

Preparing for Lent

What is Lent?

It is based on the 40 days that Jesus fasted in the wilderness at the beginning of His public ministry. (Sundays are not counted, so Lent is actually 46 days long)

During the second century it became customary to baptise all converts on Easter Sunday. During those ages of persecution and martyrdom, they had to be thoroughly prepared for the confession of their faith and for their challenging walk with the Lord.

These preparations lasted 40 days – not counting Sundays. Fasting and Prayer played an important role alongside the teaching the converts would receive during this time.

After a while, other Church members felt the need to repeat the course. This season, always during the European Spring, became the Lenten Season of the Church as Lent is Latin for Spring. Lent reaches its climax on Good Friday and ends with the Celebration of Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

There are two important aspects to Lent:

- **Penitence:** We realise our own brokenness and our need for Christ.
- **Preparation:** We strive to open our hearts wider for the celebration of Easter.

During Lent there are three tasks: **Pray, Fast** and **Give**.

- **Prayer** is about Preparing our Hearts, becoming more aware of God's love and goodness. It's not just about rituals but relationship.
- **Fasting** doesn't only have to be about food. It's any kind of addition to or subtraction from our lives that sharpens our focus on God.
- **Giving** is about making a difference in the lives of others.

The idea around Lent is that we add to and subtract from our lives so that we don't just move forward but Godward. Traditionally there are three directions for our "fasting" to take:

1. God (through prayer, reflection and action)
2. Ourselves (through the creation of good habits or breaking bad ones)
3. Others (through charity and kindness)

So, here are some examples:

- Give up sugar or coffee and use the "cravings" as a reminder to think about and devote yourself to God.
- Set your alarm clock 15 minutes earlier for devotions or exercise.
- Reduce your TV hours and use the time to read a good devotional book or to spend quality time with your family.
- Volunteer some time to help at a charitable organisation or do something to help the poor and needy.
- Come to church more regularly or join a fellowship group for the 6 weeks

Where does Shrove Tuesday fit in?

In many Christian traditions people would abstain from rich foods during this fast time. As Wednesday is the start of Lent, Tuesday would be used as a day to use up the "rich" foods (eggs, butter, oil, milk, etc) in the house. Pancakes serve this purpose very well! Also, Jesus reminded His disciples that they should not look mournful when they fasted and so the church found it fitting to start a fast with a feast!

Ash Wednesday

Job 42:5-6. Job says to God: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Ash Wednesday is primarily a day of repentance – of sorrow because of what our sins do to God, His work and those around us.

According to the Bible, repentance consists of:

- a true sense of one's own guilt and sinfulness;
- an expectation of God's grace and mercy in Christ
- an actual hatred of sin
- turning from sin to God
- seeking a holy life by persistent effort, obediently walking with God.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation but worldly sorrow brings death. (2Cor7:10)

In the very traditional observation of Ash Wednesday, worshippers come forward to confess and repent of their sin in silent prayer. They are marked with the sign of the cross, using a paste of ash and olive oil. The ash represents the sorrow and contriteness we feel over our sin. The olive oil represents joy, blessing and consecration which is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are marked with the sign of the cross to remind us that it is Christ who saves us.

Often as they are marked, the priest or elder will say "Your sins are forgiven – go and sin no more."

Ash Wednesday starts the "Fasting" of Lent on the right foot – we realise how badly we need God.

Daily Devotions

For Lent the daily email devotions are going to focus on gearing up our hearts for Easter. They arrive between 8h15 and 8h45 – Tue-Fri. If you'd like to join for Lent devotions, you can subscribe at <http://eepurl.com/dhGrzL> (you don't need to do this if you already get the EmmDev emails.) You can email Theo to subscribe you.

Keeping Perspective...

While one tries to observe these "fasts" and observances as well as possible, there must be no legalism about this. We are not trying to impress God. We're trying to prepare our hearts. Don't be guilt-wracked if you don't manage it all the time.

Lent is an opportunity rather than a burden and we pray that yours will be meaningful!



Shape me, Lord.



