

THE Kingdom THROUGH THE CROSS



2024 Lenten Devotional



NORTH SHORE
COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

Welcome.

Our little Lenten devotional is a journey through scripture and practice that takes us from Ash Wednesday to Easter together. *Together*, because spiritual practices were never meant to be done in isolation from community. We've created this Lenten devotional as a resource as we embark on two separate but very much inter-related journeys: Reflective Reading and Reflective Practice. We encourage you to join with your small group, discipleship group, family, or simply invite one friend for the journey. Some practices are designed so they could be shared with a friend or neighbor – even if they aren't yet sure what they believe about Jesus.



Our Lenten Journey

Week	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice
Feb 14-16	Wed: <u>Mark 12:28-34</u> Fri: Psalm 38, <u>Mark 14:1-11</u>	Ceasing <i>Ash Wednesday Service (Feb 14)</i>
Feb 19-23	M: Matt 6:25-34 W: Psalm 8 and 19 F: <u>Mark 14:12-25</u>	Wondering <i>Anchor Bay Soul Care Retreat (Feb 24)</i>
Feb 26- Mar 1	M: Matthew 6:16-18 W: Isaiah 58 & Psalm 69 F: <u>Mark 14:32-42</u>	Fasting <i>Anchor Bay Worship Night (Feb 27)</i>
Mar 4-8	M: Psalm 12 & 22 W: Psalm 42 & 43 F: <u>Mark 14:45-50</u>	Lamenting <i>Antioch Church Worship Night (Mar 9)</i>
Mar 11-15	M: Matthew 5:1-16 W: Psalm 102 & 107 F: <u>Mark 14:53-72</u>	Walking
Mar 18-22	M: Matthew 6:1-14 W: Psalm 50 F: <u>Mark 15:1-41</u>	Giving
Mar 25-29	M: Psalm 143 T: Psalm 130 W: Psalm 51 Th: Psalm 6 F: Psalm 22, Isaiah 53	Repenting <i>Good Friday Service (Mar 29)</i>

Underlined text indicates sermon texts for the upcoming Sunday





How to Use this Devotional

We invite you to engage through two inter-related journeys. **Reflective Reading** follows our sermon series *The Kingdom Through the Cross* with reflections on sermon texts and accompanying passages. **Reflective Practice** aims to move our faith beyond our minds, out into the world around us. Practices aim to orient your heart toward Jesus during this season, and include suggestions for how to connect your mind with your body and heart, your reading with your walking. Feel free to continue them (ideally with your family or group) beyond the week. Together we practice ceasing, wondering, fasting, lamenting, walking, giving, repenting, and finally – at the great season of Easter – feasting.



On Spiritual Practices

For most, the season of Lent is synonymous with fasting. For good reason! Christians have historically fasted during the 40 days leading up to Easter, as Jesus did before his public ministry began. Some traditions abandon this practice, in pursuit of liberty from any religious activity experienced as rigid and overly focused on self-discipline or sin management. Many rediscover the deeper wisdom of embodied faith: our minds are not the only venue for being Christian. We need practices to form the rest of us: our bodies, relationships, and communities. Fasting, in the traditional sense, can be great – and it is just the beginning!

Stopping to Notice

*To love your neighbor as yourself is more important than
all burnt offerings and sacrifices.
Mark 12:33b*

These words come to us not from Jesus, but from a ‘teacher of the law.’ Jesus affirms the statement. As we begin the season of Lent, a season often associated with fasting, let us remember that what God wants most is our hearts. The greatest commandment is this: Love God. The second: Love neighbor. As we journey through Lent as a church, let us keep this as our focus. Our practices are not to prove to God our devotion, or to earn his favor. They are to love. So let us love as he loved, by giving our lives first to God, and then by loving one another.

About the Practice: Ceasing

We invite you to begin Lent by simply stopping to notice. What is God saying to you? Where is God’s spirit at work in your community?

To help us listen to God together, we invite you to attend our Ash Wednesday service, where we orient ourselves to God’s world. At some point this week, take an intentional pause from media consumption for an extended period. We give up things not because they are bad (media can be a tool for loving your neighbor). Instead, we cease in order to notice just how much noise is in our lives. As we remove the noise, we find room to pray that God would speak into this space.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Ceasing
Monday	Matthew 6:25-34	- Attend our Ash Wednesday service (Feb 14 @ 7pm) - Cease from media consumption
Wednesday	Mark 12:28-34	
Friday	Psalm 38, <u>Mark 14:1-11</u>	

From Worry to Wonder

*Look at the birds of the air... See how the flowers of the field grow.
Matthew 6:26, 28*

Whether you know the stress of not having enough or the stress of having too much, money is a source of major worry. (Though by no means the only one!) Our lives can be anxious and fixated. We recognize that our priorities need realignment – all things balanced – but, how? Jesus says to simply seek God's reign and rule above all else. That one singular pursuit offers an organizing principle for your hopes, dreams, desires, skills, bodies, relationships, and resources. Everything will find its proper place. This is a realignment without guilt or shame, but instead: *Wonder*.

