

LENT

SIX-WEEK GUIDE
FOR PRAYER & FASTING



Cities Church



INTRODUCTION

Lent is a 40-day season of prayer and fasting. Through contemplation, personal-examination, repentance, and self-sacrificial service, Christians imitate Jesus Christ's 40-days of tempting in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-15) and reflect on his suffering for their sin (Isaiah 53; Matthew 26-27; John 18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

The sorrowful spirit and dark atmosphere of Lent form a backdrop for the glorious resurrection of Jesus. By pressing-in to the season of Lent, we are asking God to uniquely prepare our hearts to feel the joy of Jesus's resurrected life and celebrate all the implications of his resurrection for us here, now, and forever.

This guide is intended to help us embrace the season of Lent by offering Scriptures, prayers, and devotional thoughts that inspire contemplation, reflection, repentance, and sacrificial living. Though Lent is a sorrowful season, the goal is not to experience sorrow for sorrow's sake. Instead, participation in Lent is an invitation to receive more of Jesus. In our sorrowing, we identify with Jesus in his sufferings and recall that he is our Great High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Through repentance, we bring our lives into conformity with Jesus himself by loving what he loves, feeling what he feels, and thereby living in closer communion with him. In our fasting, we remember how the Bread of Life went hungry so that our souls could be satisfied forever in him.

May God pour out his grace upon you anew this season. May the rumbling of your belly be echoed by rumbles in your heart for the return of Jesus. May your longings for your next meal train you to long for heaven. And, may your self-denial lead to you deeper worship of the one who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" so that we could be welcomed into the everlasting joy of God the Father.

WEEK ONE

THE WILDERNESS

After the baptism of Jesus, a strange thing happens. One would think that the heavens opening up, God the Father audibly announcing his delight in Jesus—his son, and the Holy Spirit visibly descending upon Jesus would be a pretty good time for him to begin his public ministry. But, God rarely works as we would expect. Instead, the Gospels tell us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. For forty days, Jesus went without food; for forty-days the incarnate Bread of Life was hungry (Luke 4:2). As fully-God and fully man, Jesus endured the wilderness and the hardships of hunger, thirst, sweltering heat, sleeplessness, all the while completely resisting the devil's temptations. In doing so, he proved that he was indeed God's promised Messiah, the sinless-Savior.

Jesus entered the wilderness once-and-for-all for us. Jesus didn't need to prove to his Father that he was sinless; for all eternity the Father knew that! Instead, he went into the wilderness as our representative, as the Second Adam. He succeeded where we all have failed. Unlike us, who so-often crumble to sin's temptation, Jesus silenced the deceitful voice of the serpent with steadfast trust in the promises of God. Where we rebelled against God, Jesus stood resolute in his loving obedience to his Father.

Here, on this side of heaven, we still find ourselves in wilderness-like settings. The voice of the serpent is continually attempting to slither into our hearts, tempting us to curse the God who loves us. But we must remember that we are not in the wilderness alone. We know what happens when we enter the wilderness alone: we become beasts. But by clinging to Jesus in the wilderness, we will emerge victorious with bolstered faith and refined character.

The point of Lent is to endure the wilderness with Jesus by drawing near to him for sustenance when our souls are staving. We fast to remember that Jesus went hungry so that he could feed us. We deny ourselves to remember that Jesus went without so that he could secure for us every-

thing. We suffer, experiencing only in part all that Jesus suffered in order to save us from eternal suffering.

If this is your first time participating in Lent or committing to a season of fasting, my encouragement is not to try to be a hero. In other words, don't begin Lent by committing to go an absurd amount of time without food. Instead, start small and build up throughout the next seven weeks. Remember the point of fasting is not ultimately to go without; the point is to train yourself to hunger for more of Jesus. As you fast my prayer for you is that you would experience in your physical hunger the mysterious satisfaction of Jesus's grace.

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without two meals this week. Choose two meals to fast from this week. You decide when, but commit to devoting the time you would spend eating to reading Scripture and prayer.

READINGS FOR MEDITATION:

- Psalm 63
- Luke 4:1-15

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. The inscription at the beginning of Psalm 63 tells us that David wrote this psalm while he was in the wilderness. Why do you think God sovereignly wills for his children to spend time in ‘the wilderness’? What purposes does God seem to have for our time in the wilderness? How does Psalm 63 inform your answer?

