

Lenten Family Devotional

This is a resource for parents to use with children. These are readings and devotional activities for you and your family to use together through this season of Lent. There is one for Ash Wednesday, and then one for each week leading up to Easter. I recommend you do the first one together on Ash Wednesday, and the next 6 on each of the 6 Sundays leading up to Easter. But you can use them however you like during this season. Each devotional consists of a:

- scripture reading that you can read aloud together
- brief discussion with questions to ask your children
- prayer to say together
- challenge activity for the week

Additional Paper Chain Activity:

In addition to these readings and activities, if you are able, make a paper chain to help mark off the days of Lent. You can make 40 purple loops and 6 white ones (for the Sundays), or simply make 46 all the same color (or all different colors!). Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of lent, so they are the 6 additional loops. Tear off one loop each day until Easter.

What are Ash Wednesday and Lent? (*Read to your children, or just to yourself*)

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday is a day of *repentance*. That means it is a time for us to think about the things in our lives that are not holy, the things that are not very good, and to tell God about those things, and know that he forgives us and washes us clean! It is called Ash Wednesday because some Christians have their foreheads marked with ashes on this day to symbolize their repentance.

Lent is the season from Ash Wednesday until Easter. It is a time for preparing our hearts for God's wonderful gift on Easter morning! Jesus rose from the grave! Lent is a time to think about God, to pray, and to set our hearts on God.



Ash Wednesday

Read Together:

Matthew 14:22-33 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost" they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."

Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Discuss Together:

Jesus had been busy feeding large crowds, and he sent his disciples ahead so he could have time to pray alone. Even Jesus needed to pray and spend time with God!

- Question: Why do you think it was important for Jesus to spend time alone praying?

While he was praying, Jesus saw that his disciples were struggling in their boat because of a storm. He didn't leave them struggling, but walked across the water to get to them!

- Question: What happened when the disciples saw Jesus coming across the water?

Jesus told them not to be afraid, and he even invited Peter to walk on the water with him! Because Jesus invited him to, Peter was able to do the same miraculous thing that Jesus was able to do.

- Question: What happened when Peter saw the wind?

Peter saw the wind he was afraid and began to sink. Jesus tells him not to doubt! And Peter knows that Jesus really is the Son of God.

Jesus sees us when we are struggling, and he comes to help us! He is stronger than the winds and the storms, and able to do miraculous things! If we have faith in Jesus, we join with him in the amazing things he is doing. During this season of lent, we are thankful that Jesus came to help us, and we are preparing our hearts to follow Jesus on amazing adventures!

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Thank you for seeing us when we are in need. Thank you for giving us your son, Jesus, to take away our sins. Help us to know who Jesus is, to have faith in him, and to be ready to share his love with the world! Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

Jesus often went away to pray alone and be with God. Try creating a special spot in your house to pray. It could be a room, a chair, a corner, maybe just a pillow on the floor, or a spot by a sunny window. Ask you children to think of a good spot! Make a sign that says, "Prayer Corner," and encourage each other to use this spot several times throughout the week to pray. Model this for your children by inviting them to sit with you in the prayer spot, and say a quick prayer of thanks together. Thank God for concrete things in your lives like your home, clothes, friends, cars, toys, etc.

Week 1

Read Together:

Luke 4:1-13 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So, if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Discuss Together:

After Jesus was baptized, he was full of the Holy Spirit and went into the desert for 40 days. He was tempted by the devil during that time. But remember, Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit helps us to resist temptation.

- Question: Jesus was hungry. What did the devil tempt him to do?

The devil also tempted Jesus with power over kingdoms of the world, and he tempted Jesus to prove that he was God's son by putting God to the test!

- Question: What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "it is written"?

Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit, and is armed with the word of God. He knows what is written in the God's word! And he knows that he is being tempted to go against God's plans.

- Question: How can we arm ourselves with God's word?

Pray Together:

Dear God,

We pray for your Holy Spirit to keep us from temptation, and to help us only to follow you and your word. Help us to know the things you want us to do, and to come to you when we are tempted to do things you don't want us to do. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

God's word is powerful and helpful to us in our every day lives. Pick a Bible verse to memorize as a family this week. One suggestion is Luke 10:23 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself." But choose any verse that is meaningful to you or your children. Post it on a wall as a helpful reminder. Have fun with it! Create challenges or give rewards. Practice your verse at dinner or bedtime this week.

Week 2

Read Together:

Luke 9:28-36 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Discuss Together:

In this story, Jesus takes Peter, John, and James up a mountain to pray. While they were there, Jesus began to glow like lightning!

- Question: Why do you think Jesus was glowing?

Jesus is both a person, and also God. Up on the mountain, the disciples saw Jesus glowing in his heavenly glory!

Moses and Elijah also appeared! Moses and Elijah were two very important people from the Old Testament, and had both been dead for many many years. This was a sure sign from heaven that Jesus was truly the Son of God! Peter was confused by what was happening, and wanted to build shelters for everyone.

- Question: How do you think you would have felt if you were Peter?

Then a cloud came down around them, and they were afraid. And a voice from heaven spoke!

- Question: What did the voice from heaven say about Jesus?
- Question: What did the voice tell Peter, John, and James to do?

This story gives us a sneak peak at Jesus' heavenly glory, even though he was still a man on earth at the time. It assures us that Jesus came from God, and is one with God, and we should follow him.

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Thank you for who you are! Thank you for coming to us in Jesus. Help us to know in our hearts that he is your son, and to listen to him. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

This week look for signs of God working in the world. It could be something you notice in nature, something you see someone doing, or another sign! Write the signs down on index cards or small pieces of paper. Attach each to a craft stick or a pencil or straw to make little signs. Display your signs by putting the sticks in a lump of play dough, or collecting them in an empty cup, jar, or yogurt container. Do this throughout the week if you can, adding to your collection of signs. Use it to remind you of God's goodness and promises to us!

