

The background is an abstract, fluid composition of colors. At the top, there are deep red and brown tones that blend into a dark, almost black space. Below this, swirling patterns of teal, light green, and grey emerge, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is ethereal and contemplative, with the colors appearing to flow and merge together.

LENT

A GUIDE
FOR PRAYER

“ You don't know how to pray? Put yourself in the presence of God, and as soon as you have said, 'Lord, I don't know how to pray!' You can be sure you've already begun. ”

JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

Dear friends at Ascension Church,

As we begin this journey together, let me answer a couple of very common questions!

What is "Lent?"

Lent is the 40 days of praying and fasting that leads to Easter. Just like Advent is a season of waiting that prepares us for Christmas, Lent is a season of waiting for Easter when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. So why is it 40 days? 40 is a significant number for trials and waiting in Scripture (The great flood had periods of 40 days, Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days).

So what do we "do" during this season? **Really, the main purpose of Lent is earnest prayer.** We get to that place of earnest prayer by **(1) fasting** from some good thing(s) and **(2) practicing acts of compassion** for the least, the lost, and the poor. These two things are what St. Augustine called the "two wings of prayer"—they lift our prayer life to more earnest heights.

Isn't Lent a Catholic thing?

Yes and no. Lent was practiced long before the divide between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and so, like many other things, it need not be a difference between the two groups. We affirm the rich Protestant truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Praying, fasting and participating in Lent does not make us righteous or more acceptable before God. Participating in Lent is not a Scriptural mandate, nor should anyone's conscience be bound to do so. However, it is a helpful, wise, and time-honored tradition that draws us back to our need of Jesus Christ.

Please remember: Fasting for its own sake is not the point of this season! Fasting must lead us to greater intimacy with God and more earnest prayer. When you feel your need and your desires, THAT is the time to turn to God and see him as the answer to your longings.

I hope that this guide is helpful. I'm praying that in the midst of self-denial, you discover more of the One who denied himself for you.

Gray Ewing

Pastor, Ascension Church of Phoenix

Suggested Practices of Fasting

Breakfast	Technology	Sugar
Lunch	Media	Alcoholic beverages
Dinner	Caffeine	Bread
Fast from food all day	Social Media	The News
All liquids but water	Reading	A Social Event
Texting	Email	Noise

Suggested Practices of Abundance and Compassion

Give something away

Give to someone in need

Pray for someone you wouldn't normally pray for

Write a note to a friend

Send a text of encouragement

Make something for someone

Make cookies for a neighbor

Do something for your spouse that you know will delight him or her

Give a donation to a cause in Phoenix

Ask if you can pray for someone out loud

How To Use This Guide

This guide is designed to be simple and approachable. The Scriptures and quotes are kept short to invite deeper reflection. Each day has 4 movements of prayer:

Meditate: Read the scripture slowly multiple times. What pictures come to mind? What applications stir your heart?

Reflect: Ask yourself: How has this quote challenged or encouraged you? Both?

Pray: The prayer focus rotates among smaller to bigger circles: (1) Family (2) Church (3) Neighbors (4) World

Practice: The practice rotates between acts of fasting and compassion (The two “wings” of prayer according to Augustine)

Sundays are feast days! Even during the seasons of wilderness and loss, it is good to remember the goodness of God and the joy of the resurrection. It is our prayer that you will find freedom and joy during this season of intentionality.

• FEBRUARY 14 •

Meditate: I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

—Ezekiel 36:26

Reflect: O Lord, who has mercy upon all, take away from me my sins, and mercifully kindle in me the fire of Thy Holy Spirit. Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh, a heart to love and adore You, a heart to delight in You, to follow and enjoy You, for Christ's sake. Amen. —Ambrose of Milan, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 15 •

Meditate: My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. —Jeremiah 2:13

Reflect: You can do more than pray after you have prayed; but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed. —Adoniram Judson Gordon, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 16 •

Meditate: Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. —Hebrews 2:9

Reflect: You came to taste death, yet You were the Life and had come to bring it to the dead. —Gregory the Great, 6th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 17 •

Meditate: Everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? —John 11:26

Reflect: You said, O my Christ, “Whoever believes in Me shall live and never die.” If then, faith in You saves the lost, then save me....O Lord, from now on let me love You as intensely as I have loved sin. —John Chrysostom, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 18 •

Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.