2. Try putting Psalm 63 in your own words. Be honest though — can you say of yourself that you hunger and thirst for the LORD in a similar way to King David? If not, how would you describe the intensity of your longings for Jesus? How would you like to see your affections for Jesus grow? As best as you can tell, what are the things that hinder for your affections for him?

3. Why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness? What does Jesus's sufferings and temptation reveal about him? In other words, what would be lost if the gospel writers did not include Jesus's temptation in their account's of his life and ministry? Are there any Old Testament stories that Jesus's forty-days in the wilderness call to mind?

4. Consider Jesus, the Son of God, being hungry. What does his hunger say about his humanity and his suffering? Do you think the time in the wilderness was easier for Jesus than it would be for one of us because he is God? How does Hebrews 4:15 inform your answer?

5. Compare Jesus's response to the devil's temptation with your own typical responses to the temptations you experience. How can you grow in responding to temptation as Jesus did?

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray this week that the Holy Spirit would use this season of Lent to reveal your hidden sin, grant you repentance, and bring you closer to Jesus. Pray with the psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24)!

A vertical rectangular image featuring a soft, out-of-focus background of a sunset or sunrise over the ocean. The sky transitions from a pale pinkish-orange at the top to a light blue-grey near the horizon. The water in the foreground is dark blue with gentle ripples and a small wave cresting in the lower third. The text 'WEEK TWO' is centered horizontally and vertically in a bold, black, serif font.

WEEK TWO

HUMILITY

We live in an age of anxiety. Though our anxiety can range from feeling mildly stressed to experiencing debilitating panic attacks, all of us feel some degree of fear as we contemplate our past, present, or future.

In 1 Peter, the apostle is addressing persecuted Christians who are scattered abroad. You can imagine the anxiety that these Christians felt as they were driven from their homes and were forced to rebuild their lives elsewhere, uncertain of what further persecutions they might encounter there. Peter writes to them to offer perspective and comfort. Peter encourages these Christians, “Humble yourselves...under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Despite this being such a famous passage of Scripture, it wasn't until recently that I noticed the connection between humility and casting our anxieties on God. How do we humble ourselves before God? According to 1 Peter 5:6-7, it is by casting our anxieties on him.

The root of anxiety is pride. Pride causes us to believe we are self-sufficient and the ultimate determiners of our futures. Pride says, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” That line from Henley's poem *Invictus* sounds really great, but it's just not true. And, we know it. Moreover, we feel it. No one chooses to get cancer. No one decides to get hit by a drunk driver. Sure, we can all make choices that set us on specific trajectories; but none of us can control the future, and therefore we cannot be the final determiners of our fate. Enter anxiety.

Anxiety is what we experience when we are confronted with our human limitations and lack of control over our circumstances. The key then, according to Peter, for dealing with anxiety is to humble ourselves and entrust our anxieties to God. In other words, we don't try to be ‘masters of our fate and captains of our soul.’ On the contrary, we renounce our pride and recognize that God is the sovereign author of history; he is the one who has numbered our days, he determines the number of breaths

we breathe. Or more simply put, we humble ourselves and hand over our anxieties by acknowledging that he alone is God and we are not. Therefore, we can entrust all of life's uncertainties and difficulties to him.

And, know this: He cares for you. He knows your circumstances. He knows your fears. He knows your weakness. And he cares! So, this week, aim to humble yourself before him by casting your anxieties upon him and trust that he will show up and prove he cares.

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without four meals this week. Tell a family member, roommate, or friend what four meals you are going to skip and ask them to check in with you — better yet, see if they will skip the same meals! Whatever meals you go without, commit to devoting the time that you would spend eating to reading the Bible and prayer.

READING FOR MEDITATION

- Psalm 38
- 1 Peter 4:12–5:11
- Matthew 6:25–34
- Isaiah 55

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Consider Psalm 38:15–22. What does the psalmist mean by “For you, O LORD, do I wait”? What is an area of your life that you need to wait on the Lord? What do you think it looks like to wait upon and trust in him in that particular circumstance?

