

Living into Lent

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A Lenten Journey

This book is written as a resource for those who want to focus on Christian living and reflection during the season of Lent.

Lent is the forty-day period in the Christian year that begins with Ash Wednesday and extends to Holy Saturday, the day of the Great Vigil of Easter, which is the day before Easter Sunday. Lent is comprised of weekdays, with the Sundays in Lent being specially marked. Thus, the forty days begin with the four weekdays during the week of Ash Wednesday, and continue through six weeks of six days each, making the forty days of Lent. Devotions for the Sundays in Lent are included in this book as well.

Lent has always been a time of special devotion for Christians. It is a time for reflecting on our Christian lives, listening to God's word and will for us, and engaging in practices that can deepen our Christian experience. The meditations that follow seek to honor these impulses and provide ways of reflecting on dimensions of Christian faith that can be meaningful and significant for us.

These devotions can be used privately or in a group setting. We Christians do not live out our Christian walk by ourselves. We do so in the company of the committed, the church. We are joined to Jesus Christ by faith in and through the church. God calls and works through people in this world; and the church is the people of God who are sent by God in mission and ministry. The personal dimensions of our faith come to us in the midst of those sisters and brothers in Christ who share common faith and with whom we share our commitments to love, justice, and peace in the Christian community. What is personal in these devotions is also corporate. What is true for us in our own Christian experience resonates with others and is lived out by others as well. Therefore, our Lenten journey is very much a shared journey. We join others along the way of faith, following Jesus, and seeking to live out the will and purposes of God for our lives.

Ways to Use This Book

This book provides devotions to be used during the period of Lent. The book can be used in different ways.

Each devotion features a Scripture passage, a devotion title, a biblical text for the devotion drawn from the Scripture passage, a theological quote, a devotional essay, an Action Step, and a prayer. The theological quotations are drawn from the history of the church and are used to help us better understand the Scripture text and its implications for life. The quotes do not take the place of the Scripture; they help open its meaning so the Word of God can reach us and move us.

Each of the seven weekly sections has a theme: following Jesus, meditating, praying, loving, thanking, enacting, and gathering at the cross. All of these themes, of course, are intermixed in the lives we live. But in Lent we can focus on aspects of our Christian life in a more concentrated way. Each theme focuses on a dimension of our Lenten journey with appropriate devotions.

Readers can use the book in one of two ways:

1. Reading the devotions chronologically, beginning with Ash Wednesday and finishing on Holy Saturday. This enables a concentration on the theme of each week.
2. Reading a devotion from a different segment of the book on the different days of a week throughout each week in Lent. This practice can begin during the First Week in Lent and follow through Holy Week. This enables one to experience the various themes throughout the course of each week.

Either approach can be used for individual reading or for group use of this book.

The seven study sessions are designed for groups who wish to do further reflections on the devotions.

I am grateful to be able to offer *Living into Lent* to the church.

This project is published by CMP of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and is written from my context as a Reformed theologian in the Presbyterian tradition. But the themes of Lent go beyond any single, denominational tradition. So this is a book for the ecumenical church and for all Christian believers who want to deepen their devotional lives during Lent.

One of my passions is to retrieve and try to revitalize the Christian theological tradition and to communicate insights from the great theologians of the past into the life of the church today. I have structured the devotions with theological quotes from past and present theologians and theological documents. These quotes, I trust, will help to illuminate the Scripture text and to provide a source for meditation in themselves. To me, it is always the question from the book of Ezekiel: “Can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3). Can the old writings and theologians communicate meaningfully, with vitality, for our Christian faith today? I hope this smattering of theological quotes will do so during Lent.

My thanks go to Clare Lewis and Mark Hinds of CMP, who kindly invited and supported this work. Mark Hinds gave excellent editorial advice and provided the study sessions. I deeply appreciate their ministries and friendship. As always, my wife, LindaJo, has been lovingly supportive. Our sons and their families—Stephen, Caroline, and Maddie; and Karl and Lauren—bring blessings and joy to life together.

