

A roadmap to “Lent without guilt”

Map confusion: What, no penitence?

Lent is traditionally a season of penitence, a time of fasting, of denial, of “giving up” ... sort of a “downer”. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We can choose to look at the “Lent from the Backside” (with apologies and acknowledgement to Rev. J. Ellsworth Kalas) – that is, positive Lenten actions rather than negative ones.

What? Lent without penitence? Lent without “giving up”? Lent without guilt?

*“Lent is a time for millions to **renew faith** and also deepen a commitment to **loving and serving one another.**” - Barak Obama, Feb. 17, 2010*

Lent was originally the period when people who wanted to be baptized into the faith “got ready”. The new members were formally received on Easter Sunday. An excellent way for us in the modern world to “prepare” for celebrating Easter, though, is to turn our eyes, mind, and heart toward becoming better followers of Christ. Are you ready to think and be positive this Lent? Are you ready to continue your own spiritual journey, to get closer to God, and to better serve God – all in a positive way?

What follows are some ideas for a positive spiritual journey through the season of Lent. The roadmap calls us to action in each of four “areas”: **Connect, Serve, Grow, and Pray**. To complete this special journey, you must go to each city, though not in order. First, though, where are you headed?

- Where were you, spiritually, last Lent?
- Where are you, spiritually, this Lenten season?
- Where do you *want* to go, spiritually?

Area 1: Connect

Related songs:

“God is Light” [A free online download, but requires a CCLI license for more than individual use.]

We busy ourselves with “things”. We strive to get and sometimes even hoard “things”. We prize “things”. People are what really count, though! So this Lenten season, honor God and follow Christ by doing *more* to connect with other people. Get to know them better. Actively look for where God may be at work in another’s heart. Maybe God can use you to lift another’s spirits. Maybe another can help lift *your* spirits. You can become “more than you are” in connecting with other people.

- Greet each other warmly, in a caring manner, even in church.
Don’t just say, “Hi; glad you’re here today”, and then move on.
- Make each church visitor feel welcomed and appreciated.
- Get to know someone you do *not* already know well.
- Get involved in church events during Lent.
- Strive to see Jesus at work in each person you meet. [Open your heart]
- Tutor someone who needs it; get to know them as you tutor.
- Join a small group at church
(Sunday School class, Bible Study group, a church committee, a social group, etc.)

- Print some of our full-color Lent-Easter bookmarks that are online and offer them to people outside our church. That may even jump-start a conversation.
- “Talk up” what your church is doing. Talk with people outside the church as well as within it. Talk about spiritual development opportunities, outreach programs, and anything that excites you.
- “Check up” on people you have not seen or heard from in a while (including church members).
- [Add your idea here]

Area 2: Serve

Related songs:

“Here I am, Lord”

“Love One Another” [A free online download, but requires a CCLI license non-personal use.]

Jesus encouraged helping and serving others. He himself became a servant his disciples at the last supper by washing their feet. Look for more ways to reach out to those who need your help. Giving of yourself in serving others puts “Love your neighbor as yourself” into concrete action. You can become “more than you are” in serving others.

- **Volunteer** some time at a local homeless shelter, soup kitchen, or crisis pregnancy center during Lent. (A clothes closet, a house for mistreated women and children, etc.)
- Serve people with the knowledge that you are serving Jesus by being the hands and feet of God.
- In a world darkened by sin, help bring the light of the Word to those who so much need it. (Bibles? Pocket NT Bibles? Tracts? ...)
- Serve within the local church
- Donate needed goods to a local outreach organization (clothes closets, homes for battered women or children, etc.)
- Serve as a leader of a Bible Study or Sunday School class.
- Serve as an adult “mentor” for someone.
- Visit shut-ins
- Visit people at a local “home” (retirement home, Wesley ____, etc.).
- Be a grandparent to a kid who doesn’t have one in the area.
- [Add your idea here]

Area 3: Grow

Related songs:

“Spirit of the living God”

“Take time to be Holy”

Lent is an excellent time to grow spiritually. Your soul needs more “nourishment” than just a sermon on Sunday ... more than just Sunday School and a sermons on Sunday. Just as your body needs food daily, so does your soul. A church must not be your only source of spiritual food or you will get weak between feedings. A weakened condition makes it easier for temptations to infect us. You become “more than you are” in growing spiritually.

