

## LENT: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TIME

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Jewish people in exile in Babylon brought together documents we call Heb. Bible/OT. These writings feature an alternate approach to time—new day starts at sun-down, not sunset; day of rest-worship every 7<sup>th</sup> day; 3 major multi-day festivals scattered thru year

In Babylon, every seven days called an “evil day” (certain things prohibited); only one of four evil days was a day of rest. Featured offering to placate a different god, viewed as a potentially hostile force unless sacrificed to. You could see how the Jewish people would feel oppressed under this approach to observing time.

To get a feel for their situation: Imagine living in poverty on an Indian reservation—a crappy piece of land your ancestors were driven to by conquering Army. Then having whole rest of country go bananas over turkey-gravy on Thanksgiving, day to celebrate how great it was when your colonizers arrived to drive you out. Singing, “Now thank we all our God.”

Can see what Jewish exiles in Babylon were doing by observing their alternate approach to time. It was act of political-cultural-personal-spiritual resistance. A brainwashing antidote.

**And that’s what the church calendar, at it’s best is for.** Including major-focus seasons LENT (run-up to Easter) ADVENT (to X-mas)

Confession: I like LENT (40 days leading to Easter) better than Christmas because it feels more subversive to me. It feels like something that helps me resist the brainwashing of living in the most consumer-driven culture in history of humankind ... where we work longer many hours because we need so much stuff

Lent, which begins Wednesday, is 40 days (not counting Sundays) between Ash Wednesday (March 6) and Easter (April 21).

Easter marks a subversive event in history, when a scapegoat regained voice and agency after death—in solidarity with all scapegoats. Lent is the wind-up, in which we consider the meaning of the life, death, rising of Jesus. What it all says about God.

**Jesus spent 40 days** in Judean desert on a vision quest—during which he came to grips with power of evil known in the Bible as “slanderer” or “accuser”—a familiar enough voice in our own heads, and something we often battle at the 40-year mark.

Lent is a **season of reflection and connection** for the church—a time to focus on connecting with God, ourselves, each other, wide world. Making more room for life giving connections—which may mean a little less time on **time sucks**—smartphones, social media,

**Here's what we're featuring for Lenten Experience this year:**

#### SUNDAY FOCUS

Each Sunday focus on the meaning, the significance of Jesus life, death, and rising. What real difference does it make in our world?

#### FEATURED BOOK:

*The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone. We come from a shared religious trauma over the treatment of LGBTQ people. But we're also soaked in a society born out of White Supremacy, an infection that hasn't left us. Facing this (especially those of us who don't know it by lifelong personal experience) takes us deeper in gospel.

WEEKLY PODCAST FROM EMILY with Reflections on the book (especially helpful if your life doesn't have room for a book)

PICK OUT OVER THE NEXT WEEK one new habit you would like to establish over the 40 Days of Lent to make more space for life-giving connections, to God (a prayer practice?) to yourself (taking time to read, or enjoy music/art) to others, to wider world.

Something you and the Spirit within you that wants life in fullest are drawn to. Maybe you want to increase activity level—get a step tracker, park in farthest away space in parking lot. For me it's reducing smart phone use—off at night, on after 8am. Include a habit formation tip in each of podcasts.

It takes about 6 weeks to establish a new habit. If you think, wow, taking 5-10 minutes to calm-center myself—would help me connect to myself, others, God...Lent is perfect time to focus on that. Or something else. Take a few days to check your heart on what its drawn to. More about this later.

Support when we do this sort of thing together. Weekly habit-formation tips in the podcast. Re-light your intention every Sunday at church. Go to a Lenten Dinner Group and share what you're working on. Find someone else doing something similar. That's a fertile environment for new habit formation.

HOSTING 9 LENTEN DINNER GROUPS—Several people hosting 2–5 Simple Dinners during Lent at their homes. Something like soup-bread/cheese, for express purpose of meeting others, maybe a little discussion on a practice or two.

Sign up today at back table or check box on half-sheet for invite. Especially helpful if you like Blue Ocean but would like it better if you knew some people better. (Also, not too late to host)

KIDS DAILY PSALMS JOURNAL (5+)  
BTW, kids working up 4 songs for Easter for us

Developed by Christina Roberts at Foundry 414 Church in Madison. Kids getting copy today. Send pdf to everyone. Parents can use this at home with kids. Also for use by young at heart.

A PRAYER FOR OUR COMMUNITY (UNVEIL NEXT WEEK)

*Last year: Lord, help anyone looking for a church like ours to find us. Inspire and empower us to get the word out that a Jesus-centered, fully-inclusive faith community exists in SE Michigan. And help us, especially, to welcome those who have been marginalized, embracing them with your love and light. Amen.*

GOD BE IN MY HEAD: A PRAYER WHEN FAITH IS BROKEN

### **Three Suggestions for How to *Approach* Lent**

#### **1. TRY A KINDER-GENTLER APPROACH TO YOURSELF FOR LENT**

Some form of Christianity put a lot of stock in making promises, resolutions to do better—fosters lots of self-talk in the stern lecture format.

If this is your impression of Lent, suggest shelving it for this Lent.

Studies: if before you go to sleep at night you set an intention “I look forward to going to the gym tomorrow”, it increases your chances of doing that thing. But intention needs to be stated compassionately and positively. Not, “I should go to gym” or even “I promise to go..” but a non-binding, gently stated, but clear intention: “I intend to go to the gym” As you set that intention, your brain organizes itself to do it.

Hebrew term for our internal intention setter is the **heart**—the heart is what aims us in a particular direction. If something is already a habit, don't need to practice intention. Your body just does it. But you can't use intention for 10 new things a day: "I intend to go the gym, floss, stay off FB, call my mom, clean up my desk, limit myself to 3 Oreos" I suggest one new habit for Lent.

### 3. BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HELPING OTHERS ENHANCE CONNECTIONS

Here's a weird thing. When we make an intention to benefit others, it often benefits us. We are created as intensely social creatures (including introverts, just a different style of social). We mirror each other unconsciously, that's how connected we are.

Oceana interviewing Gaffer about his core values. Spirituality, going to church. Talking about why go to church, Oceana was talking about what she gets or doesn't get out of it and Gaffer offered this gem: Why go to church? Not just for what you get or what you may feel, but also for the blessing others receive from you (often unbeknownst).

That would apply to many more things than church.

Because we are so social—depend on others for survival—our brains are wired to care about the well being of our groups, of other people. When we weave that into our intentions, it empowers them. The brain gets to work. So, for example, you can set your intention to take a little time out for yourself—a little daily meditation time, say—but as you set that intention, include the idea that taking this time for yourself will benefit others. You'll be more relaxed around them.

If you decide to go to a Lenten Dinner, do it with the intention of helping others feel a little more connected. As you do it with that intention, you will also feel more connected as a by-product.

Why we do the things we do matters. If your intention is to get the most out of lent, the why matters. Suggest that a powerful "Why" is connection. I intend to catch church as often as I can this Lent, to support my connection (with God and others). I intend to sign up for a Lenten Dinner Group to connect more with people.

Life, including divine life, flows through connections. And we have a powerful desire for life.

QUIET REFLECTION

Our Quiet Reflection time today will last 3 minutes and have three parts:

1. A minute to center yourself, be present her now.
2. A minute to imagine a friend or loved one and what you would want for them for Lent. Not someone you want to improve. But someone you think is great, and you want them to have a great experience of Lent. What would it feel like for them to want to form a new habit that would enhance their connection God, themselves, other, wide world? Don't focus on specifics but the feeling that you have for them.
3. I wonder what I really want, some adjustment in my day or week, or use of time. Write that down as a desire.