



Lent and Easter with Youth and Young Adults

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Lent and Easter are very rich times of year for the church and, therefore, are a rich time for teaching and experiencing the faith in a new way. Traditionally, Lent serves as a time of preparation for someone who is to be baptized and it is a time where we intentionally do things that draw us closer to God as we prepare for Easter. These great 40 days of Lent offer us the gift of reconnecting or connecting with God in a new way as we pause, pray, refrain and give.

This time of year is also the time in which teenagers and many young adults have Spring Break, finals, tests, completing last minute applications, finding jobs for the summer, etc. These life events can be both joyous and stress-filled. Lent offers a lens with which one can approach life and can offer a respite in the midst of a busy life. Inviting young people to journey through Lent individually and as a community can make it a very rich, life-giving, and meaningful time.

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Invitation and Getting Real

Think about how you can issue a genuine invitation to observing Lent. If this is something new for your community, you will want to explain what Lent is and what you are inviting people to do in this time of preparation for Easter. If Lent is something that is normally observed in your community, you will still want to do some explanation of how the youth and/or young adults can engage in Lent intentionally as a community. Think about your context and what will make sense, how much explanation you want to offer, and what you are calling them to do during this time.

Lent is an invitation to “get real” about your own life, your life with God, and your life with others. If we look at the Ten Commandments, they are laws or rules given to us by God as a guide for our lives—they outline how we are to treat God, others, and ourselves. Jesus reiterated this in his Great Command, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39) Both of these iterate the importance of how we are connected with God, how we treat others, and how we care for ourselves.

Our culture doesn’t talk much about “sin” but it is a word that we still use in church. So what is sin? Sins are those things that separate us from God and from one another. They are those things that stop us from being who God has truly made us to be. As we invite people to “get real,” how are we inviting them to reconnect with God, one another, and themselves? How are they able to grapple with those things that are separating them from the love God intends for all of us? When we are aware and honest about the separation, disconnect, and sin in our lives, we can work toward connection, love, and forgiveness.

Lenten Practices

Lent is usually marked with taking time for creating a time to pause and intentionally be with God, prayer, refraining from normal activities (or taking new things on), and giving. These practices are done because they mirror the stories and events we hear about in the Bible and they speak deeply to the life Christ is calling us to live – a life where we stop, pray, refrain, and give.

As you map your Lenten journey and invitation, make sure to have a variety of entry points, activities, and prayer styles so people can enter into the season where they are feeling called. In this article you will find some suggestions to get your creative juices flowing. Where is God calling you on this Lenten Journey? Where is God calling you to invite others?

Pause

- ◆ **Ash Wednesday.** This is the day Lent begins. It is the ultimate day to pause and mark as a day set aside for reflection, prayer, and a renewed connection with God. On this day we suspend the usual so we can embrace the unusual life God calls us to each day. This day is a day we pause and remember that we are but a part of God’s creation, working with each other and God to participate in what God is calling us to.
- ◆ **Marking Ash Wednesday.** If you can go to an Ash Wednesday service today, go. If you cannot make it because of work, school, or family commitments, then mark Ash Wednesday with family and friends. Gather family or friends together. On a piece of paper, have each person write or draw something that they would like to change, do differently, or something that they would like to take on in their Lenten journey. When each person has had a chance to reflect, invite them to fold up the paper and burn them together in a safe

place. As they are burning, pray together and lift those things to God. You can say the Lord's prayer, a prayer that is meaningful to you, or simply pray for those things you wrote down.

- ◆ **Stillness and Quiet.** This is not the quiet where you get to lay down and fall asleep (even though you could probably use the sleep), but rather intentional quiet where you listen to nothing except what is around you. Quiet practices like meditation and focusing exercises may help, but we invite you to simply be quiet and pay attention to what comes up during this time. What has God called you to notice? What came up?
- ◆ **Modern Holy Week and Easter.** Invite your group to create a modern scenario of what Holy Week and Easter might have looked like if Jesus came today. This will help them understand the story better, put it in their context, and grasp that this is their story, our story, the story of faith.

