



• **LENTEN CALENDAR** •



**PARENT GUIDE**



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• ABOUT LENT •

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Lent is a 40-day season in the Church year that leads up to Easter. During Lent, we remember Israel's 40 years wandering in the desert wilderness, and Jesus' 40 days fasting and being tempted in the desert wilderness. We also reflect on the human condition—our sinfulness, our mortality, specific areas of temptation in our lives, and our need for redemption.

Many people fast during Lent as a way of preparation and consecration, as a way to empty themselves in order to be filled by the Holy Spirit, and as a means of reflecting on the deepest and truest human hunger and thirst, which is for God.

This Lenten Calendar, designed for families to use at dinnertime, focuses on four themes:

### **Manna**

When the Israelites wandered in the desert, God fed them with manna, bread from heaven that fell on the ground like dew. If your family is unfamiliar with this story, consider reading or retelling it at the beginning of Lent (Exodus 16). We will use the idea of manna to reflect on God's provision and goodness.

### **Confession**

Regular confession of sin is a common practice during Lent. Confession is merely revealing what is already known to the One who loves us no matter what. For the believer, confession is a pathway to freedom; never to condemnation.

### **Silence**

Spiritual practices of "resistance," or abstaining from something good, often help us to see and experience God in a unique way. Fasting is one such practice, and so are practices like solitude, silence, Sabbath, etc. We will focus on practicing silence together, but your family may also decide to fast together during Lent.

### **Mini-Easters**

The 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays, because every Sunday is a mini-Easter when we remember Jesus' resurrection from the dead. There are 6 mini-Easters in Lent to celebrate and remember this Very Good News.





## • THREE PRACTICES •

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This Lenten Calendar will rotate us through three repeated practices. Repetition is an important learning tool, especially for children. For those parents with babies and toddlers who will be unable to participate fully in these practices, practicing them yourselves alongside your children will serve as important modeling and will shape your devotional rhythms as a family. The tiny ones pick up on more than we know!

### **Looking for Manna**

This practice is intended to help you and your children become more aware of God's goodness and provision. For small children, it could be a very simple practice of thanksgiving: "What's one thing you what to thank God for today?" For older children, and for parents, the practice could go a little deeper and serve as a way to look for evidence of God's presence during the day, his provision and protection, or his activity in the world. Another word for this practice is a *God hunt*: Where have you seen God today? The goal is to recognize and remember God's provision, even in difficult wilderness-like circumstances.

### **Silent Confession of Sin**

Teaching our children to confess their sins not just to us, but directly to God, is an essential part of helping them to foster an intimate relationship with God. So often we prefer to be *mediators* of this relationship, rather than *facilitators*. For very young children, this exercise may be complex. If they can't practice confession silently, they are welcome to do it verbally, but do encourage them to "talk to Jesus" rather than to you. It's important to remind our children that they are loved, that they are forgiven, that nothing they can say will ever surprise God or cause him to reject them. At the end of the silence, thank God for his forgiveness.

### **60 Seconds of Silence**

This practice is self-explanatory but may be very challenging to execute as a family. Have a sense of humor about it and use every experience—even the less-than-ideal ones—as a learning opportunity. Why is it so hard to be still? As you attempt to keep silence personally, ask God to share his thoughts with you and to encourage you in the journey of leading your children spiritually.





## • REFLECTION QUESTIONS •



Each day's prompt includes a reflection question after the practice.

For families with older children, think of this as a conversation-starter for the dinner table. Invite your children to share their opinions freely without fear of being “wrong” or saying something you won’t like. For teenagers especially, do your best to hold space for their doubts and questions, as threatening as they may feel to you. Questioning is an essential step in the development of an adult, owned faith.

For parents of very young and/or non-verbal children, if there are at least two adults in the household, you can have the conversation yourselves while your children listen in. Again, modeling and learning to talk about spiritual things with your children is a key piece of helping them to grow and develop spiritually. If you are a single parent, you can share your thoughts with your children, knowing it may be more of a one-sided conversation—and that is completely fine!





During Lent, every Sunday is a mini-Easter! On Sundays we remember that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead—and so we celebrate! For many who fast during Lent, Sunday is a day of feasting and fast-breaking. This calendar will lead your family through 6 mini-Easter celebrations.

