



WEEK 1

LENT THROUGH HOLY WEEK

Daily Devotionals



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

DAY 1: ASH WEDNESDAY

Pray

Dear God, help me acknowledge my own limitations and reliance on you. I want to receive your grace. I want to respond to your call to salvation. Meet me during this season of Lent. Amen.

Read

Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends! Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.

In our work together with God, then, we beg you who have received God's grace not to let it be wasted. Hear what God says:

“When the time came for me to show you favor,
I heard you;
when the day arrived for me to save you,
I helped you.”

Listen! This is the hour to receive God's favor; today is the day to be saved!
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2)

Reflect

The first time I experienced an Ash Wednesday service, I was struck by its somber tone. The priest drew two lines across my forehead with ashes, symbolizing my mortality. She recited, “From dust you have come, to dust you will return.” I felt uncomfortable and uneasy. Why would I want to be reminded that I am going to die—and so will everyone else in my life?

But this has become a deeply meaningful service for me. In acknowledging my limitations—yes, I am mortal—I am able to receive God's grace. I am reminded that my life begins and ends in God. Recognizing that life is uncertain makes the call to salvation all the more urgent: “today is the day to be saved!” With this awareness, Ash Wednesday calls us each into the season of Lent, “Listen! This is the hour to receive God's favor.”

Respond

Throughout the day, reflect on the phrase, “From dust you have come, to dust you will return.” How does it feel to be aware of your mortality? How does it feel to be aware of others’ mortality? Ask God to give you deeper reliance on God’s grace and salvation.

DAY 2: THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Pray

Dear God, help me choose life in my thoughts, words, and actions. Show me where I am choosing death instead. Help me place all areas of my life under your blessing. Amen.

Read

“Today I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death. If you obey the commands of the LORD your God, which I give you today, if you love him, obey him, and keep all his laws, then you will prosper and become a nation of many people. The LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are about to occupy. But if you disobey and refuse to listen, and are led away to worship other gods, you will be destroyed—I warn you here and now. You will not live long in that land across the Jordan that you are about to occupy. I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God’s blessing and God’s curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life. Love the LORD your God, obey him and be faithful to him, and then you and your descendants will live long in the land that he promised to give your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20)

Reflect

Every day, I am presented with the choice between life and death. This happens when I get out of bed in the morning, engage in conversations with people, or go about my work. Am I choosing to draw from God’s wellspring, live under God’s blessing? Or am I choosing to harbor resentments, brood on disappointments, think ill of people?

Since the beginning of Israel’s formation, God has urged us to choose life. God led the people of Israel into the Promised Land and urged them to live under God’s blessing through loving God, obeying and being faithful to God’s commands. God wanted things to go well for them—for Israel to thrive, receive the promise. And God wants things to go well for us through choosing life. Loving the Lord your God. Obeying God and being faithful.

Respond

As you begin the season of Lent, evaluate where you are choosing death instead of life. What false gods are you clinging to? Where are you looking for comfort or joy that is not ultimately life-giving? What areas of your life could you start placing under God’s blessing?

DAY 3: FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Pray

Dear God, may my fasting be pleasing to you and my spiritual practices lead me into deeper solidarity with the poor and vulnerable. Teach me to die to myself so I can be reborn in the fullness of your resurrection. Amen.

Read

The LORD says, “Shout as loud as you can! Tell my people Israel about their sins! They worship me every day, claiming that they are eager to know my ways and obey my laws. They say they want me to give them just laws and that they take pleasure in worshiping me.”

The people ask, “Why should we fast if the LORD never notices? Why should we go without food if he pays no attention?”

The LORD says to them, “The truth is that at the same time you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. Your fasting makes you violent, and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting will make me listen to your prayers? When you fast, you make yourselves suffer; you bow your heads low like a blade of grass and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?”

“The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.

“Then my favor will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save you; my presence will protect you on every side. When you pray, I will answer you. When you call to me, I will respond.” (ISAIAH 58:1-9A)

Reflect

Lent is often marked as a time of fasting. People give up certain foods or habits and adopt a spiritual discipline in its place. This is a time of penitence and prayer, preparing us to die with Christ and be reborn into the fullness of his resurrection.

During this season, the temptation is to fast for fasting's sake. I can easily get caught up in the ritual—my hunger makes me cranky, or worse, self-righteous. I can start thinking, *I am working hard on a path towards holiness. Why doesn't God notice and reward me?*

But Scripture reminds me, this isn't the kind of fasting God wants. God wants my fasting to put me in solidarity with the vulnerable. Rather than becoming more self-focused, fasting helps me shed the unnecessary things I clutter my life with, so I can see more clearly what really matters. Fasting helps me create space to defend the oppressed, stand up for justice, share my food, and practice hospitality. It helps me die to myself, so I can be reborn with Christ.

Respond

Consider fasting during Lent. Is there a habit or behavior you could give up during this season? What spiritual discipline could you adopt in place of what you are abstaining from?

DAY 4: SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Pray

Dear God, expose my propensity towards sin and self-righteousness. Help me acknowledge my need for you. Help me get out of my own way so I can follow you. Amen.

Read

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi had a big feast in his house for Jesus, and among the guests was a large number of tax collectors and other people. Some Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who belonged to their group complained to Jesus’ disciples. “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and other outcasts?” they asked.

Jesus answered them, “People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people to repent, but outcasts.”

(LUKE 5:27-32)

Reflect

I have attributes of the tax collector and the Pharisee inside me. The tax collector takes advantage of people and situations, making them dislike and distrust him. The Pharisee lives by the letter of the Law, flaunting his knowledge and uprightness. Both alienate themselves from genuine relationships; their “sin” and “holiness” get in the way. These two characters are often at war, pulling me in conflicting directions.

Both the tax collector and the Pharisee desperately need Jesus. The tax collector knows he is an outcast; he has nowhere else to go. The Pharisee is caught up in his self-righteousness; he doesn’t have room for Jesus’s authenticity and unexpected gospel.

In order to respond to Jesus’s call, “Follow me,” I have to recognize both parts of myself in this story. I have to let go of my self-sufficiency and come face-to-face with my need. I have to get out of my own way, so I can accept Jesus’s invitation to join the feast.

Respond

How are you like the tax collector? How are you like the Pharisee? Write your thoughts in your journal. Ask God to help you see yourself clearly and put you more in touch with your spiritual need.

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