

How to build a Lenten Rule

Saint Luke's Episcopal Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Print a copy of this worksheet for your use at home.

Rules for Lent are a great help to the spiritual life of any Christian when they are constructed with care and with realism. Many Christians fail to keep their rules throughout the forty days of Lent because they make them unrealistic.

As you think about your rule, first begin with where you are at present in each of the broad areas below, and then look for simple and attainable ways to grow in each area. Simple and attainable steps can lead to more later; but a rigorous and demanding Lenten rule leads generally to frustration and disappointment.

In the Exhortation to a Holy Lent from the Ash Wednesday liturgy, we are urged to these activities as part of our lenten observances:

1. Self-examination and repentance

- a. Use a form for self-examination every day or once a week and see how you are doing at loving God and loving your neighbor. Here are a few questions and a prayer that might help you:

Prayer of Preparation: *O Holy Spirit, Source of light and wisdom, help me to recognize how I have sinned and fallen short by not loving you, my neighbor and myself. Help me to be honest and not seek to justify what I have done, but simply to name it and ask your forgiveness for it. Then grant me the grace to know that you have forgiven me and to forgive myself. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

- Have I been overly anxious, worried, discouraged, fearful or self-pitying?
- Have I been oversensitive and quick to take offense?
- Have I been arrogant, argumentative, opinionated or obstinate?
- Have I been dishonest in my daily life and work?
- Have I been resentful or jealous of those more fortunate than I?
- Have I wasted or polluted natural resources?
- Have I pursued the accumulation of wealth and material, worldly goods and comforts as my major goal?

- Have I been selfish or stingy in giving of my money, time and talents to help others, including the church?
- Have I neglected worship, prayer, Bible reading, and other spiritual duty?
- Have I over-indulged in food, drink or other physical pleasures?
- Have I been blind to human need and suffering?
- Have I been indifferent to injustice and cruelty to others?
- Have I felt prejudice or contempt towards others?
- Have I ridiculed others or their beliefs or been deliberately cruel?
- Have I attacked anyone with angry words, gestures or actions?
- Have I refused to forgive or to offer or accept reconciliation?

If there are any other situations for which I need forgiveness, please show them to me now, God. Amen.

b. Ask for God's forgiveness, each day or each week. Use a prayer of confession from the Prayer Book (as on page 79, for example). Change the pronouns from "we" to "I", or, *if you have something on your conscience that won't go away through private prayer*, then...

c. Contact one of the priests and use the form for Reconciliation of a Penitent, from the Prayer Book on page 446-48.

2. Prayer

a. First, based upon how often you now pray (twice a day, once a day, occasionally), make a resolve to increase your times of prayer in frequency and in length.

b. Prayer, for Christians, comes in two types: private and corporate (or liturgical). If your prayer is limited in one part or another, resolve to work for balance. *The beginning point for improvement is resolve to be at the Holy Eucharist every Sunday, unless you are prevented by illness. Let nothing else get in the way of this foundational point for our prayer. Nothing.*

c. A wonderful way to deepen and organize your daily prayer at home is to use the form for daily morning or evening prayer from the Prayer Book. St Luke's

prepares a weekly guide to make Evening Prayer easy to understand; it is available at the door of the church every week.

3. Fasting and Self-denial

- a. Fasting is simply eating less food than you usually do. It is commended in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and is a great tool to increase our awareness of being dependent upon God for everything in our lives.
- b. If you are starting a pattern of fasting for the first time, you might consider this simple approach: on the weekdays of Lent (not counting Sundays), eat a half-breakfast, a half-lunch, and a regular dinner.
- c. Self-denial is the "giving up" part of Lent. A traditional act of self-denial is giving up meat, for all of Lent, or for Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, or for Fridays only. Also, dropping certain kinds of activity (movies, television, video games, eating out) is a way to undertake self-denial. It isn't meant to be punishment; it is meant to remind us of what really matters--our dependence upon God.

4. Alms-giving

- a. Alms-giving is special offering above and beyond what you usually give to God's work through the church. But, before you go above and beyond, take a close look at your pattern of giving to the Church. Make your pledge for 2009 if you haven't already, and look to see whether you are giving an amount that is significant and sacrificial (or see if your amount what is left after everything else is paid). Adjust the pattern of giving so that God is first, and the amount you give is actually a significant part of your income. The 10% share, the "tithe", is the Bible standard for giving.
- b. Look for new ways to give generously during Lent. Money that you save through self-denial is an excellent source for alms-giving.

5. Reading and studying God's Word

- a. As in the case of prayer, giving, fasting, and worship, take a good look at where you are. If you don't read the Bible at all, then start modestly. If you are already a regular reader, then find ways to deepen what you are doing.
- b. A good beginning point is to subscribe to and read the "Daily Devo" from Saint Luke's. It is a brief email message sent Monday-Friday. The Daily Devo is a way to read the Bible every day, and think about the meaning of the passage. The reading for each day is part of the cycle of lessons for Morning and Evening Prayer. It all works together.

c. If you are not in a Bible study or class, consider joining. Saint Luke's has organized Bible study ranging from small group size to classroom style. Details and schedule are published in the Complete Schedule for Lent, available through the church website.

Use the space below to make notes for yourself about your plans for Lenten Rule: