

# Introduction

Practically everything you read about Lent tells you it's a time to slow down. *Right*. As if any parent can take a break, unless something forces us, like, say, a pandemic. But even that didn't stop us—in fact, most of us found ourselves working even harder. So, if Mother Nature herself can't put the brakes on parents, what makes us think we'll slow down for forty days just because they're marked on our overstuffed calendars?

Well, maybe that's the problem. When we think of Lent as a calendar event, we miss out on its benefits for our weary, overworked souls. These forty days are an opportunity to break away from our routines and enter deeper into prayer, seek forgiveness for our sins, and share our blessings with others. Our souls long for this kind of goodness. *This* is our real life. This is how we meet the God who gives us life and who loves us more than we can imagine. The God who stays with us through every overloaded, busy day. The God who listens to our cares and worries. The God who gives us everything, including his own Son.

On each page you'll find a quick reflection on one of the day's Mass readings for you, a short prayer for your family to say, and a suggested activity to try together. All of it is meant to help you find your real life of joy and peace with God.

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## Start Here

*Even now  
[says the  
LORD],  
return to me  
with your  
whole heart.*

JOEL 2:12

Pope Francis once gave some advice for how families can change the world. “Start from where you are, and from there, try to journey together,” he said. It might sound simple. But think about it. As Lent begins, we might feel like we really could change the world, but we can also be intimidated by the challenge ahead. Starting from *where we are* means seeing ourselves as God sees us. Take a moment to place yourself in God’s loving presence today. Allow him to look at you with his immense love. How does this change your plans for Lent?

### Family Prayer

*Have one person read the prayer aloud; the rest of the family can respond after each line: **Be with us, Jesus.***

Loving Father, you call us to be close to you during these days.

Look on our family with love.

Guide us on the path to your Son Jesus. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » Create a God corner in your home—a place for everyone to be with God. It might be the sofa or kitchen table. You might put a candle there, along with prayer books, a rosary, a crucifix, or a picture of a saint you admire.

## Today Only

*“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

LUKE 9:23

Yesterday was the big event. We got our ashes and made great family plans for Lent. Today, reality hits. Today is just plain Thursday in Lent. This is one of those hidden days when the world doesn't notice our sacrifices. If at any point your lenten commitment gets overwhelming—and for me that usually happens sometime this morning—it's good to remember what Jesus says. We take up our cross daily. One day at a time. Sure, we fall sometimes under life's immense weight. But keep looking at Our Lord showing us the way. Look at today and deal with today. As Jesus says, tomorrow will take care of itself.

### Family Prayer

After each line, all respond: ***This is the day the Lord has made.***

Thank you, Lord, for this day.

Sunny, rainy, windy, or snowy, you have created it for us.

Help us remember, Lord, that each day is a gift from you.

AMEN.

### Family Activity » How will you spend the days of Lent?

Together, take a look at your family calendar and commit to spending extra time with God. Check your church bulletin for events you can attend together. Make a daily practice of talking about the events of each day and what God might be saying through them.

## Awkward Phrase

*“Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?”*

MATTHEW 9:14

This may be the first instance in the Bible of whining. But these aren't four-year-olds. They're adult leaders in the faith community sounding like they could use a nap. We want to shout, “This is the Messiah! He's willing to die on a cross for you, and you're worried about what's in your belly?” Of course, we have the benefit of hindsight. Which reminds me. The time I have with my children is short. How often do I make a big deal about unimportant things? Today, let's spend time thinking about what's really important for our families. I think we all know what's at the top of that list: love, love, love.

### Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **Lord, accept our gift.***

Father, you love us so much.

Today we're fasting from meat to remember your Son's sacrifice for us.

Help us fast with loving hearts. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » This simple grapevine project can help everyone remember their lenten promises. Braid a few long pieces of brown or green yarn together. Hang it on a wall or drape it around an artificial plant. Cut out some circles of purple paper and punch a small hole at the top. Each time someone does something for God, they can slip a paper “grape” through the vine.

