

Practicing 
LOVE



Family Devotions for Lent

LEAH *and* ROBYN PERRAULT

Introduction

WELCOME TO LENT!

The seasons of the Church year allow us to intentionally practice the habits that we need in the seasons of our life. Lent is the season of waiting, of preparing, of sacrifice that allows us to weather suffering while we wait for the new life and celebration of the resurrection that Jesus lived and promises.

Often, we give things up in order to practice sacrifice. This year, we are inviting you and the people you share your home with to practice love for Lent. Love can be easy and effortless as well as downright dissatisfying. The idea underlying this little booklet comes from two sources. First, the Bible says, “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18). And second, Mother Teresa reflected that, “Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in that action.” At our house, “I love you” is easy to say and harder to show. We always need to practice.

And when you practice, be gentle with yourself and each other. If you cannot read the reflection in the morning, then read it at night and practice tomorrow. If you miss a day, don't let that stop you from coming back the next day. If you love one idea for practice and can't do another, repeat an activity or make up your own.

Love never goes out of season. Practicing love for Lent can deepen your faith in times of difficulty just as much as in times of great joy. So, we hope your family will join our family this Lent in practicing love at home so that it can spill out into a world longing for God's love.

Leah & Robyn

Ash Wednesday

Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing. **JOEL 2:12-13**

When we give the bigger piece of cake or share the money we were going to spend on ourselves with someone who needs it more than we do, God is not measuring the cake or the money. He is looking for growth in our hearts. We all have a long list of bad choices that we have made, of our mistakes and do-overs that make us feel ashamed. God is not asking us to give up enough cake or money so that the good deeds list is longer than the bad deeds list. He wants our hearts. God knows that those little acts of love can tie a knot between our hearts and his, if we will give him more than the cake.

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

Sit down together and have each person draw, craft or decorate a heart that reads: "God, I give you my heart. Help me to love this Lent." Sign your name and then put them on the door that you go in and out of for the duration of Lent as a reminder to practice love.



Thursday *after* Ash Wednesday

I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God.

DEUTERONOMY 30:19-20

Oh, it can be so hard to see that in every moment, God has set before us choices. When someone asks us to help them clean up a big mess or take out the garbage, it maybe doesn't feel like we have a choice. It feels like we "have to" do it. We might get in trouble if we don't. But God has set before us life and death (and everything in between). He asks us to choose life. Is a big sigh, a complaint or whine, or an eye roll a sign that we have chosen life (whether we do the chore or not)? When you find yourself irritated or feeling trapped, pause for a moment and ask yourself, what does choosing life look like right now?

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

In as many moments as you are able to today, choose life. Replace "I have to" thoughts with "I have a choice and I choose to...." As you fill your day with activities, accompany your actions with smiles, gratitude or hugs. See if you feel more love when you choose life. Notice if others respond to you differently too.



Friday *after* Ash Wednesday

Is this not the fast that I choose:

...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**

When Isaiah shares this message from God, we need to notice that sharing is understood as a sort of fast. Fasting means that we do not get something, often something that we like or want. God does not ask us to simply give up something we like or want—or even need.

He asks us to do so for a reason—to give what we give up to someone else. Doesn't it feel amazing when someone else has a treat that they do not have to share and they offer it to you anyway? God is not asking us to go hungry, or become homeless, or go naked. He is asking us to recognize that the food, shelter and clothing we have are gifts from him. When we share these gifts, we acknowledge that God's gifts are for everyone. This keeps us from becoming selfish and greedy.

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

Share something today, something that you love and want or even need. Take a favorite treat to someone else. Break your cookie in half at lunch and give it away instead of trading it. Invite someone whose home is lonely or sad to spend time at your house and give up your TV time for the day.

Saturday *after* Ash Wednesday

[Jesus] said to [Levi], “Follow me.” And he got up, left everything, and followed him. **LUKE 5:27-28**

If Jesus walked into your house right now and asked you to give up everything and follow him out the door wherever he went, what would you find most difficult to leave behind? Would it be your bedroom or your living room? A favorite toy or your guitar? Picture albums or your wallet or your phone? Would it be your family or friends? There is no right or wrong answer. It is not wrong to love people or the things that give us life. But each of us has been invited to follow Jesus. And anything or anyone we would choose before Jesus is an indication that our hearts are upside down. We can only love people and things the way God wants us to when we love Jesus the most.

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

Take a walk with Jesus today—around the block, through your house or down the hallways where you go to school or work. Think of the people and/or things you love the most and ask Jesus to help you love him the most so that you can love your people and your stuff well.

First Sunday *of* Lent

I have set my [rain]bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

GENESIS 9:13



The rainbow is the sign that God gave Noah that he would never again flood the whole earth. It was a sign of the promise between God and his people, like a divine handshake. God offered it to us so that every time we see the rainbow, we can be reminded of how he loves us. We are people who need signs, who experience love not just once with words, but over and over again with the help of things. We experience love through touch, smells, sounds and sights. Children ask their parents to sing the same songs over and over, to play the same games because these repeated actions give them safety and security. Couples go to the places where they first met or where they had significant moments because these spots become signs of how they feel about each other. God meets us in places, rituals, nature and people.

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

Think of and share, or write down, three signs of love that are meaningful for you. Is it the smell of a certain meal being made? A fistful of flowers? Arriving home to a clean house, seeing a beautiful sunset or being awestruck by the presence of a butterfly? What sights, sounds or experiences fill you with a sense that God is with you, that you are loved?

Holy Saturday

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **ROMANS 6:5**

In choosing to follow Jesus, we will undoubtedly be led to the crosses of our lives. Being misunderstood, feeling sick, making mistakes, saying goodbye to people we love—all are crosses we would rather not carry. When we feel alone, we are reminded that Jesus was also lonely. When we feel like giving up, we can remember that Simon helped Jesus to carry the cross. When we are angry with people, we remember that Jesus prayed for God to forgive those who hurt him. When God raised Jesus, we were also raised. Our hearts belong to God and we can live and love in both the dark and the light!

PRAY

Jesus, I give you my heart with my acts of love today.

PRACTICE LOVE

Turn off the lights today. Read by candlelight, build forts, eat cold food. Imagine what it is like to be in a tomb. Make a donation that will benefit people living without power, freedom, homes or peace. Before bed, turn the lights on as a sign that the waiting is over. Jesus is risen! In God's world, there is an end, a purpose to our waiting.



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