



ABIDING *in* CHRIST



– 2016 –

LENT & HOLY WEEK
PRAYER GUIDE

westgatechurch



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2016 LENT & HOLY WEEK PRAYER GUIDE

In a traditional church calendar, the 40 days leading up to Palm Sunday are known as the season of *Lent*. It's a season of fasting and prayer in anticipation of Holy Week—the week we celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ (Easter). In more traditional or liturgical church contexts, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, when congregants receive a mark of ashes on their foreheads. The season is then observed by giving something up for 40 days, until the fast is ended on Palm Sunday.

Growing up, Lent often confused me. First, I thought everyone was talking about *lint*, and I was not sure what the fuzzy stuff in my pockets had to do with church. Second, while I knew we were supposed to give something up for 40 days, I didn't understand why. So I gave up tomatoes. I hated tomatoes. It was one of the easiest decisions I ever made.

Lent can be equally confusing for congregations in the Free Church tradition, like Westgate. We don't tend to pay much attention to the traditional church calendar, and so we're not always sure whether we're supposed to be participating in things like Lent, or what it's all about.

UNDERSTANDING LENT

Lent is not a biblically mandated observance. The practice developed gradually in church history, and didn't really take shape until after the Council of Nicea in the fourth century A.D. For this reason, less formally liturgical churches (like Westgate) don't tend to emphasize the practice.

But in its best forms, Lent does involve biblical spiritual disciplines, specifically those of prayer and fasting.

Ash Wednesday begins the season with biblical imagery of both humility and repentance. Humility, particularly in terms of reminding us of our mortality: "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). And repentance, which was often expressed through "sackcloth and ashes." For instance, when Daniel mourns over Israel's exile and offers his prayer of repentance, he begins: "Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3).

Similarly, the practice of giving something up for Lent is meant to be a form of fasting. Fasting is the act of denying oneself food (or something else) as a tangible act of dependence on God. We say no to certain physical appetites for a time in order to focus our longings and desires on God himself. It engages the body and the will in our spiritual pursuit of Christ.

While ancient Israel's law only commanded them to fast once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 26:29-31), God's people have made a practice of fasting for a variety of reasons, like confessing sin (e.g. Neh. 9:1-2), bringing a burden or request before God (e.g. Exod. 24:18; 2 Sam. 12:15-23), or simply expressing one's dependence on God, like Jesus in the wilderness (e.g. Matt. 4:1-2). It was a common part of the early church's worship (cf. Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). And there are several examples of fasts lasting for forty days (e.g., Moses, Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:18; Elijah, 1 Kgs. 19:7-8; the Ninevites, Jon. 3:4; Jesus, Matt. 4:1-2).

One form of fasting is a fast of *repentance*—giving something up as an expression of sorrow and a plea for God’s mercy (e.g. Jer. 6:22-26; Dan. 9:1-19; Jon. 3:4-10; cf. Isa. 58). This is the specific idea of Lent.

Lent is a season of self-examination and repentance, expressed through self-denial, in preparation for Easter. The hunger we feel for food or something we’re used to is meant to remind us of our deeper hunger for God. It gives us an opportunity to examine our hearts and repent of anything we’re holding onto more tightly than God. And it’s meant to redirect our attention, desire, and dependence toward God’s means of satisfying that hunger—the cross and resurrection of Christ.

So while it’s not biblically mandated that we fast at *this* time or in *this* way, it can be a helpful and nourishing spiritual experience. And the occasion of Easter is as good an occasion as any to set aside time to focus on our dependence and relationship with God.

PRACTICING LENT AT WESTGATE

We don’t practice Lent at Westgate in the same way as most traditional churches. We don’t have an Ash Wednesday service, nor do we ask our congregants to give up something tangible for the season. You are welcome to do that of course, but there is no expectation, and we don’t want anyone to be motivated to do so by a sense of guilt or performance.

We do however encourage our congregation to give special attention to their relationship with God during this season, specifically in terms of *prayer*. And for that reason we are supplying this prayer devotional as a guide in deepening your relationship with Christ.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

In light of our current series in the Letters of John, we have put together a 40-day prayer guide that will take you through 1 John.

The book of 1 John is well-suited for a Lenten prayer focus, in that it invites us to examine the quality and depth of our communion with God, thereby exposing sin and reestablishing our relationship and assurance in Christ himself.

In this **Lenten Prayer Guide**, each day begins with a reading from 1 John for your meditation, followed by some questions for reflection or suggested points of prayer. A closing prayer is also supplied for each week.

In addition to the Lenten Prayer Devotional in 1 John, we have also included a **Holy Week Prayer Guide** that takes you through John 13-20. John's Gospel is in many ways the foundation for John's letters. The selected chapters focus on the final days of Jesus' ministry, beginning with the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17, and walking us through Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. (For Holy Saturday, the devotion comes from Psalm 22).