# Wake-up Call

*And leaving  
everything  
behind, he  
got up and  
followed  
him.*

LUKE 5:28

What are your mornings like? I don't mean the spilling-orange-juice-and-letting-the-dog-lick-it-up part, or the part where you get all the way to school only to discover none of your children is wearing shoes. I'm talking about those few moments before the alarm sounds and the chaos begins. Before we get up, we're following Jesus in our hearts. If you're not already starting your days with prayer, today is a good day to begin the habit. Even a quick Glory Be while asking God to be with you is good. It's in those first few moments of each day that we can leave everything behind and follow him in our hearts.

## Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **Thank you for today.***

O Jesus, we offer you this day.

Everything we do and say.

Guide us, Jesus, in your way. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » During Lent, we don't say "alleluia" at Mass. It's a reminder that we're in exile from our happy, true home in heaven. One Lent tradition is to "bury" the alleluia. Write or draw the word *alleluia* on some nice paper and have your children decorate it. Place it in a handsome box and make a ceremony of putting it away for the season. At Mass, note what is said in place of the alleluia before the gospel reading.

## February 26 | First Sunday of Lent

GENESIS 2:7-9; 3:1-7 • ROMANS 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19 • MATTHEW 4:1-11

# Great Reads

*“It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’”*

MATTHEW 4:4

Have you noticed that whenever you give up something, it suddenly becomes irresistible? Jesus has been fasting for forty days. In a classic understatement, Matthew tells us, “He was hungry.” So, how does Jesus deal with the temptation that seems to fixate on his exact need? He quotes Scripture. That’s a good idea for us. We can keep God’s word accessible to our families by bookmarking Catholic Bible websites or downloading Catholic apps. And, of course, we can keep the Bible in our homes. The message for our children? When you face temptation, the word of God gives you guidance and strength.

### Family Prayer

*Have everyone flex their arm muscles as they respond: **The word of God stands forever.***

Jesus, in the desert you were so hungry!

But when you were tempted, you turned to your Father for strength.

Jesus, guide us to your holy word whenever we are tempted.

AMEN.

**Family Activity** » Read some Bible stories to your children. (If you don’t have a Bible, go to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website at [usccb.org](http://usccb.org) and access the Bible there.) Some great stories for Lent include Noah and the ark, Jonah and the whale, and Daniel and the lion’s den.

## Courtly Behavior

*“I was...  
a stranger  
and you  
welcomed  
me.”*

**MATTHEW**  
25:35

My son didn’t know a soul on his new basketball team. I watched him warm up, separate from the others. In games, he’d wave that he was wide open, yet no one passed him the ball. The team parents kept to themselves too. I huffed about it for days until I noticed my son casually striking up a conversation with a teammate. They laughed together. Before long, kids were passing the ball to him—he was part of the team. I thought about his actions. Unlike me, he didn’t harbor resentment for anyone. (He understood Jesus’ kingdom better than I did.) Who in your world might be feeling like a stranger today? How can you reach out?

### Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **We love you, Jesus, and we care.***

Jesus, when you are hungry, we will give you food.

When you are a stranger or lonely, we will welcome you.

When you need clothes and shelter, we will help you.

When you are ill or alone, we will care for you. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » The Corporal Works of Mercy are based on today’s readings. They invite us to be active in our love for God. Find ways your family can give Jesus food and shelter this month. Your parish will have plenty of resources for this.

# Law School

*“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you.”*

MATTHEW 6:14

There’s no keener legal mind than a seven-year-old out for justice. Whether giving closing arguments on your family’s need for a puppy or reasoning out why an older brother should receive the maximum punishment allowable by your family’s law, many second graders seem destined for careers in the legal field. Rules and fairness are their world (even if they don’t always follow them). Which is why Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness rings so true for them. We can’t miss this opportunity to show them the justice of forgiving others as they are forgiven. They get it. Today, keep your child’s awareness of justice in mind as you reflect on the Our Father together.

## Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **Your name is forever holy.***

Our Father, you are kind and good.

We trust you to give us all that we need, including forgiveness when we are truly sorry.

Help us forgive just like you do. Keep us away from anything that isn’t good for us. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » Invite your children to take a line from the Our Father and draw what it means to them. When you’ve finished, put all the drawings together into a family Our Father booklet. Keep it in your God corner.