Pray

Even though we try to cram as much into each day as we can, we also need and want to pause. We all welcome occasions where we can reflect, think, be still, and pray alone and with friends—and teens are no different. As youth ministers, it is our job to give them tools and resources will allow them the permission and awareness to begin these practices now—practices that will enhance their lives from here forward.

- ◆ **Prayer Box.** If you do not have room for a chain, the prayer box is a great way to gather all your thoughts and prayers into one place. Find a box and cover it with plain paper. Decorate it with symbols of Lent and make sure to cut a hole in the top. Once it is complete, leave it on the table as your centerpiece with a stack of paper next to it. Each time any one has a prayer they can add it to the box and at the end of each week, or at the end of Lent,

you can open the box and share the prayers with each other.

- ◆ **Daily Prayer.** Invite them to take three minutes each day in prayer. This could be first thing in the morning, late a night, or at a specific time during each day.
- ◆ **Read Scripture.** Read a passage of Scripture and then sit with it for a period of time, noticing what words, phrases, or ideas come to you.
- ◆ **Active Prayer and Meditation.** Turn your exercise time into time with God by focusing on God as you walk, run, or bike. Focus on your breath, on the kind of air that surrounds you (hot, cold, crisp, dry, etc.) and give thanks for your breath. Notice what is around you, the creation, the world God made for us, and give thanks for its beauty. What are your surroundings saying to you (is there garbage to be picked up, trails that need to be trimmed, etc.) What is God calling you to do in that time and place?
- ◆ **Online Prayer.** Try new prayer practices and explore new ways of connecting with God and one another. A few suggestions are:
 - Sacred Space: <http://www.sacredspace.ie>
 - Pray as You Go: <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home>
 - D365: <http://www.d365.org>

Refrain

A common question people tend to ask in Lent is “What are you giving up this Lent?” This comes from the tradition of Lent being a time of fasting, stripping away all the fat (literal and figurative) in our lives, living a paired down life, and giving something up because Lent is a season of repentance and simplicity.

Refraining from eating meat, drinking, eating fatty foods, etc. are common ways of “refraining” or giving up during Lent.

- ◆ **Giving Up:** Is there something you can give up this Lent that will draw you closer to God or to one another?
- ◆ **Refrain:** Is there a common behavior you want to stop during Lent?

Another way to think about this, which some find helpful, is what is a behavior I want to start during Lent?

- ◆ **Starting:** Is God calling me to do something new?
- ◆ **Connection:** During Lent is there a new way of connecting with God and one another I want to try?

A vastly different way of thinking about “refraining” is refraining from focusing on self-improvement for Lent. What if you spent your Lenten journey really exploring who God has made you to be, what God is calling you to do, who God has put into your life, and be thankful for who you are?

Give

Another practice of Lent is to give—give money to the poor, give time to projects that will further God’s mission here on earth, give time to the people you love, etc.

- ◆ What do I have to give? Time? Money? Energy? My gifts?
- ◆ Who or what needs your time, money, energy, and gifts?

40 Days of Lent Reflections

Lent is a great time to take a few moments every day to prayer and meditation. Wake up early or spend time before bed to reflect on where God is in your life. You can use the 40 days of suggestions below, create your own, or choose one to do each day.

1. **Pause:** What does it mean to be dust?
2. **Pray:** What do you need to ask God in prayer today?

