

A CALL TO LIVE

LENTEN STUDY GUIDE



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A CALL TO LIVE

L E N T E N S T U D Y G U I D E

INTRODUCTION

During Lent, people around the world come together in remembrance, celebration, and response to the story of Christ with the desire to be changed not just for a season, but also for the rest of our lives. In the Catholic and some Protestant traditions, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday when Christians are signed with ashes on their foreheads. The ashes are a sign of repentance, dating back to the Old Testament when King David shed his regal clothes for sackcloth and ashes as a sign of repentance and mourning.

“*During Lent*, Christians are encouraged to focus their energy on three disciplines: prayer, fasting and almsgiving (sharing our gifts with the poor). The extra time spent praying during Lent can lead us closer to God. During Lent we are encouraged to focus our prayer on the places in our lives and in our world that need improvement. Our fasting isn’t about denying ourselves as a sort of punishment, and it isn’t even about food. We fast from television, food, video games, computers, and other simple everyday indulgences so we can literally hunger for God. Our fasting also puts us in touch with those whose hunger is never filled because they live in poverty. Finally, our praying and fasting lead us to action.”

—Tony Alonso, *Return to the Lord: Praying and Living Lent*

“*To make the Easter* story into something that neither startles, shocks, terrifies, nor excites is ‘to crucify the Son of God afresh.’ Certainly that would have been unthinkable for Jesus’ first followers, who experienced it firsthand: the heady excitement of his entry into Jerusalem, the traitorous cunning of Judas and the guilty recognition of their own cowardice, the terror of his slow suffocation, and finally the disarming wonder of an empty grave and a living body resurrected from the dead.”

“*As for us*, his latter-day disciples, few would deny the magnitude or drama of these events. But how many of us embrace their pain and promise? How many of us, even at Easter, give Christ’s death and resurrection any more attention than the weather? Lent offers an opportunity ‘to strike at the root of such complacency. Lent (literally ‘springtime’) is a time of preparation, a time to return to the desert where Jesus spent—40 days readying for his ministry.’ First popularized in the fourth century, Lent is a time for giving things up, balanced by giving to those in need.”

“*Lent is not intended* to be an annual ordeal during which we begrudgingly forgo a handful of pleasures. It is meant to be the church’s springtime, a time when, out of the darkness of sin’s winter, a repentant, empowered people emerges.”

“*Put another way*, Lent is the season in which we ought to be surprised by joy. Our self-sacrifices serve no purpose unless, by laying aside this or that desire, we are able to focus on our heart’s deepest longing: unity with Christ. In him—in his suffering and death, his resurrection and triumph—we find our truest joy.”

—Dorothy Sayers, *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter*

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Lenten study invites individuals and groups to journey through the six weeks of Lent through reflection, prayer, celebration, and engagement in the ministry and life of Christ. The resource is designed to be as flexible as possible so you or your group can pray and reflect at your own pace and in a way that fits your schedule. Consider these possible uses:

- Self-study: for the individual wanting to experience the deeper meaning of Lent
- Small-group study: for those desiring to grow together during the season
- Family study: for a family wishing to learn and engage one another while preparing for Easter
- Web site posting: for churches wishing to post daily or weekly Lenten reflections for use by a congregation
- Bulletin posting: for churches wishing to duplicate and include in each week's church bulletin or newsletter

Each week's study offers a unique and engaging theme:

- Week One: A Call to Live Simply
- Week Two: A Call to Live Humbly
- Week Three: A Call to Live Generously
- Week Four: A Call to Live Compassionately
- Week Five: A Call to Live Creatively
- Week Six: A Call to Live Fully

The resource provides you or your group with the tools to move from reflection, meditation, and celebration to action and engagement. There is no set schedule for how to use the study each day during the week; this allows you whatever time you need to reflect and meditate and study at your own pace.

Week One of this study, "A Call to Live Simply," begins on the first Sunday in Lent. From Ash Wednesday to this first Sunday, there is a shortened study that includes information about the global food crisis. Participants should read through this shortened study and complete the suggested activity before starting this first week's study.