

## **40 Days to a Simpler Life: A Calendar for Lent**

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Both *disciple* and *discipline* mean *to follow*. Throughout much of the history of the Christian church, Lent has represented a time of self-denial and examination, a time to ponder what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing for his ministry. Disciples of Jesus follow his example, his life of discipline. Too often discipline has been overly-linked with punishment. However, a healthy discipline can give our lives shape, structure and boundaries, rather than chaos and stress.

Living more simply is not easy. It takes discipline. The purpose of this calendar is to help us live Christian disciplines. We focus on a different discipline each week. Let's bring each one with us into each new week. After the 40 days of Lent we hope we have simplified our lives a bit more and are ready to continue those disciplines year-round.

Most disciplines require some kind of self-denial. Let's strive to replace the denied habit or "thing" with a more positive substitute.

This calendar encourages us to take time to think and reflect. We listen to discern God's desires for our lives and the world. Suggestions for thought or action are offered for each of the 40 days of Lent. Set aside time each day to consider the day's suggestion. On several days you will be encouraged to collect money to share with those in need. Choose a program you want to support, and find an empty container to collect your offerings. At the end of the 40 days, the organization of your choice will be pleased at your generosity.

- 1 † Ash Wednesday. The ashes on our foreheads remind us of our mortality. We can't take our possessions, power or prestige with us to the grave... or to heaven. Let's focus this Lent on eliminating the distractions of "stuff." This will free us to revel in the meaning given to our lives by our relationships with people and with God.
  - 2 † Read Matthew 6:19-21. Imagine how much time, energy and money is used maintaining "stuff" that is "corroded by rust and moths." If that's overwhelming, focus on just one room, like your kitchen or garage. Is food spoiling in your refrigerator, tools rusting on your workbench?
  - 3 † Act on yesterday's imaginings. Vow to set one item aside each day. At the end of each week offer them all to an individual or a group that could really use them. Try NOT to replace them with something else.
  - 4 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week to simplify your life.
- † 1st Sunday in Lent. Read and reflect on Luke 4:1-13.
- 5 † Our society constantly tempts us to be wasteful. Practice *creative frugality*. Can you list ten ways in your own life to substitute helpful, conserving habits instead of wasting such resources as food or water? Give \$1 for each example. Give \$5 for each one shy of ten you can't think of!

- 6 † If you elect to give gifts or buy new clothes for Easter, first visit a Third World Craft and Clothing shop. Or order through the mail from a Fair Trade market - like SERRV (800/423-0071) or Ten Thousand Villages, formerly Self-Help Crafts (717/859-8100) - not from profit-oriented importers. That way we support an artisan in a developing country and we model our values of "Learning from the World Community."
- 7 † Give up TV viewing one day a week until Easter - or cut your viewing in half. Instead, spend that time 1) with family members in activity or conversation or just being together; 2) in additional spiritual pursuits, such as prayer, meditation, Scriptural reading or Bible study; or 3) in service to a needy individual or worthwhile group. For seven days give \$1 for each hour of TV you watch.
- 8 † In addition to your regular offering, pledge that you will adopt an attitude of cutting back this Lent, for another time period, or even from now on. For example, consuming at least 10% fewer resources (like electricity or gasoline) can be your "eco-tithe."
- 9 † Vow to consume no meat one day each week. Give what you would have spent on meat to those who do not have enough of anything to eat.
- 10 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week in creative frugality - substituting helpful habits for wasteful ones.
- † 2nd Sunday in Lent. Read, reflect on Luke 13:31-35.
- 11 † As you meditate on Jesus' impending suffering, list ten ways in your own life to practice self-denial rather than self-indulgence. Give \$1 for each example. Give \$5 for each one shy of ten you can't think of!
- 12 † Celebrate your baptism by drinking only water today. Feel the addictive effects that soda pop or coffee or some other beverage may have on you. Are you willing to ask God for help to reduce or eliminate any such addictions?
- 13 † One day each week, consume no highly processed food... from canned peas to TV dinners. Much of it has its natural nutrition reduced by the process and has many questionable chemicals added. Experience the extra work and the satisfaction of eating a meal made "from scratch."
- 14 † For seven days consume nothing from a "fast food" restaurant. Instead, work with other members of your family to prepare meals together, including the menu selection and shopping. Experience the "inconvenience" and the sense of community of such a project.
- 15 † Save water while showering. Turn off the water while soaping. Turn it back on to rinse. Keep the pressure low. Replace your shower head with a "low flow" head if necessary.
- 16 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week to practice self-denial rather than self-indulgence.
- † 3rd Sunday in Lent. Read and reflect on Luke 13:1-9.
- 17 † In the face of our own impending judgment, list ten ways in your own life to practice tithing, alms giving, time giving, self-giving, rather than buying, possessing, accumulating, owning. Give \$1 for each example. Give \$5 for each one shy of ten you can't think of!
- 18 † Living simply can be lonely, especially if family and friends do not understand its value and don't cooperate. To empathize with another' loneliness, reach out to a lonely person, like inviting the person to supper.

