

VINEYARD

RESOURCES FOR LENT

Lent is the 40 days leading to Easter Sunday. This is a sacred and important time for The Church as we reconnect with the power and significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Often during Lent, we remove something from our lives so that we can spend that time in prayer and serving others. But what instead of skimming activity and distraction off the top of our days, we created meaningful space in our lives to connect with God?

Spiritual practices create space for us to connect with God. We often *want* to spend time with God. We like the idea of learning from God, listening to God, and being in His presence, but our noisy, full, frenetic world often makes that space hard to come by. Spiritual practices are intentional experiences that allow us to *keep company* with Jesus. These practices open us up to God.

Practice is the key word here. Slowing down, being intentional, or creating a new habit is not always easy or comfortable. All sorts of thoughts, emotions, to-dos come to the surface when there is space in front of us. But like any other new skill, the more we practice, the more natural, the easier, and the better the experience becomes. We *practice* creating space with God. We *practice* listening. We *practice* being God's presence. We *practice* self-examination. Not towards a goal of perfection, but towards ease and deep connection.

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How to use this guide

Our hope for this season is that you will use one or multiple of these practices to sit with Jesus so that He can form you. Each Sunday during Lent, we'll be examining a different conversation Jesus had with a follower or a critic. Each of these conversations points to something that stops us from being the people God made us to be.

Taking this scripture work with you into these practices will create the richest communal experience this season. For example, when we talk about Jesus' conversation in Matthew 19:16-22, we see Jesus telling a young man who believed he obeyed every commandment to sell what he owns and give the money to the poor. This is a conversation about not holding anything back.

So if you are journaling, journal from that passage or what that passage stirs up in you. What are you holding back? When you go for a walk, have a conversation with God about that question. Use the scripture as your passage in Lectio Divina, ask God to talk to you about this at the end of Centering Prayer. If you're praying the Hours, invite God to speak to you through the ancient hymns, scriptures and prayers about what you are holding back.

All of the spiritual practices have one aim: To bring you into the presence of God so that your life can be transformed. Transformation doesn't happen passively; we must take steps to follow Jesus. It's an active mission.

There is no "right" or "best" practice. If you are in a season where you need stretching, pick one that sounds the riskiest. If you are in a season where you have almost no time for yourself, pick the lowest hanging fruit. Some people will use multiple practices, others one practice. Some will try out different ones on different days or different weeks. Others will give each one a shot during the season of Lent so they can discover where they best meet God.

Use the season to develop a new habit or routine, or add new intentionality to familiar activities. After all, Easter is not the culmination of Lent. It is the beginning of our time following Jesus out of the tomb.

May God be with you this season.

Index / self-assessment

Do you have 10 minutes a day?

- Centering prayer
- Praying the Hours

Does movement help you focus?

- Hospitality)
- Nature
- Journaling

Want to try something creative?

- Nature
- Journaling
- Icons

Do you need to slow down?

- Centering prayer
- Praying the Hours]
- Present in your body

Want to experience the Bible in a fresh way?

- Lectio Divina

Do you appreciate ancient church practices?

- Lectio divina
- Praying the Hours
- Icons

Do you need a road-map for your thoughts?

- Examen
- Journaling
- Present in your body

Want to practice with other people?

- Praying the hours
- Hospitality
- Community

Spiritual Formation practices

Lectio Divina (engaging with scripture)

This is a Benedictine tradition of meditating on scripture in order to listen to God. Sometimes we read the Bible for information or study. Lectio Divina invites us to read the Bible for relationship and transformation. Sit quietly in a room, ideally not while lying down on your bed. Slowly read the passage you have chosen. Pay attention for any word or phrase that catches your attention. Then, meditate on that word or phrase by repeating it over and over in your mind. Read the passage a second time, again paying attention to a word or phrase that stands out to you. What thoughts are coming to mind? Tell God what you are discovering. Then sit quietly in the presence of God.

