

Lent | Preparing, Celebrating, Discipling

I. What is Lent?

- Historically, no one can perfectly nail down the genesis of Lent. Some loosely tie it to the Apostle's mourning over the loss of the Lord after the crucifixion. Others quote ancient sources that claim that something similar to Lent was already being practiced by the church. And others point to the Council of Nicea in which it mentions "the 40 days of Lent." Either way, until reset generations, fasting was an expected practice of God-worshippers.
- Regardless, the purpose of the observation has general agreement. Lent has traditionally been a time of spiritual Preparation for Eastertide.
- Lent mirrors the thousands of years that God's people have been preparing for the yearly celebration of His resurrection.

II. Who participates in Lent?

- Historically, a number of denominations have participated in Lent. However, even though many Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, and some Presbyterians have observed Lent, most Protestants do not.
- Again, we don't have the time to detail the reasoning here. Suffice it to say, observing Lent is not inherently wrong as long as it's done in faith to the glory of God as prescribed in the Scriptures.
- I can say that many Protestants of the past and most from present have wanted to distance themselves from the Catholic traditions. And I completely agree with that. Association can cause serious problems. It can miscommunicate to people on the outside, and it can confuse people on the inside.
- If you choose to observe Lent — you can defiantly do it to the honor and glory of God.

III. How do I prepare for Lent?

- Is it possible that Fat Tuesday was ever Christ-honoring? Let's say that you and your family live two hundred years ago, are devout disciples of the Lord, and are excitedly looking forward to Lent. You are all happy to spend the 40 days praying, fasting, reading the Scriptures, and preparing for the biggest celebration on the Christian calendar — Easter. So, you decide to stop eating fatty foods and sugar. But your pantry still has all the ingredients for such foods sitting there, presenting a very real potential temptation.
 - Proverbs 14:16, Proverbs 22:3; Proverbs 27:12
- Your family knows that eating fatty foods and sugar within reason is not a sin, but you also know that you want to worship God by fasting, and so removing the temptation to break that fast is very prudent. Therefore, the day before your fast starts, you and your family decide to have a special feast. You take all of your milk, eggs, butter, sugar, and syrup and you prepare a pancake extravaganza. The family enjoys the feast together, praising God for His sustenance and blessing, and now the temptations to break your fast are gone from the home.
- The point is, historically, one way people prepared for Lent was by enjoying a final feast the day before Lent started. It was intended to be an act of worship to God, not a pagan glut-fest, and it was intended to prepare the body for an extended fast. Obviously, there's no need to prepare the body to give up technology or sweets by binging on them the day before, but — historically — many people were going to participate in the full-on 40 day fast. That required some preparation simply for health's sake.

IV. How do I observe Lent?

- The day after Shrove Tuesday is Ash Wednesday. It's the start of Lent and involves a number of customs. Participants may set up a Lenten calendar, start a Lenten devotional, or make a Lenten sacrifice.
- The "sacrifice" is another name for the actual fast. Someone observing Lent chooses something from their lives (a food or activity) and they sacrifice it to the Lord for Lent. That means that they will not partake in it again until Easter.
- The Ash in Ash Wednesday, it's designed to remind us that we are nothing but dust. We were formed from dust and will return to dust. An interesting tradition is that — in many traditions — palm leaves from the previous year's celebration of Palm Sunday are burned to create the ash.
- From there on out, participants observe a 40 day fast.
 - Matthew 6:16-18; Ezra 8:21
 - Followers of Christ may choose to refrain from food or drink entirely or certain foods or drinks because they want to use the time they would normally have been eating or participating in the activity to pray and seek God's will for their lives in the Scriptures.
- Why 40 days?
 - The number 40 plays a prominent role in the Scriptures, and a good number of them reference or include fasting.
 - The first significant reference to 40 is the number of days and nights it rained during the flood. When you couple this event with the over 140 other times the number 40 is used, you find the theme of testing throughout.
 - This is true of the 40 years the Jews spent in the wilderness before entering Canaan. The Jews didn't trust God any more, and the Lord put them on a mandatory fast for 40 years.
 - On two different occasions, Moses spent 40 days in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. Those events were accompanied by fasting.
 - In I Kings 19 we learn that God fed Elijah right before a 40 day walk to Mount Horeb.
 - Jonah preached throughout Nineveh for 40 days.
 - And, of course, Jesus fasted for 40 days before He began His public ministry.

V. How do I disciple during Lent?

- **We discuss the truths of God with our fellow disciples.**
 - Some valuable topics for Lenten include the life of Christ, the necessity of confession and repentance, righteous living, and you can obviously take time to talk about fasting and prayer and Lenten acts of worship and service.
- **We invite our fellow disciples to do life with us.**
 - Don't just talk, put feet to your words.
 - So, you've read the Gospels together, wonderful! Now talk to God about what you read. Thank Christ for His life and ministry and sacrifice and resurrection.
 - You've talked about confession and repentance; exercise those gifts together. James 5:16 says, "*Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be [spiritually strengthened].*"
 - You've taken time to talk about sanctification and righteous living; start holding each other accountable to walk in the footsteps of Christ.
 - You've talked about fasting; do one together.
 - As you talk about God and live out those truths in your lives, you will be actively participating in discipleship just as the Lord commanded.