- 19 † To help deal with loneliness, find others in your community who are living more simply and see how you can support each other, as in a group. Inquire about Alternatives' support network and internet conversations.
- 20 † You're half way there! Instead of dwelling on any "sacrifices" you are making, try to witness to others of the benefits of living more simply.
- 21 † When you feel enticed to giving in to a temptation - no matter how seemingly small - express confidence that your life is changing for the better. Smile and say, "Well, that's one burden I won't have to put up with much longer!"
- 22 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week to practice tithing/alms giving, time giving, self-giving, rather than buying, possessing, accumulating, owning.
- † 4th Sunday in Lent. Read and reflect on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32.
- 23 † In the face of our own lives of overconsumption, list ten ways in your life to practice conservation, forgiveness and welcoming. Give \$1 for each example. Give \$5 for each one shy of ten you can't think of! Resolve to help others to do the same.
- 24 † We all have basic physical needs - food, clothing, shelter, etc. Advertising attempts to create artificial wants in us and call them needs. Resist the temptation to call "wants" "needs." When shopping, find creative ways to say, "I like that," rather than "I want that."
- 25 † Resist impulse buying - the temptation to satisfy "spur-of-the-moment" wants. When an impulse strikes, wait at least two days. If you still want the item, go back. Examine it again. Still want it? Do you need it? If you buy it after this discipline, it will be a reasoned purchase, not an impulse.
- 26 † Leisure is important. Excessive leisure is like too much food. We can put on unneeded weight. Try substituting service - like volunteering to help the needy - for some leisure. Both service and leisure help us. Service also helps others.
- 27 † Consolidate errands. Unless it's a true emergency, it can probably wait until tomorrow. Don't take your car unless you have three needs (not wants). Can you find a way to share or swap errands with co-workers, family members, friends and neighbors so one person makes one trip instead of three people each making a trip?
- 28 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week to practice conservation, forgiveness, welcoming, rather than waste and decadence.
- † 5th Sunday in Lent. Read and reflect on John 12:1-8. [Also day 35]
- 29 † In the face of our own life of mixed motives and criticism, list ten ways in your own life to practice thanks and celebration. Give \$1 for each example. Give \$5 for each one shy of ten you can't think of!
- 30 † Identify luxuries in your life - things that we take for granted, that we call essentials. Identify six activities this week that we can do a simpler way, without the luxurious machine - do dishes by hand, hang out clothes to dry, walk instead of driving.
- 31 † Examine any resentment you may have at doing "menial" chores, while others may live in "luxury"? Consider chores an opportunity to meditate, pray, sing, talk to others, listen to music. What's the hurry? What else do you have to do that would be more meaningful?

- 32 † Try a family meeting each week at the same time, such as Sunday after lunch. Make sure an environment of trust exists so that everyone can speak without fear of ridicule. Write down decisions. Do not rely on memory. During the week, allow any disagreements to cool, if possible, until the next family meeting time.
- 33 † After family meeting, have “family fun time,” an hour or so to talk, do something together that’s not work. Take turns planning the activity and the treats. Many resources for ideas are available from Alternatives.
- 34 † Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this week to practice thanks and celebration, rather than mixed motives and criticism.
- † 6th Sunday in Lent (Palm/Passion Sunday). Read and reflect on Luke 19:28-40.
- 35 † Read John 12:1-11. Consider using fewer personal care products, like make-up. Or substitute organic make-up that involved no animal testing. Resist the advertisers who try to make you feel inferior so that you’ll buy their product. Remember the fifth Life Principle of Voluntary Simplicity: Nonconform freely.
- 36 † Read John 12:20-36. The seed “dies” to reintroduce diversity. What needs to die in your life or lifestyle so that you and others can bear more fruit?
- 37 † Read John 13:21-32 aloud over dinner tonight. In remembrance of the meal Jesus shared with his disciples, vow to eat more simple foods, like whole grain bread.
- 38 † Maundy Thursday. Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35, a story about reversing roles. For a specified time, share or give-up ways you use your power at home to control...in the kitchen, with cleaning standards, in the discipline of your children or the TV remote control. Where does your need for control come from?
- 39 † Good Friday. Read John 18:1-19:42. Reflect on how Jesus voluntarily engaged the powers of society with a message of truth and life.
- 40 † Easter Eve. Spend at least 10 minutes reflecting and praying about what you were able or not able to do this Lent to simplify your life for yourself, for others, for your relationship with God.
- † Easter Sunday Evening. Read and reflect on Luke 24:13-49. Like the disciples in the reading, we may not know with whom we walk! As the opportunities arise, share and celebrate the rewards of discipline and simpler living with you co-workers, friends and relatives. Or make a list of ten ways to do this in the next six months.

This 40 day Lenten calendar based on liturgical Cycle C: Luke is available as a poster, as bulletin inserts, and in Spanish. For more copies, order them from Alternatives. Or copy them and pay Alternatives a royalty of 5¢ per calendar. Call 800-821-6153 for a free catalog of resources for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, weddings, other celebrations, and a lifestyle of integrity.

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