



# ABUNDANT MERCY

**Family Devotions  
and Activities for Lent**



**Claire McGarry**

# Introduction

When we think of the word *abundant*, we think of having more than we need. When we think of the word *mercy*, we think of undeserved kindness or forgiveness. Together, *abundant mercy* is a gift from God that we're invited to receive and imitate.

Here's one example: Imagine a man who is robbed, rather than pressing charges, shows abundant mercy by forgiving the offense and giving the thief a job.

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy...

*Psalms 51:1*

All of us are like that thief. We may not steal, but we do make mistakes. God is like that man. No matter how bad our mistakes are, God wants to shower us with love, kindness and forgiveness. He doesn't think in terms of whether we're worthy or not. His heart just wants to wash ours clean so that we can know his love. Then we're able to live and work for him by showing that love to others.

The greatest example of this extraordinary mercy is when God gave us his Son. Jesus was perfect in every way. Yet he took on our sins and gave up his life on the cross so that our lives could be saved. It's through this abundant mercy that we have the hope of going to heaven. While we wait, may we seek God's help to share this mercy with others and bring a taste of heaven to earth.

This booklet was designed to help us with that this Lent. Just like Jesus spent forty days in the desert preparing himself for his ministry and crucifixion, we'll spend forty days reading short reflections that illustrate God's extravagant love. Each devotion is followed by the "Receive Mercy" section with a prayer that will open our hearts to receive God's overflowing kindness and forgiveness. Then comes the "Extend Mercy" section with ideas for how to show overflowing kindness and forgiveness to others. May it bless you so you can then bless others.



ASH WEDNESDAY

# Humbly and Quietly

...your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

*Matthew 6:6*

“You didn’t bring a snack today?” Raffi asked Darius. “You can share mine,” he added, sliding a cookie across the table.

“No thanks,” said Darius. “I’m giving up snacks for Lent. Most kids have a hard time doing that, but I’m really good at it.”

“Wow, that’s impressive,” said Raffi.

“Darius!” his twin sister, Jada, whispered. “You’re not supposed to brag about it.”

“Why not?” Darius asked. “It is pretty impressive.”

“Like Dad asks: ‘Are you making this about God? Or are you making it about you?’”



In Jesus’ day, there were plenty of people who did the right thing for the wrong reasons. Like Darius, they made a big deal about everything they did so people would admire them. Even though they looked like they were making it about God, they were actually making it about themselves.

Jesus never did that. Although he had every right to brag about all that he did for us, he always made sure to point the praise to his Father. Jesus knew the best way to show true mercy was to do so humbly and quietly.

**Receive Mercy** Loving Father, reveal to me the value of sacrificing something for you so I do so humbly and quietly. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Give up one thing for Lent or add something to draw you closer to God. Turn your offering into a prayer for someone who needs it and keep praying for them.

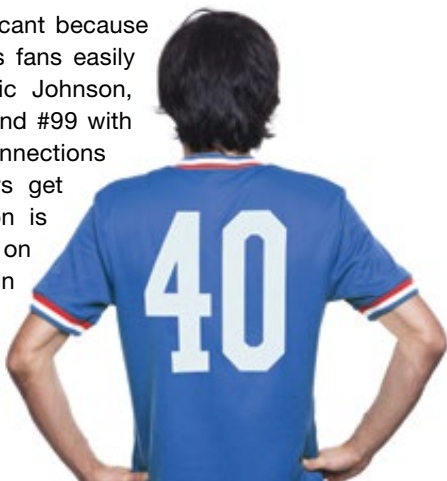
THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

## Significant Numbers

He was in the wilderness forty days...

*Mark 1:13*

Certain numbers in sports are significant because of the players they represent. Sports fans easily connect #32 with basketball's Magic Johnson, #18 with football's Peyton Manning and #99 with hockey's Wayne Gretzky. Some connections are so strong, the players' numbers get retired when they do. The exception is Jackie Robinson's #42. Each year on April 15, every uniformed personnel in Major League Baseball wears #42 to commemorate Robinson's debut as the first Black player in MLB history.



Certain numbers are significant in the Bible too. For example, 40 means “a time of testing or consecration.” It was also the number of years the children of Israel wandered the desert before entering the Promised Land. That’s why Jesus spent 40 days in the desert preparing himself for his public ministry and crucifixion. By denying himself food, he tested his ability to rely on God to feed him spiritually. The experience gave him strength to carry out his Father’s will.

Lent is our 40 days to experience what Jesus did. When we deny our physical side of something, not only do we test ourselves, but we invite God to feed us spiritually. The process teaches us we can always rely on God to carry us through, inspiring us to recommit ourselves to him.

**Receive Mercy** Unfailing Provider, as I physically deny myself of something for you, strengthen me spiritually so I’m stronger than before. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Start a paper chain by taping a paper loop to the top of a doorway. Add a loop for every day you follow through on your Lenten goal from yesterday. Watch the chain grow as Easter approaches.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH  
WEDNESDAY

## Feeding the Hunger

Is it not to share your bread  
with the hungry...?

*Isaiah 58:7*

Jocelyn, my eleven-year-old daughter, started a program called Second Chance. She built a website for donations and requests money for her birthday and Christmas to make brown-bag lunches for the homeless. Her point is to show them that no matter their circumstances, everyone still deserves a second chance.



Sometimes we think we've used up all our blessings and can't ask for more. Not true!

In our hunger for patience, mercy or love, God gives us infinite chances, no matter what we've done.

**Receive Mercy** God of Infinite Chances, thank you for always giving me what I need, no matter what. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Donate some food to a local food pantry for those in need.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH  
WEDNESDAY

## Filling Back Up

If you call the sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the  
Lord honorable...