Fellowship of the Beard. (aka the Hairy Fellowship)

Dear Gents,

Last year I started Lent with a very complicated set of "resolutions" (Didn't listen to the advice of the document overleaf!) My good intentions all fell apart, but on the spur of the moment one morning, *I decided to give up shaving.*

I have always found that I can only go a few days without shaving before the itching gets the better of me. But I told myself that every time I itched, I would remind myself that Jesus couldn't scratch His face when He was on the cross. Every time I saw my face in the mirror I'd remind myself that I need to look more like Jesus, and as the hard hairs got softer, I'd pray that God would give me a softer heart.

(A nice side effect was that the beard-in-progress led to a number of conversations and allowed me to talk about what I was doing and why in a very natural and easy way.)

So I'm doing the beard thing again this year and I'm focussed on three things:

1. To really respect what He did on the cross for me.
2. To try and be more like Him in how I treat others.
3. To get a softer heart that bends to God's will.

Our challenge to you is to join in by growing a beard or a moustache for Lent. If you already have a beard, shave it off and start afresh or shave for the whole of Lent. If the beard/hair thing is not for you, think of something you can do that will help you meet these three challenges:

1. Think about Jesus' sacrifice
2. Try to be more like Him in your actions
3. Soften your heart.

In the Lord of the Rings, the Fellowship of the Ring was the group of souls who undertook the brave journey that is at the heart of the book. They encouraged one another and supported one another. Our hope is that the "fellowship of the beard" (tongues firmly in our cheeks) can do the same for the journey of Lent.

Those who join the fellowship will do five things:

1. Grow a beard for Lent – or some other physical activity
2. I'm going to ask all the guys participating to email me their devotional thoughts or insights and I'll send out a weekly compilation.
3. You'll get sms challenge/thoughts from time to time.
4. You'll be given the name of one of the guys in the fellowship to pray for.
5. Gather together on two early Saturday (dates to be advised) mornings for a coffee and time of prayer.

You might be concerned about doing such a visible thing, especially when we remember that Jesus warned people not to do things purely for show or pride. This is obviously a danger. For me it was solved by telling my story about the whiskers helping me think about what Jesus did on the cross for me.

If you want to join the "Hairy Fellowship", please SMS me on 0825510752 or email theo@emmanuel.org.za

God bless,
Theo

Ladies and Lent.

Dear Ladies

We want to start something special this Lent. We'd like to do a few things to encourage one another and grow together in the Lord.

We're using God's promise in Isaiah 61:3 as our lent foundation:

... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of

despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.

We all have those few (sometimes many!) things that hold us back and prevent us from enjoying the fullness of our relationship with God. This year we will be challenging you to identify that one thing that you would have the courage to put on the cross with Jesus so that you can start experiencing resurrection and joy in this area of your life.

We are offering three things:

1. A few thoughts and challenges to be sent out periodically during Lent. We will do these via a WhatsApp broadcast (not a group). If you wish to receive these, please send Jackie a WhatsApp message in order to subscribe (083 282 6372) and make sure that she is saved as one of your contacts - else the messages will not come through to you. If you don't use WhatsApp, please talk to Jackie about alternatives.
2. A tea on Saturday the 17th of March at 9:30 at the church. All ladies of any age are welcome!
3. As part of the fun, we will be running a year-long "121" anonymous prayer/encouragement partner initiative. (*2 Corinthians 1:21 says 'Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ'.*) We invite you to give your names to Claudia Soutter before our tea if you would like to be part of this. There will be a sign-up sheet in church or you can sms your name to Claudia (0832861470). Each participant will be given the name of another participant. You will be asked to keep the name of your 121 partner secret. Your name will in turn be given to another unknown-to-you 121 participant. To be a good 121 partner, you will need to do the following (please do not sign up if you are not going to commit to doing these things):
 1. Pray regularly for your 121 partner
 2. Send an anonymous Bible Verse or word of encouragement at least once a month.
 3. On their birthday, give a small inexpensive gift

All interested ladies of all ages are welcome to participate in all of the above. You are welcome to invite friends and family to join in too.

Warm blessings and love from
Jackie