### **Special Treat**

We encourage you to include a special treat—a small piece of candy, a sticker, etc.—for each child in the Sunday envelopes to highlight that Sunday is different, and a day for celebrating.

### **Family Blessing**

The practice for Sundays is the practice of Family Blessing. Around the dinner table, ask each (verbal) member of the family to give a blessing to each other member. Put someone in the “blessing seat” (literal or figurative), and ask each other member of the family to thank God for something wonderful about that person. This is a way that we can honor and celebrate not only each other, but God’s beautiful creativity in thinking each one of us up. When you bless your children and/or your partner, try not to focus on attributes that have to do with their accomplishments—that is praise—as much as attributes that have to do with their *being*—which is where true blessing happens. For example, “Thank you God that Rylie is so smart she got all As,” has a very different ring from, “Thank you God for Rylie’s creative, curious mind.” Do you see the difference? Help your kids to notice the difference too, and to grow in their ability to bless people for who they *are*, not what they *do*.

### **Special Meal**

We also encourage you to enjoy a special meal on Sunday. This could mean simply lighting candles or using fancier plates, but it could also mean ordering takeout, cooking everyone’s “favorites” over the 6 weeks, having breakfast for dinner, making a special dessert, etc. How can you make your mini-Easter meals memorable?

### **How will we celebrate today?**

This question is on every Sunday prompt. You may want to open the Sunday envelopes earlier in the day so that you can plan. Notice that the question does not say “How *could* we celebrate...” but “How *will* we celebrate...” This does not need to be elaborate. Maybe it’s playing a fun game together, drinking some sparkling cider in fancy glasses, or toasting Jesus at the dinner table. Help your kids to get in on the planning by coming up with their own (reasonable) ideas.





• HOLY WEEK •

During Holy Week, you'll notice that the Scripture passages become longer and the practices shift. Through the week, we will be tracing and remembering Jesus' path to the cross—his anointing at Bethany, the clearing of the Temple, Judas' plot to betray him, the Last Supper, his death on the cross, and then the excruciatingly silent day of waiting on Saturday.

If you have young children, you may want to read these stories from a Children's Bible so they can look at the pictures as well. Very young children may not be able to engage in discussion, but again, we encourage you to use the prompts and discuss alongside them as you are able.

### **Foot Washing**

On Thursday, we remember the Last Supper, and the washing of the disciples feet. If your church does not have a foot-washing service on Maundy Thursday (some do!), we have found this to be an incredibly sweet practice to do as a family.

You'll want to get a bowl of warm water, some wash clothes, and several dry towels. On the following pages you will find a liturgy that you can use as you remember this special night together.





### **Explain the Story**

Tonight we remember the special meal that Jesus shared with his friends on the night before he died. After that meal, Jesus did something very unexpected. He got up from the table, wrapped a towel around his waist, and began to wash his friends' feet. At the time when Jesus lived, people's feet would get very dirty as they walked on dirt roads in their sandals. So foot-washing was important. But only servants would offer to wash someone's feet—never an important person like Jesus. Jesus did this to show his friends how to love and serve each other, how to put other people first, and how to lead with humility. Tonight we are going to wash each other's feet to help us remember how to love and serve.

**Parent :** On this night we remember God's love shown perfectly in Jesus.

**Child :** Come, let us worship!

### **Parent**

God of love, as we prepare to remember the events of this night, open our eyes to see the beauty of Jesus' self-giving love, and by your Spirit nourish and grow in our family a desire and commitment to serve each other and our hurting world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Reading\***

John 13:1-17

### **Silent Confession of Sin**

#### **Everyone**

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

#### **Parent**

On the night before he died, Jesus showed us how to love one another—by taking the posture of a servant. Let's remember this together, and follow in his example, by washing one another's feet.

*\*Skip if you have already read this today.*

**Foot Washing**

Take turns washing each other's feet. You may need to help the little ones to participate—and if you have very tiny ones who are likely to splash, you may want to do this in or near the bathtub! To each person whose feet are being washed, say these words:

**As Jesus has loved you, \_\_\_\_\_ , may you love those around you.**

Once everyone is finished, close in prayer:

**Parent**

Thank you Jesus for your example. Help us to treat others as more important than ourselves, to love our enemies, and to love each other as you have loved us.

**Child** : Go in peace!

**Everyone** : Amen!