3. **Refrain:** What is one practice I can refrain from today and instead take that time to focus on God on another who needs my attention?
4. **Give:** In what ways am I being called to give to someone else today?
5. **Pause:** Stop. Breathe deeply. Notice where God is in your life.
6. **Pray:** For what are you thankful today?
7. **Refrain:** What can I do differently today?
8. **Give:** What worries can I give over to God today?
9. **Pause:** As you pause and intentionally call God into your life today, where are you led?
10. **Pray:** For whom do you need to pray today?
11. **Refrain:** Give up your usual coffee, tea, soda, afternoon treat and take a walk in your neighborhood. What do you notice?
12. **Give:** What can I give those in need today?
13. **Pause:** Go stand outside. Take a deep breath. What do you notice about God’s creation?
14. **Pray:** What or who are the blessings in your life? Pray for those things.
15. **Refrain:** Refrain from self-doubt, and instead, take notice of the gifts God has given you.
16. **Give:** How can you give of your time today?
17. **Pause:** Read scripture today. What did you hear God saying in that scripture?
18. **Pray:** What are the things you need to confess to God?
19. **Refrain:** Refrain from using social media today. What might you do with that time instead?
20. **Give:** Give yourself time to dream today. What do you dream is next on your journey with God?
21. **Pause:** Before starting your day or before sleep tonight, pause and give thanks.
22. **Pray:** Name the things you are thankful for today.
23. **Refrain:** Refrain from doing the same routine today. What is something new you want to try and do?

24. **Give:** Give yourself an extra 30 minutes to call someone you haven't talked to for a while.
25. **Pause:** Take time today to go for a walk.
26. **Pray:** Who do you feel called to hold in prayer today?
27. **Refrain:** Refrain from rushing today.
28. **Give:** Think of a way to "pay it forward" today.
29. **Pause:** Take time and savor one meal today, eating the food mindfully and with thanks for the food on your plate.
30. **Pray:** Pray for help in letting go of those things that are separating you from another person, from God, or from being truthful to yourself.
31. **Refrain:** Refrain from self-judgment today.
32. **Give:** Give someone the gift of your time or one of your talents. (If you bake, bake for someone else. If you cook, invite someone else to eat with you. If someone needs you to listen, give them the gift of your time.)
33. **Pause:** Stop and ask for guidance today.
34. **Pray:** Pray for those who struggle, for those who mourn, for those who are lost.
35. **Refrain:** Refrain from doing too much, and simply find time to be.
36. **Give:** Give yourself time to hear God's word today.
37. **Pause:** Pause and ask for God to be a part of your day.
38. **Pray:** What is on your heart to pray for today?
39. **Refrain:** Refrain from "busyness" today so you can be with God and those you love.
40. **Give:** Give yourself time to sit in silence today and be with God.

Easter Practices

Easter is the season in which we celebrate the risen Christ. During Easter we hear stories of Jesus' appearances to his friends and disciples. During this time we hear Christ passing on words and wisdom to his followers who are feeling alone or abandoned. Easter is a season of joy, mystery, and new life. Inviting people into that mystery, joy, and new life is a great

way to experience the Season of Easter.

Stories of Jesus in Our Lives

Many of the Easter stories are of the resurrected Jesus appearing to people and showing them how to live in a new way. In these stories people encounter the mystery and a call to a new life. What if you were to intentionally invite people to recognize where Jesus is appearing in his or her life? Invite them to notice where they see Jesus? How do they see Jesus? When do they see Jesus? What does that look like on a day-to-day basis?

As you engage in hearing the stories throughout Easter, encourage people to take some time each day to reflect upon where Jesus was seen today, where it was, and how they recognized it. As they notice Jesus in their daily lives, ask them to take those moments, give thanks for them, and offer them up in a prayer of Thanksgiving. How might they pray for the people who helped you see Jesus, pray for continued experience with the resurrected Jesus in life daily, and/or pray for whatever comes to mind.

Easter Joy

Brené Brown, researcher and storyteller, talks about joy and gratitude. "It's not joy that makes us grateful, it's gratitude that makes us joyful." Practicing gratitude helps us realize and claim those things for which we are thankful, those things that bring us joy, those things that make our life new and resurrected each day.

In this time of Easter, make it a practice to write down those things for which you are grateful. Write it in a journal, write it on scraps of paper and keep it in a bowl on your dining room table, write it on a post-it note and stick it to your mirror. However you want to embrace gratitude, do it intentionally this Easter Season. Then, take some time each week to notice where these things have brought you new life and resurrection.