



CHRIST
THE REDEEMER

-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH-

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
February 18, 2024

Welcome to CHRIST THE REDEEMER...

We're glad you've joined us. Whether you have followed Jesus your whole life or you can't remember the last time you stepped foot in a church, we want you to feel welcome to come as you are and worship with our church family. If you have any questions about our church or where to find something, please don't hesitate to ask. We're excited about what God is doing among us as we seek to live, grow and serve as followers of Jesus in Portland and in our surrounding neighborhoods. So, welcome to CTR, we'd love to have you as part of our family.

During our service, our nursery is open for babies who are crawlers through 3-year-olds. If you need help finding the nursery area, please ask any of our greeters!

Children's Church is in session. After the blessing each week, children age 4 – 1st grade are welcome to go to Children's Church. They will re-join their families after the sermon.

THE RHYTHM OF OUR WORSHIP

On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), when Jesus' disciples found themselves troubled and confused, Jesus met them along the way. When they confessed their troubles and doubts to Him, His words and presence began to change them. He unfolded God's Word to them, pointing to His own person and work. He dined with them, giving thanks and breaking bread. The disciples recognized their Lord's presence with them and hurried to tell others the good news.

In the Emmaus story, we recognize the pattern of historic Christian worship as it began to take shape. Our worship liturgy at Christ the Redeemer moves through a specific rhythm: God **SUMMONS** us as His people, God **SANCTIFIES** us to Himself, God **SPEAKS** to us in His Word, God **STRENGTHENS** us at His table, and God **SENDS** us into the world to share His grace.

The emphasis throughout our worship is upon God's action and our appropriate response. In worship, we rehearse the gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection and are caught up into the mission of the Triune God. The flow of our liturgy aims at drawing us further into the life of the Trinity as children of God and then impelling us outward into our world.

-adapted from City Church Philadelphia [Guide to Our Worship](#)

G O D S U M M O N S

[P R A I S E]

C A L L T O W O R S H I P

[L] Let us worship God, who has done great things.

[P] **We rejoice in our God, who made a way through the desert of this world.**

[L] Let us worship God, who has caused streams of mercy to flow in the wasteland.

[P] **We are the people God has formed through Christ; we worship him, and we rejoice!**

[L] Let us worship God in spirit and in truth.

[P] **We praise God for the grace that has saved us. Alleluia! We rejoice!**

based on Isaiah 43:19-21

I S I N G T H E M I G H T Y P O W E R O F G O D

Verse 1

I sing the mighty power of God
That made the mountains rise
That spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies
I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day
The moon shines full at his command
And all the stars obey

Verse 2

I sing the goodness of the Lord
That filled the earth with food
He formed the creatures with his word
And then pronounced them good

Lord, how thy wonders are displayed
Where'er I turn my eye
If I survey the ground I tread
Or gaze upon the sky

Verse 3

There's not a plant or flower below
But makes thy glories known
And clouds arise and tempests blow
By order from thy throne
While all that borrows life from Thee
Is ever in thy care
And everywhere that we can be
Thou God art present there

GOD SANCTIFIES

[RENEWAL]

CONFESSION OF SIN

[All] **God of mercy, whose Son, Jesus Christ, longs to gather us in the wide embrace of his love, we confess that we have been wayward children. We have disobeyed your commands; our ears have been deaf to your call; our hearts have been cold to your love. In thought, in word, and in deed we have hurt others and dishonored your name. In your great mercy receive us yet again as your well-beloved children, not because we are worthy but for the sake of him who loved us and gave himself for us. Amen.**

TIME OF SILENT REFLECTION AND CONFESSION

HAVE MERCY

Have mercy on me; have mercy on me
O Lord, have mercy. O Lord, have mercy.

O, help my unbelief. O, help my unbelief.
O, Lord, have mercy. O, Lord, have mercy.

Hmm, hmm, hmm
Hmm, hmm
Have mercy. Have mercy.

