

# Less is More

## A Lenten Reflection



# What is Lent, and what does it have to do with Easter?

Lent is the season when many followers of Jesus Christ undertake an intentional spiritual preparation in the lead-up to Easter. This involves self-reflection and a renewed commitment to Christian discipleship.

People often talk of 'giving something up for Lent', which reflects its rich tradition of penitence and sacrifice. Lent is a time for self-denial, cutting back, and

stripping away those aspects of life that are superfluous or distracting. The idea is that a pared-back, simpler and more focussed life can help us to see ourselves more clearly

in relation to Jesus and what he has done for us. Our Lenten booklet this year is entitled *Less is More* and picks up on this emphasis.

The culmination of the Lent journey is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ when he

*On the cross Jesus empties himself in the ultimate act of service to humanity.*

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pours himself out for our sake. On the cross Jesus empties himself in the ultimate act of service to humanity. And on Easter morning Jesus takes up new life in his resurrection, providing hope for all of us.

In the pages that follow we suggest various themes, topics and spiritual disciplines that may assist your Lenten journey. We invite you to use this booklet as a starting point for your own reflections. Our prayer is that embracing less may mean encountering more of what really matters.

### *Lent in the Anglican Church*

The observance of Lent varies between church denominations. For the Anglican Church, the 40 days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues up to Holy Saturday, with Sundays excluded. While the Bible does not mention the custom of Lent, its 40 days resonates with other special periods of 40 days recorded in Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11, Acts 1:3). Lent culminates in Easter, when all disciples of Christ celebrate new life in their resurrected Lord.

## Less Connections

There are some attitudes that we can all do without. In an over-paced and highly stressed world, people can be more prone to personal criticism and making quick judgments about others. We can also put up walls of different kinds, which shut others out.

While it is impossible to engage deeply with all people all of the time, we can have an attitude of general appreciation towards others.

All people are made by God and reflect something of God's goodness. The example of Christ is one of openness and concern for others, especially for people on the margins. His example offers friendship and affirmation, and this helps us to receive the gifts of others.

### *Lenten practice*

Prayerful reflection is a way to begin the journey of personal change.

This week, consider how you can be more gracious in your daily interactions.

Think about your own 'default' setting when you are busy.

Reflect too on the kinds of walls you have put up and how you could make your own outlook more Christ-like.



**“How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire.”** *James 3:5b-6a*

# More Connections

**T**hrough the wonders of technology, people are supposedly more connected now than ever before. There is an ever-growing range of social media platforms that allow for instantaneous sharing with wide audiences. Conversely, these platforms can deluge us with information of every kind.

Yet while we are more 'connected', many people strangely feel more isolated. Are you the master of your electronic communication or does it master you?

Is less social media an opportunity for more face-to-face time? Is the glut of information pouring onto our screens drowning out opportunities for appreciative and more personal

listening? Are the demands of the electronic age making life busier and less meaningful? And is being too accessible too often eroding our sense of personal peace?

## *Lenten practice*

Practice slowness, stillness and silence this week. This may help you to hear God's voice among the many.

Ruthlessly audit your personal routines and ensure there is space for more human interaction and relationship.

A man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a yellow apron is grilling food on a black grill. He is smiling broadly and looking towards the camera. In the background, two women are standing and talking. One woman is wearing a patterned dress and the other is wearing a light blue top and blue jeans. They are outdoors in a sunny, scenic area with hills and a windmill in the distance.

**“Just as I have loved  
you, you also should love  
one another.”**

*John 13:34b*

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# Less Generosity

**I**n our consumeristic society, it is very easy to become disengaged from the broader concerns of the world that we live in. We can quickly become seduced by the concerns of having and wanting more. The problems of the world then become removed from our minds as our focus moves more and more to our own wants and desires.

In contrast, God's concern for the world remains constant. His zeal for the poor is burning and unchanging. The voices of his prophets continue to echo. Have you considered why a passion for justice sometimes fades? The lives of many Westerners are characterised by accumulation, wastefulness and complacency.