*Isaiah 58:13*

A.J. Swoboda was a pastor serving God in Portland, Oregon. Working double the hours he should, he was getting sick a lot. Despite teaching others about God, he wasn't learning from God's example.



God worked for six days to create the world, and then he rested for an entire day.

He showed us it's not selfish to relax. When we take time with God, rest and have fun, we fill back up. Knowing we can't help others if we're empty, God made honoring him and the Sabbath a commandment.

**Receive Mercy** Rejuvenating God, inspire me to rest in you and in activities that bring me joy. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** As a family, review your calendar to prioritize spending time with God every week, and then add a plan to have fun together.

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

# What Words Unlock

And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority... If you, then, will worship me, it will be yours."

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

*Luke 4:6, 7-8*

To celebrate the last day of school, Santiago's mom created an Escape Room game. All the kids who came over had to work together to solve riddles. The answers formed secret passwords that unlocked new levels. When they successfully unlocked three levels, they won prizes and celebrated.



When Jesus went into the desert for 40 days, he didn't eat a thing. The devil thought he could use Jesus' weakened state to get him to turn against God. Even though Jesus was starving and very vulnerable, he knew the way to unlock God's power for protection was through Scripture. Regardless of how desirable Satan made each temptation, Jesus would say, "It is written..." and then quote the exact Scripture that proved the devil wrong. After Jesus did this in response to three temptations, the devil gave up. Jesus had won in every level of temptation by unlocking the power found in God's Word.

**Receive Mercy** Author of Powerful Words, remind me to turn to the Bible for strength and peace whenever I'm tempted to do something wrong. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Choose a Scripture passage to memorize. Use it whenever you're tempted, extending God's mercy to yourself for protection.

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Never Forget

Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. ...But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then [Jesus] also went...

*John 7:2, 10*

In the shuffle of BBQs, sports and other activities, my little family tends to accidentally overlook the meaning of Memorial Day. Wanting things to be different this year, I assigned a war hero to each of us to research and learn more about. As we ate hamburgers on the back deck, we each gave a little presentation about our soldier. Hearing how each man put himself in harm's way to protect our freedom made us grateful for their sacrifice for our country. In our gratitude and pride, we broke out in patriotic song, promising to never forget again.



The Bible describes how the Jewish people have many festivals to remind them of how God protected and delivered them. One of them is called the festival of Booths. (See Leviticus 23:33-43.) They would build three-sided huts and move into them for seven days to be reminded of how their ancestors lived in temporary shelters as they wandered the desert for 40 years. Doing so today makes the Jewish people grateful for all that God's done for them and recalls their special bond as his chosen people.

**Receive Mercy** Great Protector and Provider, keep me mindful and grateful for all that you've done for me. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Create your own family tradition that keeps you mindful of all that God's done for you. Try it out this Lent! Then circle future dates on the calendar to participate in it again at that time.

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

# Love Flowing Through

I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

*John 17:26*



When Jacob's dad couldn't get leave from the military for Jacob's birthday, his dad sent his best friend Kyle to take his place. All day long, Kyle organized games, made the same corny jokes and called Jacob by his dad's nickname for him. After the party, Jacob said to Kyle, "Thank you for making it feel like my dad was here. How did you know how to be exactly like him?"

"Your dad and I have been friends for a very long time," Kyle responded. "I know everything about him. And yesterday, he called to tell me all the little details of your relationship. Basically, he poured his love for you into me. I just let that love flow through me."



God and Jesus have been together since the beginning of time. The love between them is so immense, it poured out of heaven and brought Jesus down to earth. Jesus then spent his time here letting God's love flow through him onto us as he taught about his Father and showed us how to live so we can extend that love to others. When we accept Jesus' love, we end up receiving the heart of both the Father and the Son.

**Receive Mercy** Origin of Love, thank you for pouring so much love into your Son that it overflowed onto me. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** While giving someone a hug, imagine your arms being God's. Let his love flow through you.



WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

# In the Space Between

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

*Matthew 5:44*

On December 7, 1914, a ceasefire was suggested in World War I to celebrate Christmas. Although top officials rejected it, the German and English soldiers on the front lines stopped firing on Christmas Eve and sang Christmas carols to each other across enemy lines. When the sun came up



on Christmas morning, some German soldiers laid down their weapons and walked into no man's land, saying "Merry Christmas" in English. The English soldiers joined them. They shook hands, traded presents of cigarettes and food, and some even played soccer together. The day that Jesus was born is so infused with love, it filled the space between the enemies' trenches, creating peace for a day.



That love still exists now, and we're supposed to sing it across our own enemy lines. If Jesus could forgive those who crucified him on the cross, we can lay down our weapons of hate and anger, no matter how badly people treat us. Like

Jesus did, we need to make the first move, taking a step toward those who've hurt us. When they see we have love in our hearts, we inspire them to take a step toward us. When we meet in the middle and exchange kindness with our actions and words, we, too, create peace in the space between us.

**Receive Mercy** Ultimate Peacemaker, strengthen my heart so I'm able to forgive my enemies and wish them peace. Amen.

**Extend Mercy** Write a prayer for someone you're having trouble with. Work for a ceasefire by praying that both of your hearts become filled with peace.



# ABUNDANT MERCY

## Family Devotions and Activities for Lent

**Invite your family to dive deeper** into knowing and experiencing God's abundant mercy this Lent! *Abundant Mercy: Family Devotions and Activities for Lent* is your page-a-day guide to daily inspiration using Scripture, stories and reflections, prayer, plus discussion starters and activities. Author Claire McGarry shares relatable and down-to-earth examples of how we can teach our families to receive mercy and to extend it to others.

Have mercy on me,  
O God,  
according to your  
steadfast love;  
according to your  
abundant mercy...  
Psalm 51:1



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