WORDS OF COMFORT AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

[L] The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we, free from sins, might live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed.

from I Timothy 1:15; I Peter 2:24

[All] **Praise be to God!**

MAN OF SORROWS

Verse 1

Man of sorrows, Lamb of God
By his own betrayed
The sin of man and wrath of God
Has been on Jesus laid

Verse 2

Silent as he stood accused
Beaten, mocked and scorned
Bowing to the Father's will
He took a crown of thorns

Chorus

Oh, that rugged cross, my salvation
Where your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out, "Hallelujah!
Praise and honor unto thee!"

Verse 3

Sent of heaven, God's own Son
To purchase and redeem
And reconcile the very ones
Who nailed him to that tree

Chorus

Oh, that rugged cross, my salvation
Where your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out, "Hallelujah!
Praise and honor unto thee!"

Bridge

Now my debt is paid
It is paid in full
By the precious blood
That my Jesus spilled
Now the curse of sin
Has no hold on me
Whom the Son sets free
Oh, is free indeed
[Repeat]

Chorus

Oh, that rugged cross, my salvation
Where your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out, "Hallelujah!
Praise and honor unto thee!"

Verse 4

See the stone is rolled away
Behold the empty tomb
Hallelujah God be praised
He's risen from the grave

Chorus

Oh, that rugged cross, my salvation
Where your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out, "Hallelujah!
Praise and honor unto thee!"

Praise and honor unto thee!

LIFE OF THE PEOPLE
[ANNOUNCEMENTS]



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THE PEACE OF GOD
and THE BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN

[L] May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

[P] **And also with you.**

[L] People of God, what is our prayer for these and all our children?

[All] **May the Lord be with you.**

[Children] **And also with you.**

TEACH US YOUR WAYS

Verse 1

Teach us your ways
Teach us your ways
as we learn from one another
Learn to love each other
Teach us your ways

Verse 2

Teach us to give
Teach us to give
Give ourselves for one another
Learn to love each other
Teach us to give

Verse 3

Teach us to weep
Teach us to weep
Let us weep with one another
Learn to love each other
Teach us to weep

Verse 4

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Let us learn from one another
Learn to love each other
Teach us your ways

G O D S P E A K S

[W O R D]

S C R I P T U R E

Ephesians 3:14-21 ESV

Read by Paula Ward

Prayer for Spiritual Strength

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

[L] The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God stands forever.
The Word of the Lord.

Isaiah 40:8

[P] **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon:

LIVING A SPIRIT-STRENGTHENED LIFE

Rev. Jeremy McKeen

Planting Pastor

Gospel City Fellowship

Portsmouth, NH

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Heidelberg Catechism Q & A #1

[L] What is your only comfort in life and in death?

[P] **That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.**

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

Led by Roger Kepler

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

G O D S T R E N G T H E N S

[T A B L E]

C E L E B R A T I N G H O L Y C O M M U N I O N

A Word about Communion: Communion is the family meal of Christians. Baptized believers actively looking to Jesus as their hope for salvation are warmly invited to share in this meal with us as our brothers and sisters.

- *Please approach the servers by coming up the middle aisle and returning to your seat via the outside aisles.*
- *Once you receive the bread and wine/juice, please hold on to it as you return to your seat. We will partake together as one body after everyone has received the elements.*
- *Children and those who are not partaking are also welcome to approach the servers for a prayer or word of God's blessing. We ask that you fold your hands as you approach so the server is aware.*
- *Please dispose of your communion cups and any other trash in the wastebasket located at the back of the sanctuary or the one near the exit at the front of the sanctuary as you leave today. Thank you!*

S A N C T U S

Holy! Holy! Holy, Lord!
God of pow'r and might!
Heaven and earth are full of your glory!
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

W O R D S O F I N V I T A T I O N & I N S T I T U T I O N

P A R T A K I N G O F T H E E L E M E N T S

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

Verse 1

When peace like a river
Attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot
Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well,
It is well with my soul.”

