

# How to Celebrate Lent with Your Family



Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. As a child, I remember the solemn mass of Ash Wednesday and being anointed with ashes in the sign of the cross on my forehead. As an adult, I attend a Protestant church, but I've always loved the traditional church calendar recognized by the Catholic Church. There is something special about marking the start of church seasons, don't you think?

## What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. It is called Ash Wednesday because of the practice of putting ashes on worshipers' foreheads as a sign of humility before God and as a sign of mourning for the death and destruction that sin brings.

into the world.

## What Is the Purpose of Lent?

The season of Lent spans 40 weekdays beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending with Holy Week: Holy Thursday, (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding the Saturday before Easter. Today, Lent is used as a time of prayer and preparation for Easter. We can look inward to see what needs to be confessed and changed in our lives. Some Christians fast and/or give up something for Lent as a sacrificial offering, while others focus on doing good deeds to help others.

I love author Ruth Haley Barton's take on Lent. She makes us think deeply by recommending we all ask ourselves this question, "Where in my life have I gotten away from God, and what are the disciplines that will enable me to find my way back?"

## Ideas to Make Lent Special

As Ruth's question suggests, marking the time of Lent in a thoughtful way will help you to prepare your heart for Easter. Perhaps you could even invite a family member or friend to join you in this journey. If you have young children, they may enjoy starting their own mini-ministry (see the last bullet point) or reading short prayers or scriptures with you. Here's a list of suggestions, or feel free to try one of your own.

- Give up a favorite food as a sacrifice to God.
- Work on breaking a bad habit you have.
- Add a new beneficial habit that you've been meaning to start that will improve either your body, soul, or spirit.
- Practice Lectio Divina, also called sacred reading.
- Practice a spiritual discipline that sounds interesting: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, self-denial,

simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, or celebration.

- Read Lent selections from the Book of Common Prayer or other prayer books.
- Start a mini ministry of encouragement. Each day find some way to encourage others: a quick note, a piece of candy, a hug, and so on. (More on mini ministries coming soon).

Let's all take some time to settle in with God during the season of Lent. We'd love to hear your ideas on making this a sacred season. Please share below in the comments.

Blessings,



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## Lent 2017: A Verse A Day

# Ready or not, Lent starts this week, and at Only By Prayer, we'd love to have you join us as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

Our focus this year is A Verse A Day. We'll start on Wednesday, March 1, and will continue until Easter on Sunday, April 16. Here's what you need to know.

- Weekly themes
- Focus on living out one verse per day. Each morning, check our Lent 2017 Facebook group for that day's verse and decide/look for opportunities on how you will live it out. Later that day, log back on to the Facebook page and tell us/show us how you interpreted the verse. Need some suggestions? Here's a few to start, and be sure to leave any ideas you may have in the comment section.
  - Take a photo
  - Make a meme
  - Create a work of art around the verse
  - Record a video relating to the verse
  - Write a poem
  - Do an act of service for someone

That's all there is to it, simple yet effective. Please invite



Lent 2017

A VERSE A DAY

JOIN ONLY BY PRAYER

your family and friends to join you. Sign up below, and once we receive your information, we'll send you an invitation to the Facebook group. **Please be sure to respond to the opt-in email to the group when you receive that verification email from Only By Prayer/Aweber. And also watch for a separate email to join our Facebook group. Check your junk email for both emails if you don't see them in your inbox within a few hours of signing up. They often end up there!**

Thanks for joining us, and we can't wait to get started!

Jane and Mary of Only By Prayer

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## Lent: empty to full, service



*Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. Luke 12:35-36*

Welcome to the final week of our Lent: empty to full study. We are so thankful for each one who has made this journey with us. For our final week, we will be looking at service.

**Service can be a spur-of-the-moment Spirit-led prompting to help someone, or it can be a longer commitment that you make, perhaps as a volunteer.**

Your season of life will influence your acts of service. Parents with small children often find most of their time is spent serving their families. As your children grow, your schedule may allow for more time for you to serve others outside of your home as well.

