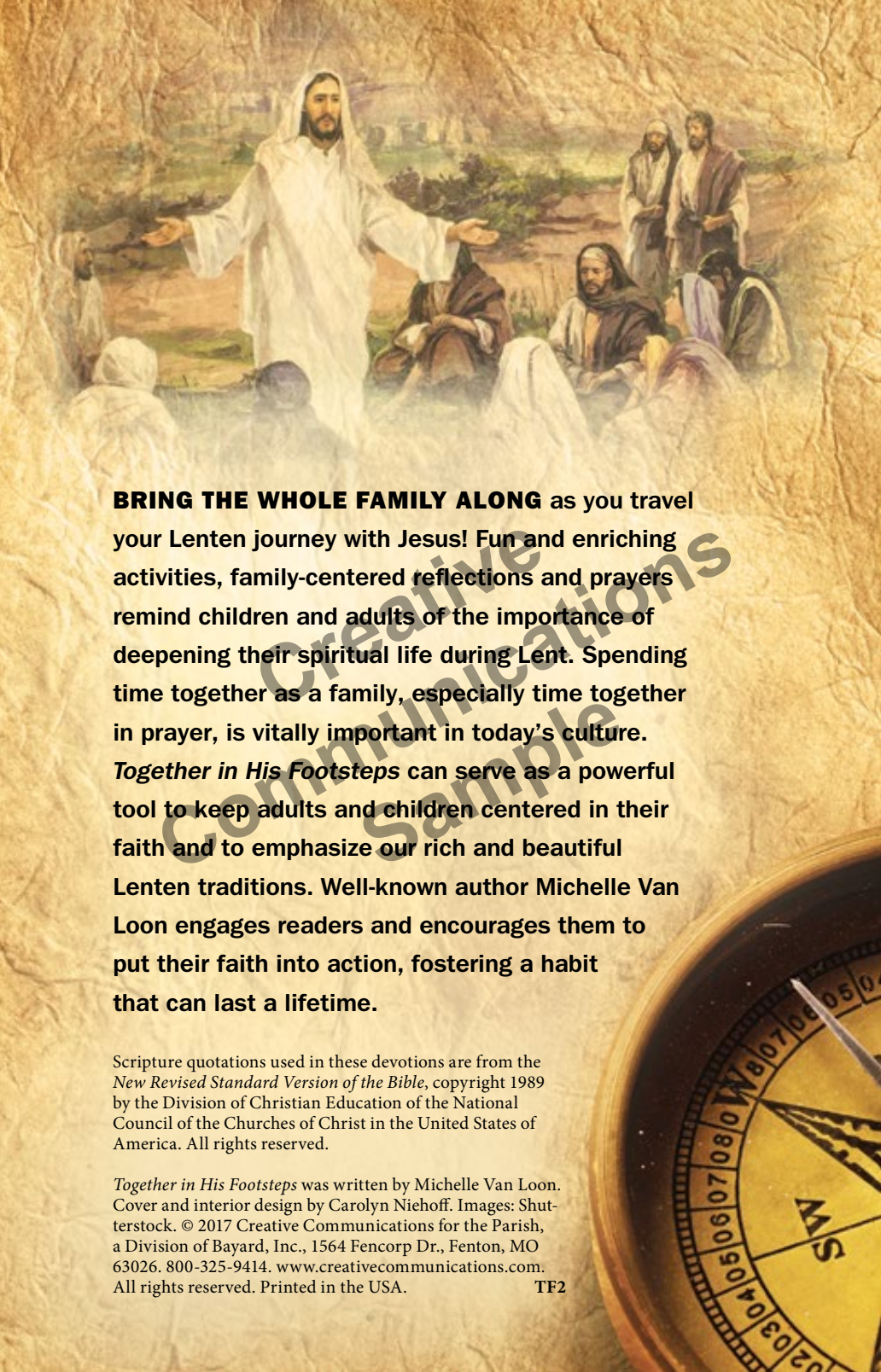
The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

The Beatitudes describe the kind of life to which Jesus was inviting his follower—a life lived under his kind and perfect leadership. The first Beatitude tells us, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Jesus told those who knew they were in need of God’s help that heaven was theirs. He reminded his followers in many of his parables that following him was a way of life worth pursuing. It is a treasure beyond anything else we can possess.

O Lord, help us to recognize that there is nothing more important in our life than seeking you!





BRING THE WHOLE FAMILY ALONG as you travel your Lenten journey with Jesus! Fun and enriching activities, family-centered reflections and prayers remind children and adults of the importance of deepening their spiritual life during Lent. Spending time together as a family, especially time together in prayer, is vitally important in today's culture. *Together in His Footsteps* can serve as a powerful tool to keep adults and children centered in their faith and to emphasize our rich and beautiful Lenten traditions. Well-known author Michelle Van Loon engages readers and encourages them to put their faith into action, fostering a habit that can last a lifetime.

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