2. According to 1 Peter 4:12–5:11, how should Christians respond to suffering? Is the answer intuitive or counter-intuitive? How so? How do you typically respond to suffering? In what ways can you grow in your response to suffering? What promise does Peter offer to those who suffer well (see 5:10)?

3. What are you anxious about right now? Do Jesus’s words in Matthew 6:25–34 bring you any comfort or relief? How so? In what ways do your anxieties distract you from “seeking first the kingdom of God?” Do you believe that “by seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” God will provide for all your needs? Why or why not?

PRAYER FOCUS

Spend time this week confessing your anxieties to God. Acknowledge your total dependance upon him and ask for the grace to trust him with your fears, your future, and any of the other circumstances that are bringing you stress. Praise him through prayer for his infinite wisdom and for his nearness to you. Ask him to make his nearness felt — that by the Spirit you would have eyes to see the many ways he cares for you and proves his faithfulness.



WEEK THREE

JUSTICE

A quick scroll through my Twitter feed shows there is no shortage of calls for justice. In fact, because there are so many calls to social justice activism—many garnishing thousands of ‘likes’ and re-tweets—the call to seek justice often sounds like white noise. Worse yet, I often misguidedly believe that merely sharing my opinion or an article on social media is the equivalent of actually doing justice.

If social media could fix the world, God had no need to send his Son; instead, he could have just created a Twitter profile. But, as we all intuitively know, social media is not the solution to the injustice we see in our world, which is why God got up from his eternal throne, came down to earth, and got his hands dirty by going to work.

The Gospel writer, Luke, tells us about a time early in Jesus’ ministry where he is teaching in the synagogue. Jesus opened a scroll to Isaiah 61 and read,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

Then, shockingly,

[Jesus] rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16–21).

Easy to say, right? But, the gospel accounts are chock-full with Jesus doing these very things: freeing demon-oppressed people, restoring sight to the

blind and health to the sick, and bringing dignity and hope to society's cast-offs and untouchables.

For us, as people filled with the Spirit of Jesus, we have inherited Jesus's desire to bring about justice for the oppressed. But, we cannot seek justice from our armchairs or behind a computer keyboard. If we really want justice, we must — like Jesus — act by getting our hands dirty. That said, our call to 'seek justice' is never divorced from God, who is both the just and justifier (Romans 3:26). We fundamentally take our cues from Jesus, not "social justice warriors," on how to work towards true justice. To be effective justice-seekers, we must know Jesus. We must know his heart, which we learn by knowing his word.

By seeking justice for the oppressed, we are not ultimately wrestling against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers that are behind all oppression (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, time spent in prayer is time spent in action. On many occasions, our intangible prayers should lead to tangible activity; but the order here matters. Prayer then practice. So, this week, make it your aim to spend time learning the heart of Jesus, asking for the Spirit to reveal injustice and oppression in your midst, and to pray over those things. Pray opportunities to bring about justice, for God to grant freedom to the oppressed, and for the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to advance.

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without five meals this week. Tell a family member, roommate, or friend what five meals you are going to skip and ask them to check in with you — better yet, see if they will skip the same meals! Whatever meals you

go without, commit to devoting the time that you would spend eating to reading the Bible and prayer.

READING FOR MEDITATION

- Isaiah 42:1-9
- Psalm 10
- Romans 3:21-26
- Philippians 2:1-11
- Psalm 103

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- I. Isaiah 42:1-9 is known as the first of Isaiah's four 'Servant Songs,' which find their fulfillment in Jesus. What do you find surprising about the description of Jesus in this passage? Consider the universal implications of this passage. How does Jesus establish justice in the earth? How is he "as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness?" What does that mean for you as one of his people?

2. Place yourself in Psalm 10. Have you ever felt like God has turned a blind-eye to injustice and evil-doers? How does the psalmist resolve his question about why the LORD seems to hide his face in times of trouble? What encouragement does this psalm offer you?

3. According to Romans 3:21–26, how can God remain just while also forgiving sinners? How does Jesus’s death in the place of sinners inform our understanding of God’s justice? In what ways does Jesus’s death show the severity of God’s justice? In what ways does it offer hope?