The most important way to determine where God wants you serving in this season of life is to of course pray about it. Seek His plans and be alert to opportunities He brings your way. Enjoy this week's Sway and be sure to let us know some of the different ways you have served others in your life!

Have a blessed Easter!

Jane Vanosdol and Mary Kane

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**Short & Sweet: 5 Reasons Why**

# Jesus Had to Die



*Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mathew 20:28

## **Why did Jesus have to come to earth, to be born as a man and die?**

For as long as I can remember, I've known about the crucifixion of Jesus. The church we attended prominently displayed a large crucifix. Jesus on the cross—front and center. The matter of His death was a bedrock issue, but I had never stopped to ask *why*.

## ***Why did Jesus have to die?***

This question had been blowing around the corners of my mind since I became a Christian many years ago, but I never gave it serious consideration until recently. It came to the forefront when one of my students, a new Christian, asked me, "*why did Jesus have to die?*". Good question. Couldn't God save people without Jesus dying on the cross? Salvation would so much easier to accept if we could skip the whole crucifixion process.

**I do not claim** to have deep theological or exhaustive information, but my answer comes straight from Scripture. Please, like the Bereans, search the Bible for further insight.

## **5 Reasons Jesus had to die:**

**Reason 1: Jesus had to die because the wages of sin is death.**

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23. Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God covered man’s sin with a sacrifice of an innocent life. Jesus came to be our sacrifice—the Lamb of God.

**Reason 2: Jesus had to die because God cannot die.**

“Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him; The number of His years is unsearchable.” Job 36:26. God is not flesh and blood; He is Spirit and therefore eternal. Since He cannot die, God had to send Jesus to the cross.

**Reason 3: Jesus had to die because redemption requires blood.**

“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Hebrews 9:22. Since God is not flesh but spirit, He has no blood. Therefore, God took on flesh, tabernacled among us, walked the road to the cross and shed His blood.

**Reason 4: Jesus had to die because prophecy must be fulfilled.**

“Therefore will I divide him a *portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death.” Isaiah 53:12. In total, 28 prophecies were fulfilled on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. For more information on prophecies fulfilled by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, please see the following link: [Prophecies](#)

**Reason 5: Jesus had to die because God needed a perfect**



**sacrifice.** “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” ... “Now where there is remission of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.” Hebrews 10:14, 18.

Jesus had to come. He is the only One who could live a perfect life, pay the wages of sin by shedding His blood upon the cross and thereby fulfill the Old Testament prophecies. One question remains then ...

## **Why did Jesus *want* to die?**

Because God so loves us that He would rather die than live without us. Sometimes I have days when I wonder if anyone truly cares. Does anyone see my hurts and my wounds? Then I remember, there is no greater love than this, that a Man should lay down His life for a friend. Jesus died for me. He died for you. He loves us.

He. Loves. You.

### **Action Points:**

1. **Knowing that Jesus has given His life for you**, how can you give your life back to Him? Where can you plug-in?
2. **Who in your life needs to hear about the life**, death, resurrection, and love of Jesus? How can you begin to witness to this person?
3. **Look for three different people to bless today.** (How about the busy clerk at the store ... the person who is going to cut you off in traffic today ... the elderly neighbor who is aching for someone to visit.)

Life is sweet because Jesus died for you.

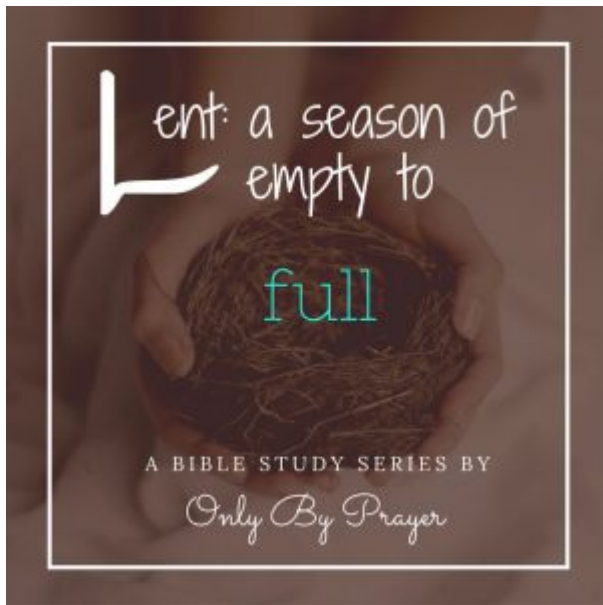
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# Empty to Full: 7-Week Guide to Lent



Would you like to approach Easter this year with a heart that is prepared for the Resurrection?