This book is gratefully dedicated to the historic ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Donald K. McKim

Chapter 1



Following Jesus (Week of Ash Wednesday)



Following Jesus

If we want a capsule definition of Christian life and experience, we can do no better than these two words: following Jesus. These simple words introduce us to a never-ending adventure of moving through life in the ways our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, points us to go. Our path will not be easy. However, we do not follow Jesus alone. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the care of the Christian community—the church—and the presence of Jesus himself as our divine companions.

The stories of Jesus calling his first disciples to “Follow me” (Matthew 4:18–22) are astounding. The record is that “immediately” they left what they were doing and followed him. We wonder why. What prompted them immediately to leave all? Did they know what they were getting into by traipsing after the itinerant preacher who would change their lives in such dramatic ways? Their decision gave them a new self-identity. Their adventure of faith led them through trials, as well as joys. They gave to Jesus an allegiance, a commitment, and obedience unlike those given to anyone else. Their response to Jesus’ call to follow is what made all the difference in the lives of the disciples.

Jesus’ call still comes to us. He invites us to respond, to be his followers, to commit our lives to him, to live in obedience to his will and his way. Our Lenten journey is a time of focusing strongly on what it means to be a disciple, or follower, of Jesus Christ. Discipleship begins with a step of faith. We move to new understandings of ourselves. We follow the ways Jesus points us toward. We experience the joys of living in Christ and of Christ living in us (Galatians 2:20). We hear Jesus say: “Follow me.”



Ash Wednesday

They left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:11

Pray

O Lord Jesus Christ, be with me, and lead me in your way, helping me to trust you as we go. Amen.

Read

Luke 5:1–11

Reflect

God has come down to us, has taken our nature, and is become one of us, that he might be our companion.

—Jonathan Edwards¹

Consider

“Christ Our Companion” (p. 5)

Action Step

Think of how you experience the companionship of Jesus.



Christ Our Companion

We begin our Lenten journey with Ash Wednesday. On this day we look beyond ourselves to God, who calls us to travel as disciples of Jesus Christ through the following weeks, to the cross on Good Friday and beyond, to the message of resurrection on Easter.

Like the first disciples whom Jesus called, we respond to the voice of Jesus, who says, “Follow me” (Mark 1:17). We too are called to be ones who have “left everything and followed him.”

We start on our Lenten journey. However, we do not travel alone. The good news is that God is with us, every step of the way. God is with us in Jesus Christ, every step of the way. This is the resource we in the church have for our living into Lent. We have a companion. Jesus Christ, our divine companion, is with us.

Jonathan Edwards helps us recognize that the great God has come down to us and become one of us, taking our nature. Why? So that Jesus Christ may be our companion—through Lent and through all our days.

We step out in Lent, turning from our own ways to the way of Jesus. We follow Jesus as his disciples. But as we do, Jesus is with us. He is one of us, human to the core. He understands us even as he stands under us, supporting us at every step. We share fellowship in him and with him. We are not alone and need not be afraid. In Jesus, we have joy in the journey!

**We step out in
Lent, turning from
our own ways to
the way of Jesus.**



Thursday

But I have called you friends.

John 15:15

Pray

Dear Jesus, show me the directions you want me to follow and help me when I stumble. Amen.

Read

John 15:12–17

Reflect

The living Christ still has two hands, one to point the way, and the other held out to help us along. . . . And we are assured, as we set out on the journey, that he is with us always, even unto the end of the world.

—T. W. Manson²

Consider

“The Two Hands of Christ” (p. 7)

Action Step

Consider the two hands of Christ and reflect on where you believe Christ is pointing your life. Also reflect on how you experience the help Jesus brings on your journey.



The Two Hands of Christ

One of our beloved hymns is “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” In one of the stanzas, we sing: “Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share?” Friendship with Jesus is a precious gift. We know Jesus Christ as a person, as our friend. He is a real presence in our lives. We are united with Jesus by faith; and by faith, we experience the presence of Christ in real and meaningful ways.