4. As you read Philippians 2:1-11, in what ways are you convicted of acting out of selfish ambition or conceit? What do you find remarkable about the humility of Jesus? Consider verses 9-11 and the paradox of Jesus's humiliation leading to his eternal exaltation. How does our participation in Christ-like humiliation lead to our exaltation (see also James 4:6)? How is this motivating as you consider what it means to associate with the lowly and seek justice for the oppressed?

PRAYER FOCUS

Take time this week to thank God for his justice. Thank him for being perfectly just and thank him for justifying you through Jesus. Also, take some time to consider the oppression and injustice that remains in our world and pray for the people marginalized groups that come to mind. Ask God to act for his glory, to bring about freedom for the fame of his name. Ask God how he would be pleased to use you and your Community Group to work towards justice in your neighborhood or in the Twin Cities.



WEEK FOUR

LAMENT

Lament is not a common word in today's vernacular. We regularly talk about being sad, feeling 'down,' or describe ourselves or others as depressed, but rarely—if ever—do we describe ourselves as lamenting. Our Bibles, on the other hand, are filled with lament. So much so there's an entire book that is titled Lamentations.

True lament is an appropriate experience in response to sin, heartbreaks, losses, and death. God cares and even, at times, encourages our lamenting (see Psalm 130:1–2). Yet, for many of us, lament feels foreign and uncomfortable.

In learning to lament, Psalm 88 is an excellent place to start. Psalm 88 is very similar to other psalms of lament except for one crucial detail: Psalm 88 doesn't resolve with a hopeful refrain or declaration of God's goodness and faithfulness. Instead, it's final line reads, "You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness" (Psalm 88:18). And then, just like that, the psalmist puts down his pen and walks away.

There are at least two things for you to see in Psalm 88.

First, what makes Psalm 88 a lament — and, really, what makes lament — is its direction. Lament is a prayer to God. In this psalm, the author brings all his confusion, pain, fear, doubt, and hopelessness before God. And, the psalmist isn't holding back. He lays everything out without couching his terms or posturing to present himself in the best possible light. No, he boldly goes before God, unfiltered with all the angst and pain contained his soul. Don't confuse his prayer with unbelief though—his lament is a great act of faith. The psalmist's crying out to God in prayer is a display of his bold belief that God hears, cares, and will act.

For you, to lament is to carry the weightiest of your emotions before God and trusting that he cares enough to hear and to meet you in your desperation. Personally, I tend to be quick to go to my wife or friends about the hardships I am facing or how distant God feels in a given season

without first earnestly directing my lament to God. But, here's the thing, through Jesus, God invites you into his presence to unload the burdens you carry and promises that, when you go to him, he will richly provide you with all the grace and help you need (Hebrews 4:14–16; James 1:5). Faithlessness is not mere doubts or fears; instead, faithlessness is refusing to bring your doubts, anxieties, or sorrows to God. So, go to him boldly and honestly with your lament.

The second thing to see starts with remembering that every word in Scripture is God-breathed, authoritatively inspired by God, trustworthy, and reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17). It is God's word. At the same time, mysteriously, it was written by real people—folks made out of the same stuff as you and me—who wrote from their experiences and perspectives as they were inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Treasure this truth when you encounter lament in the Bible. The lamentations found in Scripture shows how profoundly God understands pain. Through his word, he sympathizes with your suffering by giving you words to describe the otherwise inexpressible brokenness of your heart and experience of a world marred by sin. Your lament is validated, deepened, and ultimately met by going to God in his word. So, look to the Bible, especially the Psalms, to find language to express what you otherwise would struggle to say yourself.

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without six meals this week. Tell a family member, roommate, or friend what five meals you are going to skip and ask them to check in with you — better yet, see if they will skip the same meals! Whatever meals you go without, commit to devoting the time that you would spend eating to reading the Bible and prayer.

READING FOR MEDITATION

- Psalm 88
- Psalm 13
- Psalm 57
- Psalm 22
- Psalm 42
- Lamentation 3

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What about your life right now brings you the most sorrow?

2. What comforts or distractions do you turn to in order to address your sorrows? Do these things bring greater clarity and hope or do they produce numbness and indifference to sorrow? What is the danger in becoming numb to sorrow, pain, and grief?

