

The Season of Lent 2021

Finding Contentment in God

DATES: This year Lent is Wednesday, February 17th - Saturday, April 3rd

Lent is the forty-day period before Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the day before Easter Day. We skip Sundays when we count the forty days, because Sundays commemorate the Resurrection.

COLORS: In most churches, the decorations are purple, a royal color to prepare for the King.

HISTORY OF LENT:

The name:

Lent used to be a forty-hour period of fasting to remember Jesus' suffering and the forty hours He spent in the tomb. In the third century, Lent was made six days long. However in 800 AD it was made 40 days long. WHY?

The name "lent" is a Germanic word that referred to the season of Spring. However, the original Latin translation (*quadragesima*) of Lent actually means "forty days".

The date:

Traditionally, the Western Church (**Protestants**, Catholics, and Anglicans) begin the season of Lent on the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday in order to skip over Sundays. It was traditional in ancient times for people engaged in special times of fasting, prayer, repentance, or remorse to rub ashes on their forehead as an outward symbol of what they were experiencing internally.

This custom can be seen in the following Biblical examples: 2 Samuel 13:19, Esther 4:1-3, Job 42:6, and Jeremiah 6:26.

This custom entered Christianity through Judaism, and Christians today may place ashes on their foreheads to mark the beginning and their commitment to the Lenten season. Ideally, churches should use the ashes from the burning of palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebration.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR LENT:

Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance. It is a season for reflection and "taking inventory" of your life. The faithful rededicate themselves and traditionally, new converts would prepare for baptism.

Lent owes much of its spirit to the forty days Jesus spent in the desert preparing for his ministry when he was "tested" by the devil (*Matthew 4:1-11*). The Jewish view of the desert was an abode of demons, and it was in this place that Jesus was offered the opportunity to be the wrong kind of Messiah. He rejected each possibility. For our sake, He was tested so we would know who He was NOT. Jesus did not bribe us with earthly bread (v.3-4), astonish us with feats of invulnerability (v.5-7), nor did He seek world domination or command an army (v.8-9). Jesus simply did the WILL OF THE FATHER (v.10).

WHY PARTICIPATE IN LENT:

We participate in Lent in efforts to show true friendship with Jesus. "Some people only celebrate the happy times in Jesus' life: Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and Christmas. But as true friends, we should also watch and pray with Him, retreat with Him into the wilderness during Lent, and stand by Him at the cross on Good Friday. When Jesus entered the desert, He left behind all the expectations of others, all the hopes, and all the illusions. It was just Jesus and the Father in the Holy Spirit.

"The desert experience is about deprivation. In deprivation, we discover that we are not all-powerful. We are slaves to our stomachs, to the opinions of others, to pleasure, etc. We cannot bear pain, so we take a pill. We cannot bear growing old, so we dye our hair. Doing without can strip away some of the illusions and give us a glimpse of truth."

We participate in Lent in order to complete a "spiritual spring cleaning". It is during this time that we "clean out" those things that hinder our *corporate* and *personal* relationships with Jesus and our service to Him. Yes, we actually take the time to examine our *corporate* relationships—meaning, what's going on in the body of Christ? What's going on in our church families? Let's check up on each other during Lent.

Lent is our "spiritual training camp" in which we gain the necessary skills to overcome evil, as well as develop self-discipline for the "post-Lenten" season. We learn, examine, and get our material excesses and spiritual deprivations under control during this "training time". Remember: The best athletes use training camp to create a year-round lifestyle of self-discipline!

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN LENT:

Many use abstinence from meat and acts of penance as metaphors during the Lenten season. In a small way, this models the rejection of illusions about what we need, who we are, and who God is. Some give up television, sweets, and a host of others. It is a personal decision that is sacrificial unto God.

During Lent, we abstain from meat on Fridays, Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday! This is a time for unification of the entire body of believers. Quite often, our bodily appetites control our actions. The purpose of fasting is to make your bodily appetites your servant rather than your master. However, fasting is not only total abstention from food. In the historic Church, it means a balanced diet so that your animal appetites become a sort of spiritual *snooze alarm*. "All fasting should be done for God's glory and spiritual growth"! Lenten fasts are not DIETS used to loose weight.

REWARDS OF LENT:

During the Lenten season, we have the opportunity to hear the voice of God, which is usually lost in the den of pleasure and meaningless talk. We can enter into a private desert even in the midst of the world and face our own demons. We can tear down false idols only to be heartbroken at finding others behind them. Then rejoice at God’s revealing all of our points of growth to us. Through a contemplative prayer life, we open ourselves to hear everything that God desires of us.

Purification: When the Hebrews were led from Egypt to the Promised Land, they refused to go in because they did not trust God’s promise. God allowed them to wander in the desert for forty years until they gained the trust they lacked. During this time, all the ones that had refused to cross the Jordan died. In this way, God’s people were *purified*.

Removal of Infections: In Noah’s day, forty days of flooding washed away the evil that had infected the world. This was not a permanent solution, but it offered opportunity for those who were left to start over.

REFLECTIONS FOR LENT:

We must remember throughout this Lenten season that God is with us. He promises no trial beyond our ability to succeed. He offers us no truth we cannot accept if we become as children. When Jesus had finally driven off the devil, angels came to wait on Him. When, through Jesus, we reject illusion and self-deception, we can be sure of continued graces from God. These are not rewards of virtue but those gifts which are available only to people who worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

Clearer Communication: During Lent, we can allow ourselves to attain clearer communication lines with God through *contemplative prayer*. A *contemplative prayer life* is one that is concentrated “on spiritual things as a form of private devotion”. It is literally experiencing a *mystical awareness* of God through silence and the true act of *listening for God*. When is the last time you can remember just sitting and being so attentive to God that you were fully aware of God’s presence with you? I believe this is what Jesus felt in the desert as Satan attempted to “test” Him; however, Jesus never doubted His Father’s presence... Jesus was concentrating on the spiritual and not the natural. Lent offers us the opportunity to concentrate on the spiritual and not the natural—removing ourselves from our struggles long enough to allow the angels to attend to us.

2021 FOCUS SCRIPTURE:

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.” –Psalm 23:1 NIV

2021 CORPORATE GOAL:

As we stand together during this Lenten season, I believe God is challenging us to be sincere in our relationship with Him by making a daily choice to *find contentment in God*. Our past year has been filled with sickness, violence, trials, and uncertainty. The Lenten season gives us an opportunity to truly dive into a deeper relationship with God and reap the ultimate benefit of true *contentment* in God and in our lives.

Questions to Consider:

- What is holding me back from a true relationship with God?
- What is distracting me from having a *contemplative prayer life*?
- How can I use this Lenten season to revive my communication lines with God?
- How can I *find contentment in God* when I have so much uncertainty around me?

*****Prayer is the key to a successful Lenten season*****

Whenever you feel weak during the Lenten season or feel tempted to give up on your commitment, bow your head in prayer. As you grow during this season, you will find the silence between you and God is stronger than any words you can ever say. Conversation and time with God and staying in God’s word will keep you strong.

MY PERSONAL NOTES & GOALS:
