

Home Heart Spirit

Family Prayers and
Activities for Lent



Mark Neilsen

About Family Prayer ...

What follows are some brief Scripture passages and reflections for daily family prayer throughout Lent. Feel free to go in whatever direction the Spirit and your own reflections take you, but here are some suggestions:

- Choose a place and time for prayer that is comfortable for your family. If you are used to praying before meals or at bedtime, you may want to incorporate these prayers at the same time. Or perhaps praying in a different spot or at a different time reinforces the idea that Lent is a special time for the family and the church. Whatever choice you make, prayer will flow most smoothly if the needs of all family members can be considered.
- Begin prayer with a moment of silence to recall that God is with us in our prayer, just as God is with us throughout the day.
- Read the Scripture. Let the words sink deeply in your hearts.
- Conclude by offering any special prayer petitions or intercessions for others. Then join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer.

About Family Activities ...

Family activities during Lent may help to illustrate important themes so that adults and children alike can better appreciate what Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection. Each family will have its own level of interest in such activities, and a family's schedule and particular talents will also affect which activities will be most fruitfully pursued. Activities are scattered throughout this booklet. Look at them all to see which ones you might be interested in doing as a family. Some are best done at the beginning of Lent, some near the end and others throughout the 40 days of Lent.

Ashes

Carefully burn last year's palms from Palm Sunday if you still have them. When they have cooled, place them in a clear glass jar with a tight lid on the table as a centerpiece. Ashes are a wonderful symbol of the transformation brought about in us through our baptism. By dying to our selves and dying with Jesus, we hope to enjoy with him and through him our own resurrection.

If you prefer a living symbol of Lent, a small cactus is a nice reminder of Jesus' own 40 days of fasting in the desert. Either way, these symbols remind us of our total dependence on God for the new life that comes out of our transformation through the grace Jesus poured out upon us on Calvary.

Ash Wednesday

Reconciled To God

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. *2 Corinthians 5:20*

Through our baptism, we receive the life of Christ within us. Our desire and our hope as Christians is to live so that the



love of Christ can be expressed to the world through us. Lent is an opportunity for us to take a good look at our lives, see where we have failed and be “reconciled to God”—that is, ask for forgiveness as well as the help to do better.

Holy Spirit of Jesus, be with us this Lent as we reflect and pray that we might be strengthened in our Christian life together.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday God's Will For Us

Then [Jesus] said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” *Luke 9:23-24*

If we are going to follow Jesus, we will try to do more than follow his actions, we will try to follow his heart. Jesus was so in love with his Father that he was willing to do whatever the Father asked of him—even die on the cross. Taking up our own cross each day means that we are willing to accept God’s will as more important than our own. And what is God’s will for us? We are to love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourself.

Lord, help us to follow you in your love of the Father and of one another.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Time For Everything

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” *Matthew 9:14-15*



Lent is sometimes seen as a gloomy time of focusing on sinfulness and the difficulty of Christian life. But Jesus did not live in gloom. Instead, he found time to celebrate with friends and to fast, to be with people and to withdraw to pray alone. One of the most important things we can do as a family is

celebrate: birthdays, anniversaries, successes of any kind. The milestones and triumphs of our lives are little signs of the presence of God in us and in our family. What better reason for a party?

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming among us—and staying with us.



Call an Assembly

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children... *Joel 2:15-16*

To treat the season of Lent differently, call the family to dinner in a new way. Here's one suggestion: the children could take turns ringing a small bell as a call to dinner. The family could assemble in silence around the dinner table for a special Lenten prayer. A moment or two of silent prayer might be a refreshing and different way to begin a meal.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

No Need To Be Perfect

Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:31-32

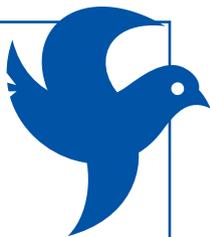
Do you ever get discouraged because you don't do things as well as you should? When you drop the ball in gym class, burn the dish you are cooking, get a bad grade or foul up the checkbook? Or does it bother you that you get so angry, lose your patience or grumble because you don't have enough money? Jesus is not in the least bothered by such failures in us; in fact, he became human in order to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus, the Divine Physician, will help us to do the best we can and not be overcome by discouragement.