3. When was the last time you brought your most profound sorrows before God? What happened? What did you feel?

4. What keeps you from lamenting — or going to God with your sorrow? What fears do you have about coming before him? What do those fears say about what you believe about the character of God?

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray through the psalms of lament and personalize them. Let the psalms guide you and give you language to express your own laments before God.

WEEK FIVE



CONFESSION

You are bad. You don't merely behave badly. You are bad. I am bad. Your friends are bad. Your innocent-looking newborn? You guessed it: she's bad, too.

In our culture though, it is viscerally uncomfortable for me to tell you, "you're bad." Just writing this I feel a bit anxious and worried. It feels insulting to say you—and your two-month-old (who is adorable, by the way)—are bad. I want to soften it. I want to jump to the "but..." and offer qualifiers to make you feel better or make me seem like less of a jerk.

But, God isn't a jerk. He is the only one who is truly good, and he says: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10–12; Psalm 14; Psalm 53).

I read that, and a strange thing happens within me, and I'm betting it happens to you, too. As I'm confronted with these words, I immediately begin to think of all the ways I'm not that bad. Or, at least I'm not as bad as I could be. I think, "Surely, I'm not as bad as my neighbor! I mean, that guy is really bad." And who of us hasn't ever had the self-justifying thought, "Well, I've never killed anybody...."

But . . .

You are as bad as a murderer. You are every bit as bad as God says you are.

Don't believe it? Well, have you ever hated someone? Has the very thought an angering individual in your life filled you with rage? I've certainly been there. And, Jesus says that one who hates another person commits murder in his heart (Matthew 5:21–22; 1 John 3:15). So, yeah, I haven't killed anybody, but there have been occasions when I've willingly watered the seed of hate in my heart that, if unchecked, could grow up

into physical murder. I haven't murdered, but I'm capable of it. So are you. How's that for a sobering reality?

We are sinners. Read that again, slowly, and make it personal: I, (your name) am a sinner.

Do you believe that? Do you feel it? Does it shock you? Think about what it means to be a sinner. To sin is to say that your way is better than God's way, that you know better than God, that you'd be a better God than he is. Sin is treasonous! It is, in effect, the expression of your desire for God to be dead so that you can rule. And here's the thing about sin: sin always leads to death. Always.

Someone has to die for your sin. That's how bad it is. That's how bad you are.

Now is where the long-awaited "but..." finally comes in: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Your sin deserves death, and the good news is someone did die. And, not just anyone: God died. The Father sent Jesus, the eternal Son, to live the perfect life you could not live and to die in your place as a sinner, shedding his blood in place of your own. All the wrath that your sin deserved was poured out upon Jesus.

So, how bad are you? Look at the cross. See the nail pierced hands and feet of Jesus. See his spear pierced side. See the crown of thorns upon his head. See the sky go black in the middle of the day as the wrath of God rips through Jesus's body. Hear the taunting and jeering of the very people he created and came to save. Do you hear your voice among the crowd? Do you see what your sin cost? Do you see that because of your sin Jesus had to die? Do you feel responsible?

Until you answer those questions with a heartfelt yes, you will not appreciate the death of Jesus for you. Until you recognize the severity of

your sin, Jesus's death will be insignificant to you. Until you own that you are bad, Jesus will not be good.

So, this week, by the Spirit's help, confess your sin. Pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without six meals this week. Tell a family member, roommate, or friend what five meals you are going to skip and ask them to check in with you — better yet, see if they will skip the same meals! Whatever meals you go without, commit to devoting the time that you would spend eating to reading the Bible and prayer.

READING FOR MEDITATION

- Psalm 6
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 38
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 130
- 1 John 1:9

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Consider a recent sin you committed. Beyond the action or attitude being wrong, what does that sin say about your heart? What does it say about your beliefs about God?

2. Do you typically see your sin as a personal offense against God? How is your sin a personal offense against him?

3. What stops you from confessing your sin? What fears do you have about confession?

4. Do you ever feel sorrow over your sin? How does that sorrow express itself? How does it compare to the sorrow you see expressed by the psalmists?