The Holy Week guide is organized differently than the Lenten one, in that it involves reading larger portions of Scripture, and concludes each reading with a prayer of reflection.

These prayer devotionals are meant to be flexible in their use. Given the focus on deepening our personal relationship with God, they are designed primarily for personal use. But they can also be used for family devotions, in Home Groups or other small groups, and even corporate worship.

This guide is also available digitally. You can download a pdf, or access each day online with your smart phone. Visit www.westgate-church.org/abiding-in-Christ.

May the Living Word make himself known to you through his written Word this Lenten and Easter season, and may these guides be helpful as you seek to abide in Christ.

– Pastor Brandon

Day 1 (Ash Wednesday, Feb. 10)

READ 1 John 1:1-2

REFLECT • What confidence has God given us that

PRAY Jesus is the Word of life?

- To what extent is he your hope in life?

Day 2 (Thursday, Feb. 11)

READ 1 John 1:3-4

REFLECT • Do you know the fellowship that the gospel creates between God and his people?

PRAY • Reflect on and rejoice in that fellowship.

Day 3 (Friday, Feb. 12)

READ 1 John 1:5

REFLECT • How seriously do you take God's holiness?

PRAY • Is there any darkness in your life God is revealing to you?

Day 4 (Saturday, Feb. 13)

READ 1 John 1:6-7

REFLECT • To what extent are you walking in the light?

PRAY • Reflect of the power of Christ's blood.

Gracious Father,

You are light and life, and your Son has made this life and light known to us. Fill our hearts with the light of the gospel, that we might rejoice in fellowship and walk in holiness, ever dependent on the cleansing blood of Jesus. Amen.

Day 5 (Sunday, Feb. 14)

READ 1 John 1:8-10

REFLECT • Is there any sin in your life that you are

PRAY minimizing or ignoring?

• Spend time in confession of sin.

• Receive Jesus' forgiveness and cleansing for your sin.

Day 6 (Monday, Feb. 15)

READ 1 John 2:1-2

REFLECT • Reflect on the truth that Christ's death was enough to deal with all your sin.

PRAY • Marvel that right now Christ is pleading his blood for you before the Father.

• Rest in the finished work of Christ.

Day 7 (Tuesday, Feb. 16)

READ 1 John 2:3-6

REFLECT • Can someone tell you're a Christian by the way you live? Would they see a resemblance to Christ?

PRAY • How does your love for God show itself in keeping his commandments?

Day 8 (Wednesday, Feb. 17)

READ 1 John 2:7-8

REFLECT • What is the old commandment, and what makes it new? (see Jn. 13:34-35)

PRAY • How have you seen the light of Christ at work in your life?

Day 9 (Thursday, Feb. 18)

READ 1 John 2:9-11

REFLECT • What does your current affection for and

PRAY treatment of fellow Christians say about your relationship with God?

- Pray for your church family.

Day 10 (Friday, Feb. 19)

READ 1 John 2:12-14

REFLECT • Do you believe God's encouragement

PRAY that you are his child and your sins are forgiven through faith in Christ?

- Reflect on all that God has already done in and through you and be encouraged.

Day 11 (Saturday, Feb. 20)

READ 1 John 2:15-17

REFLECT • What in this fallen world are you most

PRAY tempted to love?

- Reflect on the true value of what this world offers in comparison to God.
- What worldly passions or possessions do you need to renounce in pursuit of God?

Gracious Father,

We praise you that your holiness and your love are not at war with each other, but are joined together in our Savior Jesus Christ. May we honor your holiness through love and obedience, following Christ our example. And may we rest in your love and mercy through faith in Christ our advocate. Amen.

Day 12 (Sunday, Feb. 21)

READ 1 John 2:18-22

REFLECT • What characterizes an “antichrist” here?

PRAY • Consider the implications of attempting to know God while denying Christ.

- Pray for wisdom to discern false teaching and hold fast to the truth.

Day 13 (Monday, Feb. 22)

READ 1 John 2:23-27

REFLECT • Reflect freshly on the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

PRAY • Rejoice in the sufficiency of Christ for knowing God.

- Pray for protection from false teaching.

Day 14 (Tuesday, Feb. 23)

READ 1 John 2:28-29

REFLECT • How confident are you when you think about seeing Christ when he returns?

PRAY • Ask God for the grace to continue to abide (or make your home) in Christ, and to fill your heart with confidence.

Day 15 (Wednesday, Feb. 24)

READ 1 John 3:1

REFLECT • Consider the love of God: he calls us his children in Christ.