Chorus

It is well with my soul
It is well
It is well with my soul

Verse 2

Tho' Satan should buffet
Tho' trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ hath regarded
My helpless estate
And hath shed his own blood
For my soul

Chorus

It is well with my soul
It is well
It is well with my soul

Verse 3

My sin, O the bliss
Of this glorious tho't
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross
And I bear it no more
Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Chorus

It is well with my soul
It is well
It is well with my soul

Verse 4

And Lord haste the day
When the faith shall be sight
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll
The trump shall resound
And the Lord shall descend
Even so, it is well
With my soul

Chorus

It is well with my soul
It is well
It is well with my soul

GOD SENDS

[MISSION]

RESPONSES OF JOY

OFFERING OUR LIVES AND RESOURCES

[our tithes and offerings]

If you would like to give online, please use this QR code:
This takes you to our online giving portal.



HE LEADETH ME

Verse 1

He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Chorus

He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.

Verse 2

Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's flowers bloom,
by waters calm, o'er troubled sea,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Chorus

He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.

Verse 3

Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see,
since 'tis my God that leadeth me.

Chorus

He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.

Verse 4

And when my task on earth is done,
when, by thy grace, the victory's won,
e'en death's cold wave I will not flee,
since God through Jordan leadeth me.

Chorus

He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
his faithful follower I would be,
for by his hand he leadeth me.

B E N E D I C T I O N a n d S E N D I N G

[L] May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I Thessalonians 5:23

[All] **Amen!**

HIGHLIGHTS

February 18, 2024

NEW TO CTR? Welcome! If you would like to connect, learn more about our church or subscribe to our weekly announcement email, please use this QR code.



CTR KIDS LENDING LIBRARY

We are so excited about our CTR Kids Lending Library! Before and after church, please visit the library cart near our nursery and choose a Gospel-centered book to take home with you for the week! There are books available for all age groups, and some parenting resources as well!

ON THE CALENDAR:

MON, FEB 19

WOMENS' BIBLE STUDY – 6 PM

@ the home of Laura Wiersma, 29 Lilac Lane, New Gloucester (GPS does not recognize this address so please use 54 N Pownal Road - that will get you to Lilac Lane). A light supper will be served.

This is a weekly Bible study in the Psalms. You may purchase the study guide, **“Psalms: At His Feet”** (Blanton/Gordon) on Amazon.

THURS, FEB 22

NEW TO CTR DESSERT FELLOWSHIP – 7-8:30 PM

@ the Roberts', 64 Brook Road, Portland

Whether you have been visiting for a week or 6 months, but you would like to get to know CTR better, we would love for you to join us for some dessert and conversation! You will have an opportunity to interact with Pastor Sean and other leaders at CTR and find out how you can become a part of what's happening here.

FRI, FEB 23

FRIDAY PLAY GROUP – 10 AM – 1 PM

Calling all stay-at-home moms or dads! Plan to join us at playgroup every Friday at 10am. We are at a different location every week, so keep a lookout on Instagram [@ctrportlandkids] for more information! Any and everyone is welcome with their children. Please contact Abby Reid if you have any questions.

ON THE CALENDAR:

SAT, FEB 24



[SIGN UP HERE](#)

CTR TRIVIA NIGHT – 5 – 7:30 PM

Ladies and gentlemen, get ready for an epic brain-battle at our upcoming "CTR Trivia Night"! Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 24th, 5-7.30pm as we dive into a night of mind-bending trivia, laughter, and fun!

But that's not all – we've got your taste buds covered with delicious pizza, and to make it even sweeter, childcare will be provided! So, bring your A-game and leave the rest to us.

Oh, did we mention there will be PRIZES? Get ready to walk away with more than just bragging rights. It's an evening you won't want to miss. See you there, trivia champions!

Plan to join us!

@ North Deering Congregational Church [Fellowship Hall], 1364 Washington Ave, Portland

WED, FEB 28

BOOKS & BUBBLY – 7 PM @ 64 Brook Rd., Portland

Our book for next month is: "The Winners: A Novel" by Fredrik Backman. For more info, please contact Claire Roberts [clerkus@gmail.com].