• FEBRUARY 19 •

Meditate: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. —John 1:5

Reflect: Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility. —Saint Augustine, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 20 •

Meditate: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. —Psalm 34:18

Reflect: Seek God in all things and we shall find God by our side. —St. Peter Claver, 17th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 21 •

Meditate: The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants... and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”
—Revelation 11:18

Reflect: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let Your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory now and forever. Amen. —Thomas Cranmer, 16th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 22 •

Meditate: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. —Philippians 2:3

Reflect: There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world. —Teresa of Avila, 16th century

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 23 •

Meditate: I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. —Jeremiah 32:40

Reflect: Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You took on You what was mine; yet set on me what was Yours. You became what You were not, that I might become what I was not. —Martin Luther, 16th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 24 •

Meditate: We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:10

Reflect: It is not you that shapes God, it is God that shapes you. If you are the work of God, await the hand of the artist who does all things in due season. —Irenaeus of Lyon, 2nd century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 25 •

Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.

• FEBRUARY 26 •

Meditate: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

Reflect: God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but He does what is still more wonderful: He makes saints out of sinners. —Soren Kierkegaard, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 27 •

Meditate: Return to me with all your heart... rend your hearts and not your garments.
—Joel 2:12-13

Reflect: O Lord, the house of my soul is narrow; enlarge it that you may enter in. It is ruinous, O repair it! It displeases Your sight. I confess it, I know. But who shall cleanse it? To whom shall I cry but to You? Cleanse me from my secret faults, O Lord, and spare Your servant from strange sins. —Augustine, 5th century

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• FEBRUARY 28 •

Meditate: God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

Reflect: Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair. Knowing Jesus Christ strikes the balance, because He shows us both God and our own wretchedness. —Blaise Pascal, 17th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• FEBRUARY 29 •

Meditate: ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’

—Matthew 18:21-22

Reflect: No man knows how bad he is ‘til he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting it, not by giving in. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.

—C.S. Lewis, 20th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 1 •

Meditate: God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

–2 Timothy 1:7

Reflect: Lord and Master of my life, keep from me the spirit of indifference and discouragement, lust of power and idle chatter. Instead, grant to me, Your servant, the Spirit of wholeness of being, humble-mindedness, patience, and love. –Ephraim of Syria, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 2 •

Meditate: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. –Psalm 23:6

Reflection: “I live here as a fish in a vessel of water, only enough to keep me alive, but in heaven I shall swim in the ocean. Here I have little air in me to keep me breathing, but there I shall have sweet and fresh gales. Here I have a beam of sun to lighten my darkness, a warm ray to keep me from freezing; yonder I shall live in light and warmth for ever.” –Valley of Vision

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 3 •

Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.

• MARCH 4 •

Meditate: Who is a God like you? –Micah 7:18

Reflect: You humble the pride of the proud; You destroy the plans of nations; You exalt the humble and humble the exalted; You make rich and make poor; You kill and make alive. –Clement of Alexandria, 2nd century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 5 •

Meditate: They said to one another, ‘What is it?’ ... And Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.’ –Exodus 16:15

Reflect: Gracious and holy Father, give me wisdom to perceive You, intelligence to fathom You, patience to wait for You, eyes to behold You, a heart to meditate upon You, and a life to proclaim You, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. –Benedict of Nursia, 6th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 6 •

Meditate: For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. –1 John 5:3

Reflect: May I consent to and delight in thy law after the inner man, never complain over the strictness of thy demands, but mourn over my want of conformity to them; never question thy commandments, but esteem them to be right. By thy spirit within me, may my practice spring from principle, and my dispositions be conformable with duty. –Valley of Vision