Too often it seems, Lent flies by and before we know it, Holy Week is upon us and we're rushing to prepare home and heart for Easter. At Only By Prayer, we're ready to help you more mindfully prepare with our 7-Week Guide, Lent: A Season of Empty to Full and accompanying Facebook page.

Ready to sign up now?

## What Is Empty to Full?

Each week of Lent we will identify a theme for that week and email you a multi-media bundle of posts, videos, podcasts, illustrations, and Bible studies that you can use to help prepare your heart. We'll include a simple guide, just in case you want one, but **feel free to do them in any order you choose and at your leisure**. If the Spirit leads you to slow down and spend the entire week diving deep into one resource, by all means do that. We will also set up a private Facebook page for just this group to share insights, ask questions, and pray for each other. **There is no cost. We simply ask that you sign up in the opt-in form below so that we may email you the resources each week.**

## Weekly Topics

We've chosen a different spiritual discipline for each week. Here's the list:

- Week 1: Simplicity
- Week 2: Examen
- Week 3: Prayer
- Week 4: Fasting
- Week 5: Study
- Week 6: Service
- Week 7: Celebration

Ready to get started? Simply sign up below. Be sure to reply to the email you should immediately receive (check your spam or trash if you don't see it within a few minutes) so that you are added to our list. Your first bundle will arrive on Ash Wednesday, February 10, the first day of Lent. Thereafter,

you'll receive a bundle every Monday. We will also add you to our private Empty to Full Facebook page so that you can participate in the forum with us if you would like to.

We look forward to the next seven weeks! Thank you for journeying with us.

**Sign up here:**

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## The 12 Days of Easter: Day 12, Resurrection Life



### Day 12: Resurrection Life

"I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." John  
11:25

**resurrection** [rez-uh—rek-shuh n]

**noun**

1. the act of rising from the dead.
2. the rising of Christ after His death and burial.
3. the rising of the dead on Judgment Day.
4. the state of those risen from the dead.
5. a rising again, as from decay, disuse, etc.; revival

*Abundant life ... eternal life ... everlasting life ...* are all made possible by resurrection life. Not just life, but *resurrection* life; the kind of life that comes after a death. Only God can make life after death. **Resurrection** is not an action, a thing, or behavior; it is a Person, Jesus. The Great I AM.

Because of the **resurrection** there is life after death, life after divorce, life after theft, life after abuse, life after addiction, and life after lying, but it only comes from Jesus Christ. He endured an ugly, horrific death to make you (and me) beautiful.

Several years ago, a coworker asked me if I would share my *testimony* (my story of how I became a Christian) with her. I told her I would share my story, but to be prepared, because it wasn't pretty. God stopped me and whispered clearly in my heart, "Your story is beautiful."

My story is beautiful because God made it beautiful. He **resurrected** my life and called me forth from my grave that I dug with my own two hands to live in the beauty of His grace.

Though your marriage is dead, you shall live. Though your dreams are dead, you shall live. Though your reputation is dead, you shall live. God is in the business of raising things from the dead. It is His specialty.

**Resurrection** life. Forged at the cross by the love and the blood of Jesus.

Death where is the sting? He is Risen! He is risen indeed!

## Action Points

1. **Accept.** If you haven't accepted Jesus as your Savior, please do so now. Tell Him your sin and of your great need for a Savior and ask Him to come into your heart.
2. **Live!** Stop living in the shadow of a dead past, a dead relationship, or a dead dream. Jesus is calling you forth to new life. What step can you take today to live a resurrected life?
3. **Share.** Someone you know is dying to hear about Jesus. Tell them today.

Happy Easter.

Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/resurrection> (accessed: March 08, 2015).