Jesus, thank you for accepting me with all of my needs. May I never be so embarrassed by my failures that I cannot ask you for help.

Bury the “Alleluia”

During Lent most Christian churches refrain from singing or responding with “Alleluia,” a Hebrew word for praise to God. This is a way to express the serious tone of Lent as we commemorate Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, his suffering and death. On Easter morning, alleluia will again ring out to celebrate Christ’s victory over death.

We can symbolize the “burial” of alleluia at home by making a banner with the word on it, rolling it up and putting it away in the back of the closet until Easter. One way to do this is to make a banner of felt with the word “Alleluia” cut out of another piece of felt and glued to the banner. Dowel rods might be used at the top and the bottom of the banner to hold it in place. On Easter morning, the bright word and sound of alleluia would reflect our joy in the Risen Christ.



First Sunday of Lent

Time To Believe

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” *Mark 1:14-15*

Do you ever put things off, hoping that they will be easier to do some other time? Sure. We all do. But Jesus began to preach and to teach at a very inconvenient time. John the Baptist was just thrown into jail and would soon be killed. Jesus spoke out anyway, because it was time to do so. If we have been putting off an apology or finishing a chore or asking for a favor, maybe now is the best time for it. One thing is certain: now is the best time to believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

Jesus, thank you for taking the time to come among us.

Monday, First Week of Lent

Serving The Lord

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” *Matthew 25:37-40*



Jesus certainly makes it easy for us to serve him! Anytime we offer help to anyone, especially those who have the least, we are offering it to Christ. Can our family clothe the naked or feed the hungry or visit the sick? Sometimes we can do this directly, sometimes we can support the work of charities who serve the needy. And we can always pray for them.

Lord Jesus, help us find concrete ways to ease the suffering of those around us, and help us to do so for your sake.

Tuesday, First Week of Lent

A Change Of Heart

Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. *Matthew 6:9-10*

We don't pray in order to change God's mind. We really pray in order to change our mind. Think especially about words of the Lord's Prayer: "thy will be done." God's will is what is best for us, and so we pray that we can accept the action of God in our lives and in the world. Of course, God will honor our prayer whatever it is, just as any loving parent accepts a child's sincere gift no matter how silly it might appear to someone else. But when it seems that God has not answered our prayer, we need to trust that God, whose wisdom and knowledge is far greater than anything we can imagine, is doing what is best for us.



Almighty God, help us to trust that you can and will bring good out of any situation, no matter how bleak it seems to us.

Wednesday, First Week of Lent

A Clean Conscience

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. *Psalms 51:1-2*

Psalms 51 is a wonderful prayer for Lent. Not only does it remind us that we may have sins on our conscience (and maybe even a few transgressions and some iniquity!), it also tells us something important about God. For there's no point in remembering our sinfulness without recalling God's steadfast love and abundant mercy. That's really what Lent is all about: the tremendous cleansing love of God, poured out for us in Jesus.

Gracious God, help us to call upon your mercy in confidence and to believe that we have finally been cleansed of all our guilt.

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:26

A Christian family is a special group of disciples of Jesus, called by our baptism and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love one another. “Love one another as I have loved you,” is the new commandment Jesus gave us (John 13:34), and it is a tall order. For we don’t always love others as Jesus has loved us, and that is a good thing to remember as we prepare to celebrate Easter. During Lent, we take an honest look at the way we are living our lives, ask for forgiveness and for the strength to do better. One way to do that is to look at what Jesus himself did and said as a guidepost for how we are to live our lives. We can begin by looking at what Jesus did through his life, death and resurrection to show his love for us.

This booklet offers daily prayers for Lent as well as a variety of Lenten activities for families. When Jesus spoke to individuals or groups of people, he always said just what they needed to hear. As you gather to pray and reflect as a family this Lent, feel free to adapt these prayers, activities and suggestions to your own family needs. May our prayers at home and in church during Lent lead us to hear the words of the gospel anew—and put them into practice in our lives.

—Mark Neilsen



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