## *Lenten practice*

During this Lenten season, replace consumption with godly contemplation, wastefulness with care for God's creation, and complacency with a renewed sense of social responsibility.

Fasting, in one form or another, is a great way to nourish our spirit in the midst of plenty.



**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for  
righteousness, for they will be filled.”**

*Matthew 5:6*

# More Generosity

Many commentators think that Australia is becoming more hard-hearted. There is a growing cynicism about the lives and motives of others, especially those we don't know, and this can squeeze out our sense of compassion.

People are quickly labelled as deserving or undeserving, and our responses are measured accordingly. Fortunately, God-in-Christ was willing to die for us all while we were still far off. He was willing to pay the highest possible price for everyone, even though we were thoroughly undeserving.

During this week of Lent, may the grace of God reform our lives. May we become less hardened towards others, less mean-spirited and less narrow in our outlook.

## *Lenten practice*

Undertake some personal study and reflection – especially around those topics where we are quick to make strong judgments.

This is a great way for God to speak into our lives.

A photograph of a buffet table with various food items including bread, salad, and water bottles. Several people are visible, some serving themselves. The scene is brightly lit and appears to be a social gathering.

**“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,  
humility, gentleness and patience.”**

*Colossians 3:12*

## Less Service

These days, there are so many public health messages aimed at improving our physical well-being. Eating a healthy diet, consuming less alcohol, and doing more exercise are common themes. A welcome development in recent years is the ability to talk far more openly about mental health issues.

Rarely, however, do we open up about our spiritual health. People can feel rejected, hurt or burned out by the church. They may experience judgment, or be left feeling unsatisfied by responses to their particular issues and concerns.

The simplistic injunction to read your Bible, pray more, and go to church may not always help; yet love, acceptance and support surely will.

How can we be less closed about our spiritual health, and more open to both ourselves and others?

### *Lenten practice*

Meditate on possible reasons why people may experience brokenness or dryness in their spiritual lives.

During this week of Lent, praise God for his inexhaustible grace in Christ Jesus.

As members of the family of God, consider how we can be more of a blessing for others.

**“...a broken and contrite  
heart, O God, you will not  
despise.”**

*Psalm 51:17b*



## More Service

A critique sometimes made of modern Australian life is that we live in the so-called 'age of entitlement'. The underlying concern is that people are becoming more overtly self-interested, pursuing their own advancement at the expense of others.

From your own perspective, you may feel that this critique is unfair. One thing, however, is absolutely sure. Christians are called to place others first, to seek the common good, and to carry each other's burdens. Christ's death on the cross represents the ultimate example of sacrifice for others.

One way of ensuring that we don't become unhealthily self-interested is by engaging in active Christian service. This commitment can

take many forms but it is less about our own agendas and much more about contribution to others.

### *Lenten practice*

Christian service is a neglected type of spiritual discipline, feeding the soul as well as benefiting the broader community.

During this Lenten season, consider the gifts God has given you and how he may be calling you into his service.

An elderly man with white hair, wearing a light blue short-sleeved shirt and grey trousers, is walking on a dirt path. He is using a black cane in his right hand. A younger woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a grey hoodie and white pants, is walking beside him, her left arm around his right shoulder. She is carrying a brown paper grocery bag filled with green vegetables and red flowers. The background is a lush green park with trees and a path leading into the distance.

**“Forget yourselves  
long enough to lend a  
helping hand.”**

*Philippians 2:4b  
(The Message)*

At Easter Jesus made himself nothing that we might have abundant life in him. This year the theme for our Lenten reflection is *Less is More*. We hope that this booklet enriches the discipleship of followers of Jesus as we approach Easter once again. It contains suggestions as to how we can embrace the season of Lent using spiritual disciplines in a range of topical areas.

Our work at Anglican Overseas Aid is an attempt to live out the hope of Jesus in response to the brokenness of this world.

At Anglican Overseas Aid we believe in working for a just, peaceful and sustainable world. These values are inspired by the Gospel of Christ.

We hope this booklet has helped you reflect on the journey of Lent and the promise of Easter. If you want to know more about our work please visit our website at:

<http://anglicanoverseasaid.org.au>