

New Spiritual Practices for Lent

A spiritual practice can be as small as saying the Lord's prayer every day, or adding a grace before meals if you don't already say one. Though many of us have a notion of Lent as a time of extreme asceticism and harsh discipline, a spiritual practice really doesn't have to hurt. And what's more beneficial: a simple practice you will really do regularly or a complicated discipline you avoid?

Here are a few ideas:

- Begin each day with a prayer of mindfulness--that you will be attentive to the ways God is present in the world--in your life--throughout the day. Near the end of the day, ask yourself, "Where did I see God today?" It's really that simple. If you have trouble answering the question, it might help to start by thinking of the people you encountered. How was the light of Christ present in them—or what opportunities did they present for you to be the hands of God? Where did you encounter the natural world today? How is the glory of God revealed in both the beauty and the vulnerability of the creation? Where did you see imagination, creativity, new birth? Where did you see suffering? Make a list.
- Pick a specific issue of concern that you don't know as much about as you feel you should. Do both some daily reading and information gathering and daily prayer focused on this subject.
- Take a camera with you on Ash Wednesday or early in Lent and take a series of photos—places, people, and situations that represent things you want to pray for. Make a scrapbook or collage. Work on it every day during Lent. Make it a prayerful time to reflect on the images and their meaning.
- Write a letter to God.
- Try a new physical posture during prayer.
 - If you are able, kneel during part of your prayer.
 - Or try praying with your hands cupped before you, as if you are about to drink water from a stream. Open yourself to receive the living water.
- Listening is a very deep spiritual discipline. You can listen to the wind or to another person who is lonely.
- Find a psalm or a hymn text that is meaningful to you. Write the words out and study them. Choose a different portion of the text for each week of Lent and memorize it.
- Think of persons who haven't heard from you in a while. Give them a call, or send them a card. If there is something that needs mending in your relationship, take the first step.
- Spiritual reading is an important sort of spiritual practice. Find a spiritual book (or books) that you have wanted to read and set aside time during each day or week during Lent. Remember that you are feeding your soul. Imagine it as a delicious feast. Studying a new book of the Bible is one option, or try reading some of the spiritual classics. Here are a few recommended books for spiritual reading:

- **On Spiritual Practices**

- *Eat This Book A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* by Eugene H. Peterson
- *Children and Prayer: A Shared Pilgrimage* by Betty Shannon Cloyd
- *Creating a Life with God: The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices* by Daniel Wolpert
- *Prayer and Our Bodies* by Doris Wuellner

- **Books with Lenten Themes**
 - *A Clearing Season: Reflections for Lent* by Sarah Parsons
 - *Listening at Golgotha: Jesus' Words from the Cross* by Peter Storey
 - *Sensing the Passion: Reflections During Lent* by Kevin Scully

- **Reflecting on Biblical Texts**
 - *Against the Grain: Unconventional Wisdom from Ecclesiastes* by Ray Waddle
 - *The Power of a Focused heart: 8 Life Lessons from the Beatitudes* by Mary Lou Redding

- Do a service project:
 - Find out about families or individuals who will be alone at Easter and plan a celebration for them.
 - Take canned and packaged fish products to Food Pantry and attach favorite recipe for using the fish.
 - Plan a vegetable garden and prepare the soil, start plants from seeds Decide whom you can share the vegetables with when they grow during the summer.

- Decide as a family some things you can subtract or add to family practices during Lent:
 - Maybe you will want to eat vegetarian meals one or two nights during Lent.
 - Or agree to add family devotional time after dinner.
 - Plan a service project your family can do together. Check into opportunities at local organizations for projects the entire family can be involved in.
 - Decide as a family how you would like to participate and then spend family time creating your response together.

- Exercise:
 - Take a walk each day during Lent. Use the time to pray for others.
 - Work in your garden. Be intentional about reflecting on the beauty and wonder of God's creation

-- Adapted from suggestions published by The Upper Room