About the Practice: Wondering

Take time to ponder something - to wonder at the world God created: the unexplored width of space or depth of oceans, the intricacy of the cell, the fascinating complexity of social systems. All of this life has a source. This week, set aside time to engage with an article, podcast, or documentary about any phenomenon of the natural world or social sciences. In your group, give each person five minutes to share something wondrous. Close by reading Psalm 19 together and praying.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Wondering
Monday	Matthew 6:25-34	- Share a meal with neighbors - ask questions that help you know and appreciate them as unique individuals - Read an article - learn something you didn't know about the natural world and share what was compelling to the group.
Wednesday	Psalm 8 and 19	
Friday	<u>Mark 14:12-25</u>	

*On Saturday February 24th, 9am-12pm you are invited to a Lenten Soul Care retreat at Anchor Bay church led by pastors and spiritual directors Doug and Adele Calhoun.
www.anchorbaychurch.org/events/lentensoulcareretreat*

On True Fasting

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?'

Isaiah 58:3a

Even if we humbly hide our private devotion from others, we hope that God would notice. We do it for God, after all. Jesus orients us away from using religious practice to seek approval before others, but there's more to fasting than a right heart and humble appearances. The prophets don't hold back – true fasting means seeking justice and equity in the world around us. It is far too easy to fast simply for the sake of our own spiritual (or even worse, dietary) benefit. The Bible has no time for this. Isaiah 58 describes true fasting as sharing food, shelter, and clothing, that we might 'spend ourselves on behalf of the poor.'

About the Practice: Fasting

Fasting looks different for everyone. Some can meaningfully fast from good things in order to enjoy something better. In some Catholic traditions, beans and rice are eaten for meals and money saved is given to local charities. We have given a few options of things you might fast from, but whatever you decide, we hope that you would take whatever is skipped and provide for someone else who might need it. If it is food, donate the money saved to a local food pantry, or make a joyful shopping trip at the end of the week on behalf of others. If it is time, consider volunteering for the *Downtown Dinner*, helping prepare or serve food to people in need in our community. (Contact the Madens at nanjimal@aol.com to learn how to get involved with *Downtown Dinner*.)

Medical note: If you have a history of disordered eating or any other medical concern, do not fast from food, but instead omit something else you enjoy from your life. Please follow advice of your doctor.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Fasting
Monday	Matthew 6:616-18	- Fast from social media, alcohol, coffee, food, or from something else you delight in. - Help out with <i>Downtown Dinners</i> .
Wednesday	Isaiah 58 and Psalm 69	
Friday	<u>Mark 14:32-42</u>	

On Tuesday February 27th, 7pm-8pm come to Anchor Bay Church (10 Dane Street in Beverly) for a night of musical worship and guided prayer centered on the theme of rest.

Being Honest With God

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Jesus does not bless suffering, or the events that cause it. He blesses people who mourn. Conflict, injustice, illness, and loss are real. It is not good or healthy to look away or deny reality. The Bible Path this week includes poems of lament that God's people have recited or sung for thousands of years. Jesus prays one (Psalm 22) from the cross. Notice how the Psalm reflects his experience. Notice also that it entrusts that experience to a God whose ultimate purpose is the restoration of all families and nations of the world.

About the Practice: Lamenting

God invites honesty. It is human and necessary. Among friends, you may already share worries or concerns. This week when you meet, shift that practice to a posture of lament. Open with a simple prayer that acknowledges the presence of God as the source of life. Take turns honestly sharing the events that warrant God's attention. These can be in your own personal life, family, or community. Notice feelings of unease, but avoid offering advice to resolve the tension. Rather, close by reading Psalm 22 together and praying. After reading the Psalms for the week, try writing your own psalm of lament, offering to God your honest complaint.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Lamenting
Monday	Psalm 12 and 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set aside time to lament with your group, sharing areas in your life where you feel God is silent. - Compose your own psalm of lament.
Wednesday	Psalm 42 and 43	
Friday	<u>Mark 14:43-50</u>	

On Saturday March 9 at 7pm Antioch Church is hosting an Encounter night worship service. Come to the NSCBC sanctuary for an hour of uninterrupted worship time and spirit-led ministry with opportunities for response through prayer.

Walking With Jesus

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down...
Matthew 5:1a*

Didn't we just say not to show off our devotion before others? Jesus seems to contradict himself here in Matthew 5:16: "that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Jesus humbles our private devotion (fasting, praying, tithing, and giving to the needy). But this doesn't mean we should be secret about our faith! Jesus wants us to give God the glory by being salt of the earth, light in the world. How is Jesus asking you to be salt and light in the world this week?

