

Lift Up Your Hearts

Lent Daily Devotions for Families



Kate Wicker



Ash Wednesday



Choose Lenten Resolutions

Just as the stone is rolled away from the tomb on Easter, Lent offers us forty days to begin removing whatever separates us from God and to lift up our hearts toward him and his unending love for us.

Now some Lenten practices are more meaningful than others. A few years ago, I didn't have to choose my Lenten sacrifice; it chose me. A torn hamstring sidelined me from my regular running routine and my being in control. It didn't feel like a spiritual sacrifice at first—it was only running after all, right? But over time, missing out on the physical activity, the mental health booster and the social outlet (a close friend often joined me for a few miles each week) made that Lent a season of surrender. But it opened me to Christ's presence in unexpected ways. No longer in control of what my body could do, I let go of my athletic identity as a runner and recognized that my worth ran far deeper. Instead of hitting the pavement, I had more time to sit with God, to be reminded that I was, first and foremost, his beloved daughter.

Prayer, almsgiving and making sacrifices or fasting are powerful Lenten practices. They help us crucify some of our worldly desires, grow in faith and better appreciate the Lord's Passion through our own small scourges. But Lent, ultimately, invites us to return to God, to lift up our hearts to him—to *be with him*. Lent isn't about performance. More than the self-denials, it calls us to be present to God—and to others. When we make space for God, light breaks forth. Healing begins. And God responds, "Here I am."

Help your family choose Lenten resolutions that help you let go of whatever is keeping you from living a more faith-filled life, drawing you closer to a God who longs to **restore you and hold you close**.

Lord, help me return to you with all my heart this Lent. Teach me to let go of control and to open myself to healing, hope and restoration. Amen.



Holy Listening

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **JOHN 16:13**

As we begin our journey into Lent, Jesus gently reminds us of a gift that is always available: the Holy Spirit. This Spirit isn't loud or demanding. We must slow down and listen to hear him.

We live in a noisy, fast-paced world where listening well doesn't come naturally. We're used to talking, scrolling and responding. But Lent is asking something different of us. It invites us to pause, to make time and to be still. The truth is, if God matters to us, then it's up to us to make space to hear him.

This Lent, let us cultivate a habit of holy listening. not just in church or during prayer but in all the quiet moments life offers—during walks, in car rides and in the stillness of our hearts. Listening to God requires practice, but the promise is beautiful: He will guide us into truth.

Pray: Holy Spirit, teach me how to listen, make room for your gentle voice and trust that you will lead me where I need to go. Amen.

Think: When do you feel it's hardest to listen to God or to each other? What's one small way we all can practice listening better this week?

Sacrifice: Over the next two days, try to eliminate as much background noise as possible (turn off music, TV, social media, etc.).



Saturday After Ash Wednesday



Reflect God's Mercy

When Jesus had come down from the mountain...a man with [leprosy]...came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be made clean!" **MATTHEW 8:1-3**

Jesus cured the leper instantly, but he doesn't ask for globs of glory or recognition. He simply desires the man live out a restored life of healing and gratitude.

Lent is an invitation for us to do the same: to step back from our egos and let Jesus take center stage. It's not just through prayer and sacrifice that we draw close to him, but it's also in how we see and love others. When we encounter a crying baby, a gossiping friend or an irritating co-worker, we can choose to see Jesus there. **Every encounter becomes a chance to reflect God's mercy.** Every act of patience, kindness or forgiveness becomes a living testimony of Christ's love.

Pray: Sweet Jesus, I want you to be at the center of my life. Help me to see you in others, and love them as you love me. Amen.

Think: What's one way you can show the love of Jesus to someone who might be difficult to love today?

Sacrifice: Choose someone difficult to love today, and do something kind for them. This could be offering a genuine compliment, praying for them by name or simply showing extra patience. Let your love for Jesus be visible in how you treat even the most challenging person.



