

Season of Lent

Lent is a time of soul-searching reflection in preparation for celebrating Christ's death and resurrection on Good Friday and Easter. Starting on Ash Wednesday, Lent usually consists of the 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays.

The earliest reference to fasting and prayer before Easter is by the early church father Irenaeus. 40 days of fasting became widely practiced by the 2nd century, probably due to the number's biblical significance in the lives of Noah, Moses, Jonah, and Jesus.



Lent is not mandated by God's Word, but is based on biblical principles: (1) reflection on the significance of Jesus' death, along with prayers of repentance and confession, (2) fasting as a means to focus more wholly on God, and (3) giving to assist the poor. We're not required to do these during Lent, but can benefit from adopting some of the customs of earlier generations of Christians.

Lenten practices (like any spiritual disciplines) don't make us acceptable to God; we're made right with Him only through faith in Jesus' death on a cross for our sins (Eph. 2:8-9). These practices are simply a means through which He works in our lives to help us grow to spiritual maturity and be conformed to the character of Christ (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 8:29). They are for our benefit, but not a way to "earn" anything from God.

How to Practice Lent. This is an opportunity to reflect on the significance of Christ's death and examine our hearts. It's not a "law" we must follow, but can be a time of spiritual cleansing and renewal. Based on the historic practice of Lent, try doing something in each of these categories:

1. **Fasting:** Give up something for God. Fasting is not a means to "earn" something from Him, but rather a way to learn to curb your appetites and focus more completely on God. There are many varieties of fasting.
2. **Prayer and Meditation:** Read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Reflect on His suffering, and the tremendous love that it represents. Reflect on your own sin and what it cost Him. Take time to pray in confession and repentance; do some spiritual "house cleaning."
3. **Giving to the Poor:** Use the money that you save by not eating to help the poor. Consider doing some volunteer work. How can you show the love of Christ to others?