Centering Prayer (removing sensory experience)

Centering prayer is a simple method of quiet meditation. It allows us to find quiet and stillness with God. Find a place of solitude (away from noise, people, screens, etc), and choose a sacred word (God, Jesus, mercy, love etc). As you begin to quiet your heart, say the word again and again slowly. Let your body and mind slow down as you pivot around that sacred word. If stray thoughts come into your mind, return to the word. Finish by being quiet before God and listening for His voice.

Praying the Hours (a rhythm of prayer)

“The Hours”, or fixed-hour prayer, is a practice of creating a rhythm through your day by engaging with prayer and scripture at set intervals throughout: morning, noon, “vespers” — essentially sunset or evening — and “compline” — just before bed. The Hours is composed of scripture, prayer and hymns. Set a reminder and visit vccc.org/hours when it is time to pray.

Examen (self-assessment)

Examen is an Ignatian tradition of prayerful reflection on the events of the day. Rather than barging through our days, we are slowing down and looking back at the day and asking Where did I see God in my day? Where did I block what God wanted to do? Each day I want to become more like God, but sometimes the person I am becoming is not like God. The examen helps bring awareness to our day Find some quiet space and lead your thoughts through these steps.

1. Become aware of God’s presence. Allow yourself to acknowledge that God is with you wherever you are.
2. Review the day with gratitude. What parts of your day are you thankful for?
3. Pay attention to your emotions. What am I feeling?
4. Choose one feature of your day and pray about it. Consider where you got in the way of God. Talk to God about that.
5. Look forward to tomorrow. Talk to God about what is coming.

Hospitality (hosting others)

Simply put, this means opening what you have to give to others in need, and receiving guests as a “window to the sacred presence.” When you host people in your home, or are serving hospitably outside of your home, spend time in prayer beforehand. Put your heart in a place to receive a guest like you would receive Jesus and serve like Jesus would serve. Allow the experience to form you further by returning to God’s presence afterwards to process your experience. Ask God who you should invite.

Community (knowing and being known)

Make intentional time to let others know you deeply and to get to know others deeply. This is not just hanging out, but creating space for God’s love and grace to be known. Talk about your life honestly, be authentic with what you are thinking about, where you are stuck, what you are carrying. Listen well to others. Enter into other people’s realities. Give to others sacrificially and treat them as a guide much wiser than you. We also encourage you to embrace others who you have nothing in common with.

Nature (as a source of divine revelation)

Experience God as our Creator. Whether this is simply taking a walk, or something much grander, when you are in nature, make yourself aware of all of your surroundings, and consider how to live in harmony with them. Take to nature as a chance to see God. Consider how your actions affect God’s creation. Try talking to God in this space as well.

Being Present in your Body

Consider how your flesh and blood are spiritual by getting into your body — exercising, working with your hands, caring for your body. Pay attention to what your body is feeling: where you are well and where there is strain. Prioritize wellness, care and rest as first an act of worship. When you are in this space, make room to listen to God.

Journaling

Journaling is about intentionally processing your life with Jesus. Writing often gives space for us to communicate with God in a unique way. You can read a few verses of the psalms and then write about it, exploring what the scripture tells you about God and what it highlights to you about yourself. Consider using daily prompts to access new depths of your experiences, mind, imagination, and creativity. For more ideas, check out *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice* by Helen Cepero.

Icons

Engage with art, music or other created works to stir something inside of you to respond to Jesus in new ways. Take in and react to how others have captured something about Jesus. Interact with God in the presence of pictures, paintings, sculptures. Stand in front of the art and talk to God like you would a friend standing near you. Pay attention to what He says to you and how that art brings depth to your faith.

Where to find more during Lent

Evanston Vineyard sermons & blog: evanstonvineyard.org/watch-and-read

Facebook: facebook.com/evanstonvineyard

Instagram: instagram.com/evanstonvineyard

Further reading

The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom by Christine Valters Paintner

Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church by Barbara A. Holmes

Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World by Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill

Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life by Tish Harrison Warren

Meditations of the Heart by Howard Thurman

Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation by Ruth Haley Barton

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us by Adele Calhoun

Spiritual Practices in Community: Drawing Groups into the Heart of God by Diana Shiflett