CTR COMMUNITY GROUPS

Are you interested in joining a community group at CTR? Signing up for a community group is simple!

Fill out a form online at <https://www.ctrportland.org/community-groups> or use this QR code to go directly to the form.

To contact one of the coordinators:

Amanda McKrell (griswoldam1@gmail.com or 716-479-0093)
Matt Reid (mattreid522@gmail.com or 404-550-8872).



SERVE...

At CTR, we believe that part of what makes the church a beautiful place is that it draws people with various passions and gifts into one body. Below are some opportunities to use your passions and gifts to serve one another and our local community.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIESAbby Reid
Phone: 404.723.4448
E-mail: areid@ctrportland.org

GREETER MINISTRY Abby Reid
Phone: 404.723.4448
E-mail: areid@ctrportland.org

MEALS MINISTRY Tammy Locke
Phone: 207.671.0936
E-mail: tam74maine@gmail.com

MISSIONS COORDINATOR.....Kathi Favre
Phone: 207.298.2089
E-mail: klfavre@gmail.com

MUSIC..... Kendra Hollen
Phone: 207.272.4104
E-mail: khollen@ctrportland.org

SET-UP EJ Kruse
Phone: 814-392-4810
E-mail: ejkruse89@gmail.com

SPECIAL EVENTS.....Claire Roberts
Phone: 956.270.2565
E-mail: clerkus@gmail.com

How Do I Get and Stay Connected at CTR?

At CTR we long for clear communication and deep bonds. We are excited that you're interested in being more connected and involved. The following is a list of our communication channels and their purpose in the life of our body:

1. EMAIL NEWSLETTER (*Keeping in Touch*)

This is the primary vehicle by which we communicate regarding the life of our church. Most weeks you will receive an email with announcements and upcoming events. From time to time, our elders will also use this vehicle for church-wide or members only correspondence. **NOTE:** *If you are not regularly checking your email from CTR, it will be difficult to feel and be connected in the life of our church.* [Use this QR code to sign up for the email.]



2. CTR APP & TEXT MESSAGES

The CTR App is designed to help those in our church interact with each other. It is largely crowd sourced and includes information on informal meetups, prayer requests, live and past sermons/services, different hobby groups, ways to give, etc. [See page 14 to download the App.]

Text Messages are sent exclusively as reminders about events in the days/hours immediately beforehand.

3. SUNDAY MORNINGS

Sunday mornings employ several communication methods, including written **announcements in our Order of Worship**, verbally highlighted **announcements**, and (new) **projected announcements** running before and after the service. Sunday Morning announcements are focused on pointing people to events and ministries that help them explore or integrate more fully into the life of our church. Given the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of those attending Sunday Morning Worship, only on rare and exceptional occasions will these vehicles be used by leadership for information that is primarily member focused.

4. CTR WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Both mediums are designed to be primarily outward facing.

The CTR Website [ctrportland.org] is designed to be our front door– a welcoming place for new people to discover and learn about our church. It is minimal in announcements and church life information.

Social Media [Instagram & Facebook] is used for promotion of church events. People are encouraged to “re-post” as a way of sharing with and inviting their friends. [@ctrportland]

If you would like to access or have had difficulty accessing any of these vehicles, please contact ctr@ctrportland.org. Our admin, Cheryl Sullivan, is happy to help you get integrated into our communication systems.

ON KEEPING HOLY LENT

Rev. Craig Higgins, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Rye, NY

People from different religious backgrounds have very different reactions to the season of Lent. Some grow up in churches where Lent is observed, but with little to no real explanation. Whether observed as a time of strict austerity or merely as a time of forgoing a few simple pleasures, in such cases Lent may seem like an empty, meaningless ritual.

On the other hand, some grow up in church traditions where Lent is not observed at all. These folks may think of Lenten observance as, at best, a hollow custom, or, at worst, quite foreign to authentic Christianity. As a matter of fact, many who grew up in church have the same the question as those who didn't: "What *is* Lent, anyway?"