- **Participate in a Lenten Bible Study.** Some Lenten studies are also online (search for “Lenten study”).
- **Go to at least one Holy Week “Lunch Lift”.** [During Holy Week]

- **Read some scripture each day.** The amount is up to you. Some ideas:
 - Use a Bible reading plan.
 - Read and compare the story of Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and through the trials and resurrection in *each* of the Gospels. (You may find a “Harmony of the Gospels” helpful.) Scripture: Matthew 21 – 28, Mark 11 – 16, Luke 19:28 – 24, John 12:12 – 21.
 - Using a Bible concordance, select a topic and then see what the Bible has to say about that subject area. Many study Bibles include a Concordance.
- **Read a different Psalm each day (or week).**
Why a Psalm? They express the hopes and joys, frustration and jubilation of the author **and** reflect our similar emotions today.
- **Open your heart.** Deliberately try to see Jesus at work in each person you meet.
- **New habit.** Start a new, *good* habit. [We are seekers of your heart, Lord.]
- **Forgive.** Reflect on a wrong someone has done you and forgive them. Pray for them lovingly, as Jesus would pray. Jesus even forgave those who wanted him executed -- “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”. (Luke 23:34, NIV)
- **Change an attitude about others.** “Take care that you do not despise one of these [lost sheep]; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10, NRSV)
- **Online reading.** Read the special “Lent through Easter” pages on our web site. Pick a topic and research it online.
- [Add your idea here]

Area 4: Pray

Related songs:

“Sweet hour of prayer”

Christians often say, “Prayer works”, but many practice prayer only in the face of a serious problem. Lent is a great time to beef up your prayer life. If you are not in the habit of frequent prayer, Lent is an ideal time to get your feet wet. Wade in ... the water’s fine. You can become “more than you are” in praying more often and for more people.

- **Adopt a Wesleyan style prayer philosophy.**
 - Pray the best you can;
 - for as often as you can;
 - for as many people as you can.
- **Pray *first* each day.** Get up 15 minutes earlier each day and spend your first 15 minutes of the day thanking God for the gift of life and offering your day to Him.
- **Take a prayer break.** Stop several times a day, raise your heart and mind to God, and say a very short prayer such as “Jesus, I love you,” or “Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” or “Lord, I offer myself to you; I seek your heart.”
- **Pray for persecuted Christians.** Pray for the millions of Christians suffering under persecution in various countries around the world.
- **Pray for Christian unity.** Pray that there would be one flock and one shepherd.
- **Pray for Evangelism.** Pray that the Good News about Jesus the Messiah would reach all those who have not yet heard and accepted. Ask God how you can help that happen.

- **Open my eyes.** Pray that God might let you see something beautiful that you had not seen before. Pray that God might let you be more aware of the beauty of His world.
- **Open my heart.** Pray for even those whom you dislike. Think of the person who has most hurt you or annoyed you the most, and then spend several minutes each day thanking God for that person and asking God to bless him or her.
- **Open my mind.** Pray about your attitudes concerning various people or groups of people. Let God in. Be open to changing your mind.
- **Pray about change.** Business gurus say that an organization is ideally suited to getting its current results. If an organization wants to change the results it is getting, it must change what it is doing. Ask God what we might do differently at our own church to bring more souls to Christ.
- **Offer yourself to God** ... “Here I am, Lord”. “Spirit of the living God, ... use me”.
- [Add your idea here]

Home: Reminder and Prayer

Instead of beating yourself up and concentrating on traditionally negative actions for Lent, try emphasizing the positive as you walk with Jesus through this holy season. Commit to “being more than you are” in connecting with others, in serving people in need, in growing spiritually, and in praying.

A Daily Lenten Prayer

At least once a day, set aside a moment of quietness and pray to God the following simple, 3-sentence prayer:

“**Here I am, Lord.** [Inspired by the hymn of that name]
Take me; mold me; use me. [Inspired by *Spirit of the living God*... “melt me, mold me, fill me, use me”]
Help me be *more* than I am.”

Next, reflect on this request of God, wait a few moments, and see if God puts an idea into your mind of how you can “be more” that very day.

If you like, you can add arm and hand movements that symbolize the words of the above three lines. This may serve as a memory aid as well as helping focus your mind on the prayer. An example:

Words in the prayer	Body motions
Here I am, Lord	Arms outstretched, toward the heavens, with your face lifted up.
Take me;	Pull your forearms down diagonally until elbows rest against your chest.
mold me;	Grasp your arms across your chest.
use me.	Move your arms outward and to each side in a sweeping motion.
Help me be <i>more</i> than I am	Move your hands into a prayer position.