

LENT'S
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~~intents~~
~~in tense~~
intense!



daily lenten observations
for teens and young adults

LENT'S ~~in tents inter~~

With Marked Intensity

Ash Wednesday

Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Isaiah 1:18

I'll start out with an admission: I'm a rather careless typist. And so, when pages are returned to me from the proofreader, they are a vision of red, inky squiggles and swirls. There is no denying the mistakes I've made; in fact, they are highlighted in an almost gruesome fashion. Even my on-screen spell-checker reveals my many errors with an unavoidable crimson zigzag.

And then Lent hits me. It's Ash Wednesday, a day that starts out with an admission. You (and I) are DUST: sin-stained and filthy, destined for DEATH. The dark mark on your forehead makes that fact undeniable. That is, in a word, INTENSE.

Let's spend some intentional time this intense season to look back (past tense) on what brought us to this reality. And then let's focus on what our intensely loving God has done—and continues to do (present tense)—to ensure that those dark, incriminating marks are erased (future tense) eternally!

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Intentionally in Text

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Lent really IS a good time to read a daily devotion. Even people who wouldn't think of reading a devotion the rest of the year take up the practice during Lent.

Which makes some sense. Lent is a time when we are supposed to be devoting some intentional time to looking INWARD (at what needs to be changed, at what needs to be forgiven, at what needs to be cast out) and looking OUTWARD (at what our Lord Jesus is doing this season for us).

Daily devotions can help us focus on those sorts of things.

What are some other good reasons to read a daily devotion?

Intended Growth

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Plant a seed today. Get a tomato seed...or a bean seed...or just a grass seed from where your parents keep those sorts of things—maybe the garage. Find some soil. And plant it in a little pot...or a coffee mug...or a cut-open milk carton. Take care of it during this season. And do two other things today:

First, as you're watering your little seed, contemplate MUD. Think about CLAY: the substance from which Adam was formed. Consider DUST (from

which we come...to which we return).

Then, reenter Genesis chapter two, where God planted a garden called Eden: a paradise (from which we come...to which, we are promised as Jesus travels toward his cross and beyond, we return).

It's Intense

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Psalm 32:5

We live in a FEEL-GOOD society. We're supposed to feel GOOD about ourselves. If we DON'T feel good about ourselves, well, by golly, there are plenty of companies who are willing to sell us plenty of products for plenty of money to make us plenty happy! Watch fifteen minutes' worth of commercials any time of any day and keep a list of how many of those commercials promise, at some level, to help you feel good. Easier yet, keep track of those that DON'T—the list will be more manageable.

And so I realize that I stand directly in the face of common logic when I state that Lent is a good time to feel ASHAMED.

Intense HOPE

Sunday, the First Week

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. Psalm 42:11

Sitting in front of a table full of food and praying “I know you will take care of me, Lord” isn’t a cry of faith and hope. It’s a cry of thanks. The food’s already there! Hope is not required.

It’s when the table’s empty—and the refrigerator... and the cupboard—that “I know you will take care of me” becomes a prayer of HOPE.

And so, during these dark days of Lent, when you’re being asked to think about things like mud and clay and ashes and sin and death, HOPE becomes a real issue.

Since it’s Sunday (and remember that ALL Sundays are tiny celebrations of Easter, even in Lent), it’s an especially good day to look six weeks into the future...to EASTER. And to HOPE that salvation is near. And to know that it IS!

Intense Focus

Monday, the First Week

Lent is a good time to look inside of yourself (and maybe outside, too, at what’s going on around you) to see the things that are wrong, the SINFULNESS that’s left unchecked in your life ...

...and to FEEL BAD about it. To be ASHAMED of the things that are driving a wedge between you and your God...between you and those around you.

...to be SORRY.

And to remember when you get to THAT point that being SORRY isn't really a "feel-bad" experience. It's a step toward the ULTIMATE feel-GOOD experience.

You know...the one our great God promises us, even this Lent. No, ESPECIALLY this Lent, when God's own Son is ensuring us a place in heaven, so that we can feel good for all the RIGHT reasons: not because of some product that someone sold us...but because we are LOVED. By GOD, no less!

Just...Be PERFECT!

Tuesday, the First Week

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

Don't take this lightly, folks. This isn't something that people live through. Moses stood before God hidden in a cloud atop Mount Sinai. It nearly set Moses on fire (literally!). Isaiah saw God...but only the hem at the bottom of God's robe. And THAT all but undid poor Isaiah. (You can read about both these events in Exodus 34 and Isaiah 6.) Besides that, no mere mortal has looked at God in the face and lived. Not one.

This is tough, serious, INTENSE stuff.

Which is exactly why Lent is a good time to look God square in the face—to size God up and to come to the realization of just how almighty the Almighty God is...and how perfect...and just...and creative...and beautiful...and high...and lifted up.

And then to let these words of Jesus ring in our ears: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” It’s too much!

Lent's In Tents

Wednesday, the First Week

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. Deuteronomy 8:2

Let’s face it. This could be—and should be—a more difficult journey. Those complaining, commandment-breaking Israelites traveled in a 40-year-long caravan while God searched their hearts. Is our commandment-breaking situation any better? The answer, from our perspective, is NO.

But, from God’s perspective, that journey (an even more death-defying journey, in fact) has already been made for us.

We, like those tent-bound travelers, could not keep God’s commands. Only God could do that. Through his perfect Son, we ARE perfect. And the path to the promised land is opened wide.

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Let's face it; the season of Lent can be a little intense! But if we take an intentional moment each day to look at the effect Lenten observance is intended to have in our present lives, we'll see that we're not just wandering through a 40-day Lenten wilderness. We are being led by an intensely loving and sacrificial Lord who, since the beginning of creation, offers hope for our eternal future.