THE MEANING OF LENT

Lent's origin is hidden in the early centuries of church history, but we do know that it originated as a time of preparation for Easter. From the church's earliest days, the resurrection of Christ celebrated not only each week (on Sunday, the Lord's Day), but also in a special festival of the resurrection. This festival we call Easter Day, and it is celebrated as the Sunday of Sundays!

Lent, as a season of preparation, is traditionally focused on repentance. Speaking biblically, to repent means to make a change in our attitudes, words, and lifestyles. As 16th century reformer Martin Luther taught, the Christian life in its

totality is a life of repentance. Beginning when we first commit our lives to Christ, and continuing throughout our lives, we are more and more turning away from sin and self-centeredness and more and more turning to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Even though a repentant spirit should mark all we do, it is still appropriate that certain times be set aside for a particular focus on repentance.¹ The church has traditionally done this at the Lenten season (and, to a lesser extent, in the pre-Christmas season of Advent).

Lent, therefore, is a time for focusing on the heart, a time for asking questions about our spiritual health:

- What are my characteristic sins, and how can I work and pray for change?
- What idols have captured my imagination so that my love for the living God has grown cold?
- In what ways is my devotion to Christ and his church less than wholehearted?

The Lenten season is the spiritual equivalent of an annual physical exam; it's a time to take stock of our lives, our hearts.

Keeping Lent, however, is potentially dangerous, precisely because of this focus on the heart. After all, it is much easier to read a book on prayer than to spend time leisurely speaking with our heavenly Father. It is much easier to fast from certain foods than it is to

¹ In much the same way, we celebrate the resurrection of Christ each Sunday, but especially at Easter; and while we should always thank

God for the Incarnation, we especially celebrate it at Christmas. These periodic reminders keep us from becoming forgetful and imbalanced.

turn from idols of the heart. It is much easier to write a check than to spend time in ministries of mercy. Consequently, Lent is easily trivialized. The point of Lent is not to give up chocolate; it's to give up sin!

Even with this warning, however, we need to beware of going from one extreme to the other. Yes, it is possible so completely to *externalize* your Lenten observance that you end up trivializing it. Yet we need to remember that we are not purely spiritual beings. God created humans as *physical* beings; we are psychosomatic creatures, a “nexus of body and soul.”² What we do physically has an effect on us spiritually—and we neglect this principle to our peril.

For example, it is unquestionably true that my attitude in prayer is more important than my posture in prayer. However, sometimes being in a physical posture of humility—kneeling in prayer—helps me get in the right frame of mind. It shouldn't surprise us in the least that there is a connection between the physical and spiritual; it simply reflects how God created us. That's why, at the center of Christian worship, God gave us the sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist—simple physical rites involving water, bread, and wine, but rites that communicate to us the most profound of spiritual realities. That's also why, in the pages of Holy Scripture and throughout the history of the church, we find many physical acts and postures³ designed to help us worship, to help us pray, to help us in our spiritual growth.

² This phrase comes from Dr. Jack Collins of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

³ The list could be quite long, such as standing for prayer and praise, bowing one's head and closing one's eyes for prayer. Two practices not generally practiced by Presbyterians also come to mind: Lifting up one's

Recognizing this God-created link between the physical and the spiritual, the Lenten season has historically included a physical element, specifically fasting and other acts of self-denial. We'll deal with these more fully below.

SHOULD WE OBSERVE LENT?

I am sometimes asked why churches should observe Lent at all. Well, I certainly agree that of all the seasons of the church year Lent is the most-often trivialized. Consequently, many churches (including some Presbyterian churches) do not observe the season. There are, however, two good reasons for keeping this tradition:

First, this is a *wise* tradition. Realizing that repentance should characterize the totality of the Christian life, we should see the practical wisdom in setting aside time especially for this purpose. Just as a baseball player may work at staying in shape year round but still give special attention to conditioning before the start of spring training, so we may find great spiritual benefits in setting aside a few weeks to give special attention to the state of our souls.