PRAY • Reflect, marvel, and praise God over this incredible truth.

Day 16 (Thursday, Feb. 25)

READ 1 John 3:2-3

REFLECT • Meditate on what God will do when

PRAY Christ returns—how we will see him, and how he will change us.

- How does this hope change your life?

Day 17 (Friday, Feb. 26)

READ 1 John 3:4-6

REFLECT • Is your life characterized by practicing sin, or by fighting it?

PRAY • Confess and repent of any sin in your life.
• Cling to Christ who came to take away sins.

Day 18 (Saturday, Feb. 27)

READ 1 John 3:7-10

REFLECT • Reflect honestly on your life. Does your lifestyle show evidence of Christ in you?

PRAY • If so, be humbly encouraged, and keep clinging to Christ.
• If not, repent and trust in Christ.

Gracious Father,

It is only by your grace and our union with your Son, Jesus, that we are able to call you Father. We praise you for that. Keep us from error and strengthen us in the truth by your Spirit. Help us to live like your children, walking in repentance and obedience, and delighting in our relationship with you. Amen.

Day 19 (Sunday, Feb. 28)

READ 1 John 3:11-15

REFLECT • Reflect on ways you've experienced God's

PRAY love through his children's love for you.

- What is unique about the church's love?
- Pray for God to fill your heart with love for his children.

Day 20 (Monday, Feb. 29)

READ 1 John 3:16

REFLECT • What does Christ's death in our place say about God's love for us?

PRAY • How can you show that love to others?

Day 21 (Tuesday, Mar. 1)

READ 1 John 3:17-18

REFLECT • Ask God to reveal to you areas in life where you love stuff more than people.

PRAY • Ask God to open your eyes to opportunities to love his children in tangible ways.

Day 22 (Wednesday, Mar. 2)

READ 1 John 3:19-22

REFLECT • When your heart condemns you (i.e. questions your relationship with God) what does it usually accuse you of?

PRAY • How does your life in Christ reassure you?

Day 23 (Thursday, Mar. 3)

READ 1 John 3:23-24

REFLECT • Reflect on the connection between

PRAY believing in Christ and loving one another.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to deepen your sense of his presence by strengthening your faith, love, and obedience.

Day 24 (Friday, Mar. 4)

READ 1 John 4:1-3

REFLECT • Think about the voices that influence the

PRAY direction of your life the most. Do they affirm Christ, or some other kingdom?

- Pray for wisdom and discernment to hear the Spirit's voice as you follow Christ.

Day 25 (Saturday, Mar. 5)

READ 1 John 4:4-6

REFLECT • Consider the relative weakness of evil: though its influence is strong, the Spirit of Christ in you is stronger still.

PRAY • Ask God for strength to overcome the world and its influences.

Gracious Father,

It is through your Son's sacrifice for us that we know what love is, and are able to love one another. It is through your Spirit's presence that we have confidence before you. It is through your Spirit's power that we can overcome the world. Strengthen us for love and obedience that we might abide in you and you in us. Amen.

Day 26 (Sunday, Mar. 6)

READ 1 John 4:7-8

REFLECT • What does it mean that “God is love”?

PRAY • How have you experienced God’s love in your life? How about this week?
• Ponder and praise God for his love.

Day 27 (Monday, Mar. 7)

READ 1 John 4:9-10

REFLECT • Ponder the fact that before you loved God, he loved you.

PRAY • How does the cross teach us what love means?
• How does the cross fuel your love for others?

Day 28 (Tuesday, Mar. 8)

READ 1 John 4:11-12

REFLECT • Consider your life: to what extent is it marked by love?

PRAY • How does our love for others reveal God to them?

Day 29 (Wednesday, Mar. 9)

READ 1 John 4:13-15

REFLECT • We have confidence before God through our faith in Christ; that faith is a gift of God’s Spirit.

PRAY • Praise God that our confidence rests in his work and not our own.

Day 30 (Thursday, Mar. 10)

READ 1 John 4:16-17

REFLECT • What does it mean to abide in love?

PRAY • What kind of love will give us confidence for the day of judgment?

Day 31 (Friday, Mar. 11)

READ 1 John 4:18-19

REFLECT • Does the idea of seeing God fill you more with fear or with love?

PRAY • How does God's love for us drive out fear?

Day 32 (Saturday, Mar. 12)

READ 1 John 4:20-21

REFLECT • How does God's love for you free you to love your brothers and sisters?

PRAY • Spend time in prayer on behalf of specific believers in your life.

Gracious Father,

We confess that had you not loved us first, we would never have turned our love away from ourselves and away from this world, to give it to you. Thank you for loving us first, and for showing us what love is through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Give us confidence in your love, and freedom to love others as we have been loved by you. Amen.

