
*Introduction
to Lent*

INTRODUCTION TO LENT

Sacrifice is not a word most of us enjoy hearing, at least not in connection with ourselves. The truth is we all make sacrifices all day long, every day. And the question is not whether we must make sacrifices, the question is: what sacrifices are we making? Best case scenario, our sacrifice is something we want for ourselves but choose to give up for the sake of someone else. Worst case scenario, we make a foolish assessment and sacrifice something truly and profoundly valuable.

As C.S. Lewis wrote,

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

We tend to keep our fingers tightly wrapped around what cannot compare to what He offers us.

In Psalm 51 King David wrestled with what godly sacrifice means, v.16

“You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

David knew that God wanted his heart, not perfunctory exercises in religion. In giving up our own agendas, desires and preferences, we recognize what we try to keep for ourselves comes from broken places. Making a choice to offer our broken selves in return for His abundant life, truly is no sacrifice. But in those moments of laying down what seems precious to us...the pain is real. Our sacrifices, made in faith and love, are transformational; we become more like Him. He entered pain for us to give Himself to us. He calls us to follow His example.

In Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus’ words to His disciples are sobering:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

Lent is a season to practice the discipline of sacrifice. In doing so, we demonstrate our faith and our love.

Lent is an opportunity to consciously fellowship with Christ in His suffering; making a way for more of Him with less of ourselves. In church history, Lent as a preparation for Easter became connected to fasting before baptism in remembrance of John the Baptist’s words “Make straight a way for the Lord.”

1John 1:23

Self-denial and fasting detach me from earthly things and remind me of Jesus' sacrifice; opening space in my soul for the swelling of God's love.

A choice to **not** observe ancient practices of fasting or self-denial may not mean you are sinning, but it could mean you are sacrificing the sweetness of deeper spiritual transformation.

Consider joining us on an adventure of sacrifice for the next 40 days, emptying ourselves to be filled by Him. Each week you will find a short meditation on this site with suggestions for fasting and a recipe to enjoy with your family or share with someone in need. We recommend a sundown to sundown fast this week in preparation for the next 6 weeks. Ask God for what would be most helpful to your life in Him and prayerfully consider what the Lord may be asking you to relinquish. Whether that is coffee, eating out, social media, a more traditional 24-hour food fast or something far more difficult is not what is important. Fasting is in vain if it is merely abstinence; it is meant to be an act of participation in Christ's work, through which He liberates us from dependence on anything but Him.

We wait in anticipation with you for the "swelling of His love" in our hearts and homes!

RESOURCES:

40 Days of Decrease - Alicia Britt Chole
Taste and See - Margaret Feinberg

Week Two:
BACK TO WORK

BACK TO WORK

Not long after Andrew and John met Jesus, they went back to work. Andrew with his brother Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter, and John with his brother James and their dad Zebedee were fishermen. They had followed Jesus out of curiosity it seems for a day. But in Luke 5:1-11 we read about them living their same old, same old. All night long they had tossed their nets, circled their boats, slapped their oars and waited for a catch... without success. Tired and frustrated, Simon Peter made a choice to listen to Jesus and give it one more try.

One more drop.

One more circle.

One more hope.

Their nets filled to bursting. Obviously, Jesus was the right connection for success. What could they have been thinking about the future of their careers as fishermen?! But Peter responded with shock and with shame:

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Peter must have been very aware of his inner struggle to trust, yet Jesus provided in abundance. Then, Jesus did something crazy no matter how you look at it. Jesus invited these fishermen into his mission of changing the world.

“Peter, Andrew, James, John, follow me. We have bigger fish to fry!”

Immediately, they left EVERYTHING, even that massive catch and followed.

It is staggering to envision them rowing back to shore and walking off into the unknown horizon with a man they barely knew and who had “no place to lay his head.” I know by personal experience, that I would have been more likely to say:

“Just let me get these fish to market, and turn the proceeds over to my family at least. Then, I’ll be right with you.”

Experience with Jesus was mounting for them; they could no longer imagine just going back to work. The first four disciples entrusted themselves and their families to God’s care when they made that entirely impractical decision. This week consider fasting for a day, “self-promotion” or “self-provision”. This may be counter-instinctual, but I am sure you will find He is enough. Ever since God himself took a sabbath after His work of Creation, it’s been an important part of following Him.

Lay down your nets, whatever they may be. Follow Him for a day into what only He holds for you. How? I don't know exactly. It is different for each of us.

But consider taking the day to:

Stop working so hard to provide for yourself and/or the people you love. Stop spending mental and emotional energy on schemes to provide for yourself and/or the people you love. Follow Him into stillness. Follow Him into rest. Follow Him into delighting in what He has already given, and follow Him by offering Him your future.

Maybe at the end of the day, enjoy a heart-healthy meal with some people that God cares for even more than you! The following recipe is recommended by Theresa Newman. I intend to make it with Tilapia, because apparently there is a type of tilapia called "St. Peter's fish" found in the Sea of Galilee. It is believed to be the kind of fish Jesus used to provide a temple tax for Peter. (Matthew 17:27)

HEALTHY FISH TACO BOWLS

Author: Ashley McCrary

Total Time: 15 minutes | Yield: 2 people



INGREDIENTS

- 2 pieces Cod (or Tilapia)
- 2 cups cauliflower rice
- 2 tbsp fresh cilantro (chopped)
- 1/4 cup red cabbage sliced or chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper (sliced)
- 1/2 cup guacamole
- 1 tsp ghee or butter
- 1/2 cup marinated onions
- 1 Roma Tomato (chopped)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Before cooking my fish, prep the bowl first, then cook the fish last. If you overcook Cod, it can get a bit chewy.

Prep your jalapenos, tomatoes, and cabbage on your cutting board.

Prepare marinated onions (1 small red onion sliced thin, 3/4 cup olive oil, 1 tbsp. of oregano and 1 tbsp of red wine vinegar.) I usually prepare mine the night before and pop in the fridge for best results.

Heat skillet with 1 tsp of ghee or oil over medium heat and add in your cauliflower rice. When the rice is almost done, add in cilantro and juice from one lime. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Remove your cauli rice and add to your serving bowls. Next, add your cod filets to the skillet with olive oil and cook 4 minutes on each side. Keep an eye on these and try not to overcook. It should be opaque and flake easily with a fork.

Build your bowl as desired (jalapenos, tomatoes, cabbage and guacamole) squeeze lime juice and sprinkle fresh cilantro over the top and serve.