Second, it is right that we *honor* the traditional wisdom of the church, and Lent is a tradition that the church has observed for centuries. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit has been present throughout church history, guiding God's people into an ever-increasing awareness of biblical truth, we believe that it is foolhardy to disregard history and constantly to try to “reinvent the wheel.” We

hands for prayer and praise is seen in both Scripture and history. And making the sign of the cross, while post-biblical, has a long history (yes, even in Protestant circles!).

dishonor our spiritual ancestors when we casually disregard their wisdom.

Are Christians required to observe Lent? Strictly speaking, no; Presbyterians have long emphasized that our consciences are bound to Scripture alone, and there is no biblical mandate to celebrate Lent. But countless generations of Christians have found this a helpful tool.

WHEN IS LENT?

The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts until Holy Saturday, the Saturday before Easter Day. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week, which includes both Maundy Thursday (commemorating the institution of the Eucharist) and Good Friday (commemorating the crucifixion of our Lord).

Reminiscent of Jesus' fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Lenten season, not counting Sundays, lasts forty days. Sundays are not included because the Lord's Day, according to church tradition, is never a fast day but always a *feast day*—a celebration of the resurrection! Therefore, during Lent the Lord's Days are listed as Sundays *in* Lent, not Sundays *of* Lent.

HOW CAN I (& MY FAMILY) KEEP A HOLY LENT?

Traditionally, the Lenten season is observed in four basic (and often overlapping) ways:

Self-examination. As we've discussed, this is central to the traditional Lenten observance. Use this time to ask yourself some hard questions about your spiritual life, your spiritual maturity.^{4*} If you're married, ask your spouse to

give you his or her evaluation of your spiritual health. Many Christians have a Christian friend, or a small group of fellow believers, who have agreed to hold them accountable. If you don't have an accountability group or partner, Lent might be a good time to initiate such a relationship. Parents—especially fathers—could use Lent as time to spend more time with their children individually, trying to understand their particular spiritual struggles and providing them encouragement.

With all this emphasis on self-examination, however, it is crucial to keep your focus the *gospel*: All of us are more sinful and helpless than we would've ever dared admit, yet it Christ we are more accepted and forgiven than we would've ever dared hope. Be careful that your self-examination is centered on this good news. There is always the danger of falling into morbid introspection, which can lead to despair over your own spiritual health and to a harsh legalism toward others.

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.

The two major fast days of the traditional church year—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—both occur during the Lenten season. Traditionally, the other days of Lent—except Sundays, of course⁵—are marked by other acts of self-denial. Some common examples would be giving up one meal a day or giving up a

⁴ See the questions at the end of this paper for a place to start.

⁵ The traditional church calendar sometimes has a few other "feast days" during Lent as well.

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. (I've known some people to fast from watching too much television!) For families in this dangerously frenetic culture, Lent would be certainly be an appropriate time to cut back on the seemingly-endless flow of activities and spend time worshipping, praying, and learning together.

Since fasting is so unfamiliar to many in our culture, it is wise to consult with a pastor or other spiritual leader before making any decisions in this area. (Some people, of course—such as expectant or nursing mothers, the sick, and those on special diets—should not fast.) Before you begin fasting, I would recommend that you look at what the Scriptures say about the practice (see especially Matthew 6), and perhaps get some guidance from good books on the subject.⁶ And again, remember that there is nothing magic in these spiritual disciplines; they are tools to help you grow closer to Christ.

Acts of compassion. The Lenten season is a particularly appropriate time to ask God to fill you with compassion for the poor and oppressed and to put this into practice in concrete ways. This can take many practical forms. For example, there are Christians who give up one meal a day as a Lenten discipline, and then give the money they've saved by doing so to the poor. Many churches—including ours—have an Easter offering for ministries of mercy, so money saved during Lent could be given at that time. There are many ways in which families can practice compassion during Lent. In your

neighborhood, there may be a poor family you could help (with or without drawing attention to yourselves). Or maybe you know an older person who lives alone who could use some help around the house—or would simply like having a friend. Some families save their loose change or forego some simple expenditures, then give the money to the poor. Lent can be an excellent opportunity to teach our children the value of compassion.⁷

Using the means of grace. Finally, the Lenten season is a time for renewing our focus on the means of grace—a focus that all-too-easily fades when not given adequate attention. Historically, the church has said there are three means of grace—three instruments through which God helps us grow to be more and more like Christ: the Scriptures, prayer, and the sacraments.