5. What do you need to confess today?

PRAYER FOCUS

Again, using the psalms as a guide, ask God by his Holy Spirit to search you and to reveal your heart level sin — your deep patterns and orientations of opposition to God. Ask God to help you see both him and your sin rightly so that you may feel godly sorrow over your sin. Confess. Confess your failure. And, in your confession, don't think of your confession taking place before an impersonal judge, but think of confessing your sin deeply and personally, as you would to a dearly loved one; for that is how God has called us to approach him in our confession — as our Father.

WEEK SIX



REPENTANCE

Confession and repentance are distinct yet inseparable. Repentance is not confession and, at the same time, godly confession is not complete until it is accompanied by repentance.

So, what is repentance?

Repentance is a change of heart that is accompanied by a change in behavior. If confession is the sorrowful recognition of your heart's rebellious condition, then repentance is the act of bringing your heart into conformity with God's by actively loving what he loves and hating what he hates. That is the goal.

To that end, here are three points to remember in your repenting:

First, repentance requires knowing God. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Proverbs 9:10). Apart from knowing God, we have no enduring standard for what is right or wrong, good or evil, of God or not of him. Since the goal of repentance is to have our hearts conformed to God's heart, we have to know his heart — know what he loves and what he hates — and the best way to learn about God's heart is through his Word.

Second, repentance is a gift from God (2 Timothy 2:25). Repentance requires a change of heart, which is to say repentance genuinely requires a miracle. That said, we should earnestly seek the gift of repentance; we should make a regular practice of asking God to make our hearts soft, malleable, and prepared to be corrected and conformed to his own. Ask the Spirit to illuminate hidden sin within you and for the grace to confess and repent right away when you fail. Most importantly, when you feel the Spirit's prompting for you to resist temptation, to confess, or to repent, do not ignore him, but do it! Which leads to the third point.

Act the miracle. In other words, act out the miracle of repentance that God is working in you. Sometimes this means making a dramatic change to your behavior until your heart catches up. For example, I used to hate running, but I knew that running provide me with more energy,

overall health, and discipline. For the first few weeks, I had to force myself to put on my running shoes and get out the door. However, the more consistently I ran, the more my attitude towards running changed, so much so that and I genuinely enjoyed myself and look forward to getting out for a run — I'd even be disappointed if I missed a day. Often times our hearts operate similarly, and it is not legalistic to forcefully change sinful behavior and habits with the prayer that in doing so you will learn to love what is good and right.

Just as the love of running was never going to magically overcome me but had to be cultivated, you should never excuse your sin or lack of repentance with the sorry excuse that you won't change until "God changes you." The way he works the miracle of changing you is through your faithful effort to turn from your sin and walk in obedience to him. The miracle of repentance is his working in your working; his supernatural power strengthening your natural efforts; his holy resolve to aid your pursuit of holiness.

RECOMMENDED FAST

Go without seven meals this week. Tell a family member, roommate, or friend what five meals you are going to skip and ask them to check in with you — better yet, see if they will skip the same meals! Whatever meals you go without, commit to devoting the time that you would spend eating to reading the Bible and prayer.

READING FOR MEDITATION:

- Romans 2
- 2 Peter 3:8-10
- 1 John 1:5-2:6
- 2 Chronicles 7:11-22
- Proverbs 28:13
- Ezekiel 18:21-32

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In your own words, what is the difference between confession and repentance? How are they related? Can you have one without the other?

2. Think of an example from your life when you've witnessed true repentance in someone else? What were the marks of their repentance? Was their repentance merely external changes in behavior, or do you believe their heart was changed?

3. Identify some ways that God has granted you repentance. Since becoming a Christian, how have you seen your loves and behavior come into greater conformity with God's own loves and actions? What areas of your life do you still see need for repentance?

4. In Scripture repentance is often tied to “living.” Why do you think the biblical authors make this connection? How does repentance lead to life?

5. What prevents you from repenting or what sin have you been resistant to repent from? Confess this to your spouse, roommates, or Life Group.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that God would grant you the gift of repentance as you come to greater knowledge of him and his character. Pray that you would experience life in your repenting. Ask God for his Holy Spirit to strengthen you as you walk out your repentance in making real-life changes to your habits and behaviors.