First Week of Lent

Repentance & Returning

First Sunday of Lent

Return to God

Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart... **JOEL 2:12**

When my oldest daughter, who is now in college, was little she liked to make up her own prayers. During some recent spring cleaning, I found one of her old prayers scribbled down in a box of mementos. In her childish scrawl, it read: “Is God here? Yes. Yes, he is. Amen.”

My faith life isn’t always so trusting or simple. I want God to be right here with me or to believe he is ever-present in my life, but sometimes he seems aloof, and usually it’s me—or just the busyness of life—putting the distance between us. But **Lent offers us a beautiful opportunity to rediscover God, to offer him our hearts as tattered and distracted as they may be.**

Pray: Dear Jesus, may this Lent be a journey in which I return to you. Thank you for always being there for me, waiting with open arms. Amen.

Think: What’s one simple way we can “return to God” this week even when we feel far away or distracted?

Sacrifice: Choose one part of your day to slow down and be truly present with God, with a loved one or even with yourself.



Fast, Then Feast on Doing Good

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the straps of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them

and not to hide yourself from your own kin? **ISAIAH 58:6-7**

During Lent, God wants us to come back to him. Isaiah says true fasting means helping others: feeding the hungry, setting people free, sharing what we have. When we turn from selfishness and return to love, God draws near. He promises, “Then you will call, and I will answer.” **Repentance means directing our hearts back to God and to others.** That’s where real change begins.

Pray: God, help us turn back to you. Show us how to love others the way you love us. Thank you for always being nearby. Amen.

Think: How can we help someone in need this week with our time, with our kindness or by sharing what we have?

Sacrifice: Try to not snack between meals today.

“Helping Hearts” Activity

Supplies: Small slips of paper or index cards; markers or crayons; a small basket or jar

Instructions:

1. Sit together as a family, and read Isaiah 58:6-7 out loud.
2. Discuss this question: How can we help someone in need this week with our time, with our kindness or by sharing what we have?

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent



Make That Apology

Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? **ROMANS 2:4B**

When I was in the eighth grade, I was on a field trip when a popular girl asked lowly, nerdy me to walk with her. The thrill of being chosen led me to not only follow Miss Popularity but to also ditch a true, loyal friend. Mature beyond her years, that friend was quick to forgive me, but I remember feeling uncomfortable with her kindness. Eventually, I returned to her, hugged her, said I was so, so sorry, and we are still good friends to this day.

The verse above reminds us that grace has a purpose: to draw us closer and to not let us drift further from God. Repentance doesn't begin in fear. Instead, it begins in the gentle awareness that we are loved, even in our brokenness. **God's kindness isn't permission to keep going our own way.** It's a hand extended, leading us to repentance.

Pray: God, thank you for extending your mercy, offering me room to turn around, to grow and to begin again. Amen.

Think: Are you holding a grudge against anyone? If so, let go of your bitterness, and work on forgiving this person.

Sacrifice: Do you have to apologize to someone? Do it ASAP...and mean it.

3. Invite each family member to write or draw one way they want to show love or help someone this week. Examples: Make sandwiches for a local shelter; write a kind note to someone feeling lonely; donate gently used clothes or toys; help a sibling with chores; pray for someone going through a hard time

4. Put the slips in a basket or jar labeled "Helping Hearts." Throughout the week, pull one out each day and do it together or encourage one another to follow through.



This Lent, author and speaker Kate Wicker brings families an approachable and inspirational booklet to keep at the family table throughout the season. Gather each day to consider Scripture, a reflection and relevant conversations and activities to guide hearts both young and old toward the glory of Easter Sunday. (And even if its every other day, you'll be blessed as your family gathers around the Word and a timely message for the season.) Kate Wicker keeps it real—and encouraging—to inspire families to thoughtfully make their way through Lent with love.

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Quote on page 21, O'Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*. Edited by Sally Fitzgerald, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979, p. 307.



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1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026
800-325-9414 • www.creativecommunications.com



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