Week 3

Read Together:

Luke 15:7-7 Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.’

Discuss Together:

Jesus often taught in parables. Parables are stories that make a point. Jesus told this parable because the religious people were upset that he was spending time with “sinners” and even eating with them! They didn’t think that a good follower of God should do that.

- Question: What do you think Jesus was trying to teach the religious leaders with this parable?
- Question: How did the shepherd in the parable feel when he found the lost sheep?

Each and every person is important to God! Jesus wanted the religious leaders to know that God cares about everyone, and that no person is more important to God than another. Jesus came to earth for every single one of us, and heaven is like one big party every time someone comes to know and love Jesus! Remember how important you are to God. And remember that every person you meet is also important to God.

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Thank you for coming to find us when we were lost! Help us to love others the way that you love us, and to remember that each person we meet this week is one of your precious children. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

Draw or color a picture, or write a kind note or card and give it to someone this week who might need some encouragement. Is there a local nursing home where you could take your picture? Do you have a neighbor who lives alone who might love some colorful artwork? Is there a student at school who could use a friendly note or card? Maybe someone in your family needs a reminder that they are loved! Show God's love to someone this week.

Week 4

Read Together:

John 12:1-8 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Discuss Together:

Mary took a very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. This seems a little strange to us today! But in Jesus' day, it was common to provide guests with water to wash their dusty feet when visiting. But Mary went overboard. She didn't just wash Jesus' feet with water and a few drops of perfume, she used an entire jar of very expensive perfume!

- Question: Why do you think Mary might have gone overboard? What could she have been thinking?

Mary was being lavish, but not wasteful. She knew that Jesus was worthy of expensive perfumes. But Judas Iscariot was not happy.

- Question: Why did Judas say that the perfume should have been sold?
- Question: Was Judas sincere in caring for the poor?

Jesus explains that Mary's act is like an anointing for his burial. He knows that he is going to die on the cross soon. She has honored him very greatly by her act!

- Question: We can't pour oil on Jesus' feet, but what are ways we can honor him?

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Help us to honor you in great ways. You gave your son for us, and we thank you so much!
Everything we have comes from you, and you are worthy of all our praise. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

We can honor God this week with our resources. Along with your children, pick a charity and make a donation. Or have them save up their change during the week in a special container, and make a donation somewhere. Or maybe you can volunteer together with an organization, or just volunteer to help a friend or neighbor. All of our gifts come from God, and when we give to causes that help God's people and God's creation, we are giving back to God's work! Talk about ways you can use your money or time or talents to bless others this week.

Week 5

Read Together:

Luke 19:28-40 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it."

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Discuss Together:

Jesus was entering Jerusalem, and the time for his death was getting closer. His disciples and those who had been following him were cheering for him.

- Question: Why were the people cheering and praising God?
- Question: What did the pharisees say to Jesus?

Some of the religious leaders were not happy that people in the crowd were cheering for Jesus! They called him blessed and said he was the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

- Question: What does Jesus say to the Pharisees when they tell him to quiet his followers?

Jesus is God's son. When the people were near him and saw his miracles, they couldn't help praising him! When we know Jesus, we want to praise him too.

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Give us voices to cheer for you! Help us to shout your name with joy. We are so grateful for who you are, and for what you have done for us in your son Jesus. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

Find a smooth rock, and using paint or permanent markers write a word on the rock that reminds you who God is. Some suggestions: Jesus, Messiah, Savior, Helper, Redeemer, Father, Friend, Comforter, Peace, Joy, Love, Hope, Strength, Power, or any other word that reminds you of God's character. If you can't find rocks, use paper and cut out oval shapes. Write your words on the ovals, and stick them up somewhere as a visual reminder of who God is.

Week 6

Read Together:

Luke 22:39-46 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Discuss Together:

This is the last reading before Good Friday and Easter. Before Jesus was arrested and killed, he went with his disciples to pray. Jesus went off a little distance by himself to pray.

- Question: What did Jesus pray to God in the garden?

Jesus felt anguish over what he knew was coming next! He asked God to take it away from him, but he knew that God's plan was best.

- Question: What did God do to comfort Jesus?

God didn't leave Jesus alone and upset, but he sent an angel from heaven to give him strength.

- Question: After the angel strengthened Jesus, how did Jesus pray?
- Question: Twice Jesus tells the disciples to pray. Why does he say they should pray?

Jesus is worried about what he will endure, but he is also worried about his disciples. He wants them to turn to God for strength as well.

After this, Jesus was arrested, and went through a terrible death. But on Easter morning we celebrate who Jesus is, because he overcame death! We know that he truly is the Son of God, and that through his death and rising from the dead, he has taken away our sins.

Pray Together:

Dear God,

Help us to remember your great love for us on Good Friday, and to celebrate your victory on Easter! Thank you for taking away our sins, and for loving us and being with us. Amen.

Challenge for the Week:

Lent is a season of preparing our hearts for Jesus' act of love on Good Friday, and victory over death on Easter. It's a great time to develop spiritual practices that help us focus our hearts on God. It's a time for repentance, reflection, and for thankfulness. During this last week of lent find one "new-to-you" way to focus your hearts on God. Maybe it will be praying together as a family. Maybe you will think of something to *fast* or give-up for a day, or even just an hour. Maybe you will read a Bible story together. Encourage each of your children to choose how they would like to focus on God this week. Then do it once or twice, or even every day! Do whatever works for your family. But be mindful and intentional in whatever you choose to do.