If regular times of prayer and Bible study have never been a part of your life (or if they once were but have become less so) then Lent is a wonderful opportunity to begin these life-changing practice. There are scores of lectionaries and Bible-reading plans out there; talk with a pastor or mature Christian to help you find one right for you; there are also many helpful aids for developing a consistent life of prayer. The Lenten season would also be a good time to get involved in a small group—a practice that generations of Christians have commended as key to their spiritual growth. And if your family doesn't have a time of worship together, Lent is a great time to start—and then keep going the rest of the year!

⁶ An excellent discussion on fasting and other spiritual disciplines is found in Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (NavPress, 1991).

⁷ For more ideas on building compassion as a value in your family, see John & Susan Yates, *What Really Matters at Home: Eight Crucial Elements for Building Character in Your Family* (Word, 1992), especially chapter 5.

In our individualistic culture, it is all too easy to lose sight of the fact that Christianity is a *communal* faith, that the center of Christian life is not private religious devotion but corporate worship, gathering with fellow believers to sing, pray, and receive Holy Communion. There are many today who identify themselves as Christians but for whom the church is peripheral and tangential. If this sounds like you, then use this Lenten season to commit yourself to the community of God's people. If you are a follower of Christ and yet have never been baptized, then make every effort to be baptized as soon as possible. If you have been baptized, remember that in baptism you were incorporated into a community, the family of God, and that you are to join in the family meal, the Eucharist. And parents, the Lenten season is a wonderful time to help your children realize that the church is their family, that worship is their first duty and greatest joy. And if your children understand the gospel, then this season could be a wonderful time to take the steps toward having them admitted to the Lord's Table.

As Lent begins this year, my prayer for you is that this would be a truly blessed season, a time of genuine and significant spiritual growth for you and for your family. May God grant you a truly holy Lent.

Lord God, eternal and almighty Father, we join with the first Christians in praising you for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received forgiveness and eternal life. We thank you too that it became the custom of the church to prepare for the celebration of Christ's resurrection in a time of penitence and self-examination. Grant us, therefore, gracious Father, the grace to observe a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by

prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on your holy Word. Grant that we may remember that though we are dust, and to dust we shall return, that we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Appendix: Questions for Self-Examination:

1. *Have I been fervent in prayer? Was there warmth? Access?*
2. *Have I prayed at my stated times? With my family?*
3. *Have I practiced God's presence, at least every hour?*
4. *Have I, before every deliberate action or conversation, considered how it might be turned to God's glory?*
5. *Have I sought to center conversations on the other person's interests and needs and ultimately toward God, or did I turn them toward my own interests?*
6. *Have I given thanks to God after every pleasant occurrence or time?*
7. *Have I thought or spoken unkindly of anyone?*
8. *Have I been careful to avoid proud thoughts or comparing myself to others? Have I done things just for appearance? Have I mused on my own fame or acclaim?*
9. *Have I been sensitive, warm, and cheerful toward everyone?*
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?*

*In his set of questions for self-examination, the late Jack Miller gets right to the point:

1. *Is God working in your life?*
2. *Have you been repenting of your sin lately?*
3. *Are you building your life on Christ's free justification or are you insecure and guilt-ridden?*
4. *Have you done anything simply because you love Jesus?*
5. *Have you stopped anything simply because you love Jesus?*

*These questions are from *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Zondervan, 1986).



**CHRIST
THE REDEEMER**
-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH-

Christ the Redeemer Presbyterian Church
longs to be a diverse people who gather around
and extend the table of God's grace.

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE at 10:00 AM

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