About the Practice: Walking

Jesus walked. He walked a lot. But he didn't wander, he walked with a purpose. Walking is a great way to connect our faith with the world around us. Consider a daily prayer walk in your neighborhood, walking with friends and praying for the welfare of your city. Jesus also didn't mind interruptions. He embraced them as opportunities to show God's love. If you are interrupted this week, consider how you can be an active listening presence. Share what you experienced with your group.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Walking
Monday	Matthew 5:1-16	- Take a daily prayer walk in your neighborhood. Be an active listening presence to anyone you encounter.
Wednesday	Psalms 102 and 107	- Try committing the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-16) to memory.
Friday	<u>Mark 14:53-72</u>	- Visit a town historical society, library, or read a local newspaper to learn something about your community and lift it up in prayer.

Storing up Treasures

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21

It isn't a question – your heart will follow your investments. We spend money, time, and attention on what we value. In a context where wealth was measured in a stash of durable goods, it was perhaps unsettling (perhaps realistic) for Jesus to warn the crowd that moths will eat, vermin will destroy, thieves will break in and steal. We might say that pandemics will disrupt, landlords and health insurers will raise prices, cars will unexpectedly break down. There is another way. Jesus invites people to invest their time, money, and attention in the reign and rule of God – to adopt the economic priorities and values of God's kingdom. When the world is set right, they will have made good investments. These will be the realities that last: healed relationships, the wellbeing of vulnerable people, the beauty of creation.

About the Practice: Giving

Begin the week by reviewing your household spending over the last month, quarter, or year. Notice patterns of spending. Set aside time with your group or family to discuss how these patterns reflect the priorities of your heart. End the week by giving. As a group or family, pool together money as you feel led and give it away. Work together to identify a community need you can help meet or a “world partner” whose work inspires you. The possibilities are endless. You can trust that your heart will follow. Celebrate together and take delight in giving.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Giving
Monday	Matthew 6:1-14, 19-24	- Review your household spending and giving for 2024.
Wednesday	Psalm 50	- As a small group, pool a donation and decide together where to give it.
Friday	<u>Mark 15:1-41</u>	- Share a meal with neighbors or deliver a meal to someone.

Whiter than Snow

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Psalm 51:7*

Not until moving to New England did I (Adam) finally understand what the psalmist meant in Psalm 51:7. On a retreat in New Hampshire, stepping outside after morning worship, the sun bounced off a fresh coat of snow into my eyes and I understood – perhaps more than any sermon has ever shown me. The white snow overwhelmed me with light. God cleans us whiter than that. I believe God gives us the physical world to show us spiritual realities. The next time you see a fresh coat of snow, remember the grace and mercy you can receive from God by repenting. It is on offer for free. Our reflective reading touches on five psalms of confession, teaching us the language of confession through God's word.

About the Practice: Confessing

James 5:16 charges us to confess not only to God as we do in our worship service, but to one another that we might be healed. Share how you have strayed from God to your small group or d-group. After confession, remind each other of how God forgives all who earnestly repent. We close Holy Week with our Good Friday service shared with Antioch Church – March 29th at 7pm in the sanctuary.

Leaders note: Prepare your group prior to this week by letting them know of the opportunity to confess. Carving out a specific time to do this can allow people to feel safe to bring up something difficult. Remind the group of confidentiality.

Reflective Readings and Practices

Day	Reflective Reading	Reflective Practice - Confessing
Monday	Psalm 143	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confess to your small group the ways you have wandered from God. - Pray for God's forgiveness over each person who confesses. - Attend our <i>Good Friday service on March 29th at 7pm</i>
Tuesday	Psalm 130	
Wednesday	Psalm 51	
Thursday	Psalm 6	
Friday	Psalm 22, Isaiah 53	

Postlude

Other ways to engage with the season of Lent

This guide is meant to help you connect with God and your community during the season of Lent. There are many other ways to engage with the season. Some take the season of Lent as a space to be creative, or to take on other practices of devotion. Here are a few that might fit any week.

- Write a poem based on the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-16)
- Memorize scripture or meditate on it via *Lectio Divina*
- Join our artists fellowship to create art or music based on a passage of scripture.
- Join the choir as we prepare music for Holy Week and Easter

Worship Services

Wednesday February 14	7pm	Ash Wednesday Service
Sundays in February & March	9:15 and 11am	Sunday services
Sunday March 24	9:15 and 11am	Palm Sunday Services
Thursday March 28	various times	Maundy Thursday Dinners
Friday March 29	7pm	Good Friday Service
Sunday March 31	7:30am	Easter Beach Service (West Beach)
Sunday March 31	9:15 and 11am	Easter Sunday Service

Additional Resources

Looking for more? Here are a few books that inspired this devotional.

Matt Canlis | The Backyard Pilgrim: 40 days at Godspeed

Skye Jethani | What If Jesus Was Serious? A Visual Guide to the Teachings of Jesus We Love to Ignore

Tish Harrison Warren | Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life

Adele Calhoun | The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us



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