We are united with Jesus by faith; and by faith, we experience the presence of Christ in real and meaningful ways.

T. W. Manson has shown us the two hands of Christ. One points the way; the other helps us along the way. This is exactly what we need in our Christian lives, isn't it? We need to know the way, the path, the direction to follow in life. Jesus is “the way” (John 14:6) and he points his way to us. He invites us to follow his way, with him.

We also need Jesus' help along our way. This is a great comfort in our friendship with Jesus. He is faithful to us, he shares our sorrow, he picks us up when we fall, he is with us always (Matthew 28:20). If we had this assurance from any other friend, we might hope for the best. Others can disappoint us, leave us to face difficulties on our own, and even abandon us. But not Jesus. He is joined with us and is our true guide and friend.



Friday

He went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Matthew 19:22

Pray

O Lord Jesus, help us know the opportunity of discipleship so that as we follow you, we will experience the true life you want us to have as your disciples. Amen.

Read

Matthew 19:16–26

Reflect

The following of Christ therefore is not a privilege of the group of disciples. . . . Being a disciple . . . is a special task, a special destiny, a special promise; a special opportunity which is missed by the young man whose riches prevent him from following Jesus.

—Hans Küng³

Consider

“The Opportunity of Discipleship” (p. 9)

Action Step

Contemplate what possessions you have that might be hindering you from fuller service to Christ. Decide whether you can let go of some of these.



The Opportunity of Discipleship

The philosopher René Descartes coined the phrase “I think, therefore I am.” If I realize I am thinking, I must exist. In our acquisitive society, we tend to say, “I possess, therefore I am.” Our lives and possessions are so intertwined that what we have may define who we are.

In the end, the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus, could not part with his possessions in order to respond to Jesus’ call to follow him. The possessions prevented his discipleship. The lure of what he possessed kept him from what he could become. So he went away, grieving. Perhaps he had a vision of a greater life, as a disciple. But he was never to know what was possible. His personal wealth choked his opportunity for discipleship.

Hans Küng reminds us that being a disciple of Jesus is special in many ways. A special mission claims our whole lives and gives focus to all we think, say, and do. Discipleship opens up a destiny we could never know otherwise. It holds an assurance of Christ’s presence with us that is a promise that can be trusted. Discipleship is a special opportunity that holds open for us the best life possible—not a life that makes us rich and famous, but a life that is eternal—the true life in God we were created to live and enjoy.

**Discipleship
opens up a destiny
we could never
know otherwise.**



Saturday

And he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Mark 2:14

Pray

Help us to know the joy of being your disciples, O Christ. Help us to face the future with the assurance of your mercy. Amen.

Read

Mark 2:13–17

Reflect

Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey's end. But we know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁴

Consider

"The Joy of Discipleship" (p. 11)

Action Step

List ways in which your following Jesus brings you joy. Think of times when Christ's mercy has brought you joy.



The Joy of Discipleship

We often like to know the end from the beginning. Some folks will turn to the final pages of a mystery novel to find out “Who dunnit?” right away, so they can follow the character through the plot of the story.

In the bigger picture of life, we would all like to know “how it ends” for us. But this is a mystery, unknown through all our years. We do not and cannot know how our life will end, as we move along. That is reserved for the final chapter of our life’s story.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer encourages us to recognize, as disciples of Jesus Christ, that Christ knows our journey’s end. He sees our destination and guides us along the way, pointing us, helping us, supporting us. Through it all, Christ offers mercy and forgiveness for our sins and failures, for what we have done and what we have left undone. Bonhoeffer says Christ’s mercy is boundless. We can face any future, secure in Christ’s mercy. This is our great need— and what Jesus gives us.

Christ offers mercy and forgiveness for our sins and failures, for what we have done and what we have left undone.

So no wonder, as Bonhoeffer notes, “discipleship means joy.” It is the joy of life lived to the fullest in service to Christ. It is lived in freedom to love and help others, to extend Christ’s mercy, and to find the true life Christ came to bring. As we respond to the call to follow Jesus, our joy will be everlasting.