# Sign In

*“This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah.”*

LUKE 11:29

A big promotion. Winning the lottery. Many of us wait for life-changing signs, but God gives us greater signs of his love every day. We know this down to our bones, but in the day’s rush and reality, we overlook it. Then we watch our children sleeping or hear a brilliant insight in their innocent remark and it makes us, even for a moment, reconsider everything. This is the sign of Jonah for us. When we respond by changing our lives, like the people of Nineveh, we experience a sign far greater than Solomon’s glory: the Sign of the Cross. The sign of our new life in Jesus. Today, pay attention to small signs. What is God trying to tell you?

### Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **Lord, send us your Spirit.** (Be sure to start and end your prayer today—and always—with the Sign of the Cross!)*

Dear God, through the long winter, we feel a little like Jonah trapped in the whale!

Help us find signs of spring soon.

Help us be open to the signs of your presence everywhere today. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » One “sign” of Lent is the color purple. Invite everyone to wear something purple today.

# Welcome Home

*“Ask and it  
will be given  
to you; seek  
and you  
will find;  
knock and  
the door will  
be opened  
to you.”*

**MATTHEW 7:7**

Can you hear the joy in Jesus’ words? It reminds me of visiting my in-laws when our kids were little. We’d knock at the door and be welcomed with open arms. The kids could count on homemade fudge, an endless supply of soda, and Grandpa’s chocolate chip pancakes every morning. That’s how it is with God. He already knows everything we need, and he waits joyfully for us to knock. In your prayer today, take a moment to simply savor the joy of Jesus’ presence with you.

## **Family Prayer**

*After each line, have everyone respond by knocking on a door or table.*

Lord, we humbly come to you in prayer. Can you hear us knocking?

Lord, sometimes what we think we need and what you know is best are two different things.

So, we keep praying, Lord. We keep knocking. Help us know what you want for us. AMEN.

*(After you finish the prayer, be sure to hug your children to show that God loves us and always listens to our prayers.)*

**Family Activity** » Pray as a family for the Holy Father’s intentions for this month. There are many sources for this. Search “pope’s prayer intentions” or visit [popesprayerusa.net](http://popesprayerusa.net).

# Really, God?

*You say, “The LORD’s way is not fair!” Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair? Are not your ways unfair?*

EZEKIEL 18:25

My sister was 59. She had a new career and a new life as a first-time grandma when she died suddenly. I was angry—so furious with God I didn’t set foot in a church for months. And by extension, neither did my children. One night, I stumbled into confession. “Yes, it’s terribly unfair,” the pastor agreed. “But is it fair to separate your children from God?” Short version of the story: I took my kids back to church and worked on my anger. Life is hard, but God isn’t the bad guy, trying to make our lives terrible. Yet he is with us through it all. Is there something painful in your life right now? Why not talk to God about it?

### Family Prayer

*After each line, all respond: **Jesus, hear our prayer.***

Jesus, today we pray for all those who need your help.

We pray for family, friends, teachers, and neighbors.

We pray especially for those who can’t ask for help. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » Invite everyone to offer an intention—something or someone for your family to pray for. Write down the intentions and place them in your God corner. Pray for them together throughout Lent.

## Tough Love

*“For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?”*

**MATTHEW 5:46**

Miss Kitty was a gorgeous cat, but she had been mistreated before we adopted her, and she never quite got over the trauma—hissing and swiping at any poor soul who tried to pet her. I know my kids didn’t love caring for a cat that could draw blood in return for kindness, but I think she provided a good lesson that not everyone always loves you the way you expect. Is there someone in your family’s life who needs love? Perhaps someone who is difficult or misunderstood? I know it’s hard, but... what is Jesus asking you to do?

**Family Prayer** (based on a prayer of St. Ignatius)

*After each line, all respond: **Lord, teach us how to give.***

Lord, teach us to give without counting how much we’ve given.

Help us work for you without looking for something in return.

When our work is done, give us good rest, knowing we have served you. AMEN.

**Family Activity** » Does your school or parish participate in Operation Rice Bowl? Make it even more meaningful by exploring [crsricebowl.org](http://crsricebowl.org). You can read stories of hope, get meatless recipes, and learn ways to join other Catholics working to end global poverty—even after Lent is over.