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 7 •

Meditate: The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. —Psalm 51:17

Reflect: O God, make me worthy of this calling, that the name of Jesus may be glorified in me and I in him. —Valley of Vision

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 8 •

Meditate: For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. —John 13:15

Reflect: No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great. —John Chrysostom, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 9 •

Meditate: But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ —Luke 10:29

Reflect: Show Your mercy to me and gladden my heart. I am like the man on the way to Jericho who was overtaken by robbers, wounded, and left for dead: O Good Samaritan, come to my aid. I am like the sheep that went astray: O Good Shepherd, seek me out and bring me home in accord with Your will. Let me dwell in Your house all the days of my life and praise You forever and ever. —Jerome, 4th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 10 •

Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.

• MARCH 11 •

Meditate: God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger. –Jonah 3:10

Reflect: We believe that God—Who is perfectly merciful and also very just—sent His Son to assume the nature in which the disobedience had been committed, in order to bear in it the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. —The Belgic Confession, 16th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 12 •

Meditate: How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? —John 5:44

Reflect: O Lord, I cannot plead my love of Thee: I plead Thy Love of me; The shallow conduit hails the unfathomed sea. —Christina Rossetti, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 13 •

Meditate: Draw me after you; let us run. —Song of Solomon 1:4

Reflect: LORD, we would come to Thee, but do Thou come to us. Draw us and we will run after Thee. —Charles Spurgeon, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 14 •

Meditate: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. —Psalm 51:7

Reflect: I cannot pray, except I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer or receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of; and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ. —William Beveridge, 17th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 15 •

Meditate: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” —John 8:11

Reflect: It is easier to cry against one thousand sins of others than to kill one of your own. —John Flavel, 17th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 16 •

Meditate: For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. —2 Corinthians 7:10

Reflect: Work in me more profound and abiding repentance. Give me the fullness of godly grief, that trembles and fears, yet ever trust and loves, which is ever powerful, and ever confident. Grant through the tears of repentance I may see more clearly the brightness and glories of the saving cross. —Valley of Vision

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 17 •

Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.

• MARCH 18 •

Meditate: I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy... To us, O LORD, belongs open shame... To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness... —Daniel 9:3, 8-9

Reflect: According to God's righteous judgment, we deserve punishment both in this world and forever after: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor? God requires that His justice be satisfied. Therefore, the claims of His justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or another. —Heidelberg Catechism 12, 16th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 19 •

Meditate: Pray without ceasing. —1 Thessalonians 5:17

Reflect: If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer. —Martin Luther, 16th Century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 20 •

Meditate: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. —Matthew 12:34

Reflect: In short, a man must be set free from the sin he is, which makes him do the sin he does. —George MacDonald, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of your neighbors and friends.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 21 •

Meditate: If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? —Psalm 130:3

Reflect: My transgressions and short-comings
present me with a list of accusations,
But I bless thee that they will not stand against me,
for all have been laid on Christ;
Go on to subdue my corruptions,
and grant me grace to live above them. —Valley of Vision

Pray: For the needs of our country and the world.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 22 •

Meditate: We love because he first loved us. —I John 4:19

Reflect: You have loved us first, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if You have only loved us first but a single time, rather than that without ceasing You have loved us first many times and every day and our whole life through. —Søren Kierkegaard, 19th century

Pray: For the needs of your family.

Practice: Choose a practice of compassion for today.

• MARCH 23 •

Meditate: He is not God of the dead, but of the living. —Matthew 22:32

Reflect: May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real Thou that I speak to.
—C.S. Lewis, 20th century

Pray: For the needs of our church.

Practice: Choose a practice of fasting for today.

• MARCH 24 •

Palm Sunday Feast! Enjoy the good gifts God has given.



A S C E N S I O N
C H U R C H O F P H O E N I X