



LENT AND ITS PURPOSE

Lent's origin is based on the church's season of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. It is traditionally focused on repentance. As Martin Luther taught, the Christian life in its totality is a life of repentance—turning away from sin and self-centeredness and turning to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

HOW CAN WE OBSERVE LENT?

Self-examination. Use this time to ask yourself some hard questions about your spiritual life and your spiritual maturity. If you're married, ask your spouse to give you his or her evaluation of your spiritual health. Or ask a close friend, perhaps people in your Community Group for accountability. Spend a few days reflecting on one or two different questions listed on the right. See if you can reflect on all of them at least once during the Lent Season.

Self-denial. The Lenten season traditionally is also a time for acts of self-discipline and self-denial—a time to remind ourselves that we do not live by bread alone. Self-denial helps us remember what is so beautifully signified in the Eucharist—that Jesus is the true bread of life, our only source of strength and sustenance. Some common examples would be giving up one meal a day or giving up a particular food. Self-denial, however, doesn't always involve what we eat; some people may work on other habits, seeking better to use their time. For families in this dangerously frenetic culture, Lent would certainly be an appropriate time to cut back on the seemingly-endless flow of activities and spend time worshipping, praying, and learning together.

QUESTIONS OF SELF-EXAMINATION

1. How is my prayer life? Is there warmth? Boldness?
2. Have I consciously recognized God's presence in various moments throughout the day?
3. Have I, before every deliberate action or conversation, considered how it might be turned to God's glory?
4. Have I given thanks to God after every pleasant occurrence or time?
5. Have I thought or spoken unkindly of anyone?
6. Have I been careful to avoid proud thoughts or comparing myself to others?
7. Have I done things just for appearance? Have I mused on my own fame or acclaim?
8. Have I, before every deliberate action or conversation, considered how it might be turned to God's glory?
9. Have I been sensitive, warm, and cheerful toward others?
10. Have I been impure in my thoughts or glances?
11. Have I confessed sins toward God and others swiftly?
12. Have I over- or under-eaten, -slept, -worked?
13. Have I twisted the truth to look good?
14. Have I been leading in my home, or only reacting to situations?
15. Have I done anything that was motivated by my love for Jesus?