

## **Lenten Fasting Guide**

This Guide is designed to help you more fully participate in the Lenten season through a better understanding of the context of Lent and the practice of fasting or abstaining.

### **Overview of Lent & Lenten Fasting**

Lent refers to the 40 day period that leads up to Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday. Corresponding to Jesus' 40 day fast (Matthew 4), this season was firmly established in the early church by the fourth century to be an intentional season of fasting and renewal. Originally used as a time to prepare new followers of Jesus to be baptized on Easter, Lent was eventually observed by the entire church as a way of recognizing the need for God's transforming work in us all through prayer, fasting, abstaining, self-examination, repentance, and meditation on Scripture. Lent witnesses to the power and beauty of our union with Christ and to the daily dying and rising with Christ that this entails.

One of the primary ways that we lean into the observance of Lent is through the practice of abstaining. While abstaining allows us to enter into the suffering of Jesus, it is also meant to draw and center our hearts on the deeper gift we receive through his death, burial, and resurrection. Simply put, abstaining is a way to place ourselves in the way of grace by withdrawing our reliance on earthly things so that we can feast on God's presence and power. It is an ancient practice of giving up superficial desires to get in touch with our deepest desires.

Lenten fasting begins on Ash Wednesday (February 14th) and ends on Easter (March 31st). Lenten fasting differs, however, from traditional fasting in that Lent observes "feasting days." In the Lenten fast, every Sunday remains a day of feasting, in which we pause our fast as a way of stirring up hope for what is to come — our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. So, in Lent we fast and feast as a way of anticipating Jesus' gift of life.

### **Participating In the Lenten Fast**

The purpose of fasting during Lent is to abstain from things like food, drink, or certain routine actions in order to remind us that only God can truly satisfy our soul-level hunger. We abstain from things that bring us comfort in order to feast on God's presence. Work through the following steps to discern how you will be participating in Lent this year.

**Consider the following questions.** Take some time to process or journal through the following questions. Pay attention to any invitation you sense from the Spirit.

1. Have I become dependent on something other than God to attend to the deeper aches of my soul?
2. What do I use to find pleasure, comfort, or emotional regulation?
3. What conveniences am I conditioned to automatically use? (e.g. elevators or escalators instead of stairs, close parking spaces, music/podcasts in the background, etc.)
4. What could I abstain from that might help draw my attention to my deeper need for Jesus?

**Consider the following list.** Below, you will find some frequent things people abstain from in the season of Lent. Pay attention to any invitation you sense from the Spirit.

- **Foods** that are generally associated with feasting: chocolate, all desserts, coffee, caffeine, alcohol, meat, bread, etc.
- **Media or Entertainment:** cell phone apps, television, a streaming service, movies, radio or music in the car, computer at home, video games, social media, etc.
- **Habits and Comforts:** shopping (online and/or in stores), using elevators instead of stairs, parking in a spot close to the store, finding the shortest checkout line, surfing the internet when bored, etc.

**Spend some time in prayer.** Deciding what to abstain from doesn't have to be or feel incredibly ascetic or heavy; it is not meant to be a way of punishing yourself. A Lenten fast is about a fuller experience of our union with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. So use your responses to the questions and the lists above to spend some time in prayer with the Spirit. Ask Jesus and yourself: What am I being invited into? Pick something you will notice the absence of, but not something that will genuinely cause you suffering.

**Finally, commit it to God and share it with others.** After deciding what you will be abstaining from this Lenten season, commit it to Jesus. This could look like journaling about it, writing it on a sticky note to keep on your bathroom mirror, or remembering it in prayer each morning. However you choose, it's important to enter this journey with clarity and commitment around what God is inviting you to do. Once you've committed it to God, share it with your Community and/or a close friend who is also participating in Lent. We do not share as a form of accountability, but as a way to celebrate God's invitations to us. Continue to celebrate and share with them throughout the Lenten season what you sense the Spirit is doing in and through each of you.