

Station 1: Giving Up

During the 40-day season of Lent (40 days Monday-Saturday from Ash Wednesday until Easter), we take time to prepare for Easter, reflecting on how Christ gave Himself up for us (Ephesians 5:1-2). In an echo of His sacrifice, we choose to “give up” certain things in our lives so that we might leave more room for Jesus to speak to and work in us. The *range* of items we can choose to give up is wide--social media or screen time, specific food items, buying things for ourselves, gossiping, etc.--but the *heart* remains the same: we choose to “give up” (fast) as a reminder that Christ has given Himself up for us, and that we are in need of more of Him in our lives, rather than some of the other things we often substitute for Him. We do this for 40 days as a representation of Jesus’s 40 days in the wilderness.

Questions to Consider:

- Examine your heart. What has taken your focus off of loving God and loving others lately?
- What are specific areas in your life that you could “give up” as a sacrifice to God?
- Write one or a few of these down on a post-it note, then stick it onto the cross in order to give it to Jesus.

Station 2: Taking On

While Lent is often characterized by our “giving up” to God, we are also called to “take on” as a part of our new lives in Christ; if we are removing things from our lives, we desire for them to be filled by Christ. As Christians, spiritual disciplines can serve as helpful practices to focus our hearts and minds on our need for Christ in this season. In John Ortberg’s book, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, he has outlined 8 different transformational spiritual disciplines for every person.

Take some time to read and reflect on one or two disciplines you want to commit to “taking on” during the next 40 days. Once you have decided, “take on” one of these rope bracelets as a consistent reminder of your commitment to Christ through these disciplines during Lent:

1. The Practice of Celebration

Joy is a character of God. C.S. Lewis calls joy “the serious business of heaven.” This is the practice of rejoicing in every moment of life because every moment is a gift. Maybe start with an unplugged hour or an unplugged day. Maybe it means reading your Bible before you touch your phone in the morning. Maybe it looks like a daily time of gratitude each evening in reflecting on all that God has done in your life.

2. The Practice of “Slowing”

Dallas Willard said in response to being spiritually healthy, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” What would it look like to commit to not being a multi-tasker or a list-doer? To practice slowing, it involves cultivating patience by deliberately choosing to place ourselves in positions where we simply have to wait. Drive in the slow lane, eat your food slowly, find the longest line at the store, don’t wear a watch, or spend extended time in solitude.

3. The Practice of Prayer

The writers of the scriptures took prayer seriously, and scripture overwhelmingly teaches that prayer changes things. Find a time and a place and stick to it. The same time, the same place, every day. Practice being fully present and talk to God directly about what is happening.

4. The Practice of Servanthood

Want to rid yourself of pride? Of stubbornness? Of vanity? Of excluding God and others from their rightful place in our hearts? Jesus invites us to a life of humility. This has to do with submitted willingness and self-forgetfulness. Servanthood is just helping people. It could look like doing seemingly mundane tasks for others. Or going through your day willing to be interrupted by the needs of others. It could mean setting up chairs and pews each week, or serving with a local ministry partner. Find a way to take on servanthood this next 40 days.

5. The Practice of Confession

We need confession in order to be healed and changed. Prepare by placing yourself into the care of the Spirit and asking for help. Examine yourself each evening by walking through various categories of sin from your day: pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, sloth, and gluttony. Ask yourself, "Why did I do what I did" or "What happened as a result of my action?" It requires a promise of the future, a desire not to do this hurtful thing again, so make a vow. Then be immersed in the grace God has given us. You are released.

6. The Practice of Listening to the Holy Spirit

Promptings from the Holy Spirit come in all different forms: conviction of sin, an assurance of God's love, a call to action, and so forth. God speaks to us through scripture, through nature, and through the words of others, and we want to be people to have ears to hear this voice. So choose to take intentional time to listen each day. Maybe this is at the start of your day, or maybe it is in the evening as you reflect, but either way, carve out time to listen to the voice of the Spirit and respond.

7. The Practice of Secrecy

No one's approval will affect us unless we grant it credibility and status. It is a practice to seek God's approval over others'. This might look like taking thoughts captive in refusing to allow the approval or disapproval of others to dominate our lives. Fight comparison. Fight resentment. Fight shading the truth. Practice doing good deeds in secrecy: immerse yourself in prayer for someone in your life each day without them knowing, spend time alone memorizing scripture, or choose to give away a gift to someone else each day!

8. The Practice of Reflection on Scripture

"Be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Immersing our minds in scripture reforms them. Ask God to meet you in scripture, read the bible in a repentant spirit and with a vulnerable heart, meditate on a brief passage each day, or spend time thinking about a specific thought or idea throughout each one of your days, allowing it to become a part of your constant rhythm and life.

Station 3: Offering To

Historically, the three Lenten practices are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Intentionally spending increased time with the Lord in prayer (“taking on” something to help you draw near in prayer), as well as “giving up” something (fasting) in order to spend more time with the Lord. The third practice, almsgiving, may be the one that is least focused on, and yet is just as important as the other two. Almsgiving means donating money or goods to the poor and performing other acts of charity - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Almsgiving is ministry to others, and, at its best, it involves prayer for the other and sacrifice/fasting from something in order to give it away.

Below are a few practical ideas. Commit to one or more of these, or prayerfully come up with your own almsgiving practice(s) for the next 40 days. You can drop money in the box as an offering to the work of the church and the growth of God’s Kingdom and/or write down your almsgiving commitment and drop it in the box.

1. Give your time. Serve with IHelp (contact Joni Ward jbeward@rocketmail.com or Scott Bingham scottbingham@asu.edu), Help organize the Mexico housebuilding trip (contact Ben Parker benjaminbparker@gmail.com), volunteer at Phoenix Rescue Mission (contact <https://prm.volunteerhub.com/>), volunteer to help organize a local food pantry, clothing bank, or another ministry you are interested in.
2. Start a Piggy Bank. Set up a Lenten almsgiving “piggy bank” in your home. This might be especially instructive and fun for children. It will help to teach them that Lent is a season grounded in sacrifice and service. As a strategy, let’s say you typically eat out once a week. During Lent, give up eating out and drop the cost of that meal into your piggy bank. (That does require having cash on hand, though.) At Easter, donate/designate the money specifically to the benevolence fund at The Spring, a fund which directly helps individuals in need. Or give your piggy bank funds to some other charity that helps the needy.
3. Carry food and water in your car to give to people on the street who are asking for help.
4. Set aside time(s) during lent to visit someone you know in a hospital or a nursing home.
5. Set aside specific time(s) to visit someone in prison. If you want to visit Hayden Drescher, a member at The Spring, contact Tom Parker (tomascparker@gmail.com) or Jordan Gustafson (jordangustafsonyl@gmail.com) who can help you with the process.
6. Increase your giving to the church, where we tithe both locally and internationally to those in need.

Station 4: Imposition of Ashes