

## THE HISTORY OF LENT

The word Lent comes from a variety of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic words meaning “spring, a time budding with new life and hope.” But for Christians, Lent is not a celebration of nature. Rather, it is a process of prayer and spiritual renewal. The Lenten season emphasizes one’s need to cultivate a deeper walk with Christ through spiritual exercises and disciplines.

Originally, in the first century, Lent was observed as a 40-hour period, in keeping with the forty hours Jesus’ body was in the tomb. In the third century, the 40 hours evolved into a 6 day extension. These 6 days were known as the Holy Week (also known as Passion Week, the last week of Jesus life here on earth). Then, the 6 days grew into 36 days (36 being the tithe or a tenth of the 365 days of the year). Finally, during the reign of Charlemagne in the 8th century, 4 days were added to the 36, to create our current celebration of Lent. The added days were Ash Wednesday, which begins the Lenten season, and the three following days, running up to the First Sunday in Lent. The forty days of Lent (Sundays are not included, for they are the Lord’s Day, which includes a celebration of the resurrection) is a time which calls all of us to be dedicated to discipline and personal examination.

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## LENT

A GCC GUIDE



## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Start small and be realistic with those things you give-up or take-on. Focus on establishing good and effective habits and building a solid foundation
2. Prayer during Lent: Give God some set time each day of Lent. Most people find it helpful to try at the beginning or the end of the day, whether thirty minutes, fifteen minutes, five minutes or what you set your heart on.
3. Fasting: Take the initiative to fast from something during Lent. It should be something that costs and that you know will be difficult at times. Some examples include fasting from TV or video games, fasting from chocolate or coffee, or fasting from going out to restaurants or movies.
4. Giving: Think of a practical way to set aside money for Kingdom use (whether to a church, a charity, or other cause). For example, if you try giving up coffee for Lent, you could put aside the money you would have spent on coffee each day.

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

**Be gracious.** Don't look down on people who are not actively observing Lent or who fall in their fasting. If we are not careful, Lent can definitely lead to spiritual pride.

**Don't get discouraged.** If you fail, pick yourself up and try again. "Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again." (Prov 24:16)

**Keep your eyes on the Prize.** It is all about Jesus!

# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LENT?

Lent is meant to be a time of preparing for Easter, as a major celebration in Christianity. As we approach the remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, we embrace this time leading up to Easter Sunday, not as a duty or obligation, but as an opportunity to express and intensify our love and heart for our Savior.

## WHAT IS LENT?

The Lenten Season commonly refers to the forty day period from Ash Wednesday until Palm Sunday (which marks the beginning of the Passion Week of Easter). But given its purpose, it is worthwhile to include the Passion Week as well and make it a full 46 days of Lent.

During this time, we desire to experience the following:

## READINESS

Lent is also a time to prepare candidates for baptism and confirmation. This season is intentionally set aside for examination, instruction, repentance and prayer for these candidates. Also it is a time of readiness for all members as we prepare to observe and celebrate the Passion Week. The more we honestly prepare, the more meaningful the remembrance of Christ's Passion.

## REFLECTION

Lent is a time to refocus and reflect on the suffering, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Life is often busy and hectic, leaving little room for the remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Lent is a intentional time to pause and allow the spiritual truth of God's love shown in Jesus to take its rightful place of prominence in our hearts and minds.

## RESOLUTION

One key component of Lent is to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting. It does not necessarily have to be food, but could be anything that clutters our lives or impedes our relationship with God... that is why it is different for different people. For some it might be TV, for others it might be shopping.

## REPENTANCE

In the Lenten season, self-examination is crucial. As we reflect on the cross, it should expose our pride, our self-sufficiency and our disobedience. Not just so we feel guilty. Rather, the purpose of Christ's sacrifice becomes personal (it was for such sins that Christ died for us), and we have the opportunity to receive freely the forgiveness that was purchased for us on that cross.

## RENEWAL

Lent is known as a time of spiritual renewal and growth. It is a time for people to experience and reflect on the sufferings of Jesus, in light of personal sin and unrighteousness. As we focus on Jesus, who died so that we may live, it will renew our passion and our first love.