Day 33 (Sunday, Mar. 13)

READ 1 John 5:1-2

REFLECT • Meditate again on the gospel—the

PRAY marvel that through faith in Christ we know we are born of God.

- Ask God to help you love others afresh by loving him more and obeying him.

Day 34 (Monday, Mar. 14)

READ 1 John 5:3-5

REFLECT • Are God's commands a burden to you?

PRAY • How does our faith lighten the burden?

- How does our faith overcome the world?
- Ask God to strengthen your faith to overcome the evil one at every turn.

Day 35 (Tuesday, Mar. 15)

READ 1 John 5:6-11

REFLECT • Reflect on what God tells us about who his Son is and what he has done.

PRAY • Praise God for his saving work in Christ.

Day 36 (Wednesday, Mar. 16)

READ 1 John 5:12

REFLECT • Ponder the implications of having the

PRAY Son of God, and respond in praise.

Day 37 (Thursday, Mar. 17)

READ 1 John 5:13-15

REFLECT • Do you pray with confidence that God

PRAY hears you?

- Ask boldly for God to grant your requests according to his will.

Day 38 (Friday, Mar. 18)

READ 1 John 5:16-17

REFLECT • Pray for repentance within the Body of Christ.

PRAY

- Pray for conviction of sin and the cleansing of grace.

Day 39 (Saturday, Mar. 19)

READ 1 John 5:18-20

REFLECT • Pray for protection from the evil one.

PRAY • Pray that God's church would hold fast to the truth of the gospel.

Day 40 (Palm Sunday, Mar. 20)

READ 1 John 5:21

REFLECT • Ask God to expose any idols in your life.

PRAY • Ask God to fill your heart with an affection for him that leaves no room for false gods.

Gracious Father,

We praise you that you have revealed yourself in Spirit and in truth. Keep us from sin and fill us with love. Give us faith to overcome the world, and confidence of eternal life in you through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HOLY WEEK

Day 1 (Monday, Mar. 21)

READ & REFLECT John 13:1-30

Loving Father,

What a great mystery that you have entered into the suffering of your rebellious people by sending your Son. Jesus, you set aside your heavenly glory, took on human flesh, and came not to be served, but to serve. You willingly experienced betrayal by those closest to you, which cost you everything on the cross. What else can explain this but love? Help us marvel at your love for us this Holy Week. Amen.

Day 2 (Tuesday, Mar. 22)

READ & REFLECT John 13:31–15:17

Kind Father,

There is no greater kindness that humanity can experience than to know you, our God. By your mercy you have revealed yourself through your Son, and opened our eyes to see him by your Spirit. You have made a way through Jesus for sinners to have eternal life. May we abide in you this Holy Week—in your love and in your word, and so bear much fruit for your glory. Amen.

Day 3 (Wednesday, Mar. 23)

READ & REFLECT John 15:18–16:33

Powerful Father,

Though this world hates you and your Son, and therefore wars against your children, help us to trust in your power this Holy Week. Thank you that you are present by your Spirit, to guide us in truth and convict the world; that your Son has overcome the world and gives peace amid our tribulation; and that he is coming again to bring joy out of the sorrow of this broken world. Give us strength to persevere in him. Amen.

Day 4 (Maundy Thursday, Mar. 24)

READ & REFLECT John 17:1–18:27

Glorious Father,

There is no fuller demonstration of your worthiness than the love and faithfulness of your Son. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper on this day, may we never forget the cup Jesus willingly drank for us—your wrath against our sin. Make us one in Christ, that the world might believe that you have sent Jesus. Amen.

Day 5 (Good Friday, Mar. 25)

READ & REFLECT John 18:28–19:42

Sovereign Father,

As we remember the cross this Good Friday, we marvel that this terrible day was according to your eternal plan. No one took Jesus' life that day; he willingly laid it down. May we grieve today over the sin, shame, and brokenness Christ bore for us; yet may we rejoice in the grace and forgiveness that is ours through him. Amen.

Day 6 (Holy Saturday, Mar. 26)

READ & REFLECT Psalm 22

Faithful Father,

As we live out our days amid the sin and sorrow of this fallen world, feeling at times as though you have forsaken or forgotten us, remind us of your faithfulness, which you have proven through the events of Holy Week. And give us patience and perseverance as we look to the hope of the resurrection to come. Amen.

Day 7 (Easter Sunday, Mar. 27)

READ & REFLECT John 20:1–31

Victorious Father,

There are no words suitable to express the wonder and glory that death has been defeated in Christ. We praise you for your power and victory; we praise you for your faithfulness and love; we praise you that you are making all things new through your Son. Receive the glory due your name this Resurrection Day. Amen.

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