

Lent



EMBRACING YOUR NEED FOR GOD

CREATED BY THE POLISHED NETWORK



Lent: Embracing Your Need for God

© 2024 by the Polished Network

Contributing Writers: Erin Baxter & Lindsey Wright

Designed by: Emily Gonzalez

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means —electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other— except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Dallas, Texas, by the Polished Network.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction | [What is Lent?](#)
Week 1 | [Ash Wednesday](#)
Week 2 | [Wilderness](#)
Week 3 | [Repentance](#)
Week 4 | [Waiting](#)
Week 5 | [Emptied and Filled](#)
Week 6 | [Humility](#)
Palm Sunday | [Both/And](#)
Maundy Thursday | [Gethsemane](#)
Good Friday | [Death, Suffering, Endings](#)
Holy Saturday | [Fear, Confusion, Silence](#)
Easter Sunday | [Hope, Resurrection, Life](#)



INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS LENT?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. This 40 day stretch leading up to Easter Sunday is meant to be a time to reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Traditionally, the Church has invited people to fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

At Polished, we want to invite you to consider how you can engage with this season to connect more deeply with your own humanity and need for God.

The number 40 is mentioned 146 times in Scripture and generally symbolizes a season of testing, trials, and then triumph.

God flooded the earth for 40 days and nights.
Goliath mocked and taunted Israel for 40 days and nights.
Moses was up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights.
The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years.
Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and nights.
Jesus remained on Earth for 40 days after His resurrection.

Consider how God might be asking you to turn your eyes towards Him over these next 40 days. Is there something He's asking you to lay down? Is there something He's asking you to practice? Is there someone He's asking you to pray for? We invite you to allow this season to draw you closer to Him.



During this season,
the faithful are to
grow in their love
of Jesus crucified.

Fr. John A. Hardon



From dust you
came and to dust
you shall return.

Genesis 3:19



WEEK 1 - ASH WEDNESDAY

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as if insubstantial—

Did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing

that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.

Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made,
and the stars that blaze
in our bones,
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

Blessing the Dust

JAN RICHARDSON



To be commanded to love God at all, let alone in the wilderness, is like being commanded to be well when we are sick, to sing for joy when we are dying of thirst, to run when our legs are broken. But this is the first and great commandment nonetheless. Even in the wilderness - especially in the wilderness - you shall love him.

*Frederick Buechner, A Room Called
Remember: Uncollected Pieces*



WEEK 2 - WILDERNESS

Whenever I think about Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days, I tend to remove his humanity. I mean, I'm human. And I cannot fathom going 40 days without food. I don't even like to go half a day without food. So when I sit and force myself to consider his humanity in the wilderness, I get uncomfortable. How did he do it? Why did he do it? Exactly what was he doing for those 40 days? Did he try to distract himself from the hunger pangs? Did he ever pass out from low blood sugar? When I think of him in the wilderness, these are my real questions as a fellow human.

There's so much we don't know about Jesus' life. So many moments untold. I wonder if he shared the details of those 40 days with his friends. Or were they sacred between him and his father? What I do know is that he did it. And he ended that time with a strength that allowed him to withstand the most tempting (but false promising) of offerings. And he emerged with clarity in his calling. Immediately, he began preaching and calling his disciples to follow him.

Thankfully, I've never felt God calling me to fast for a full 40 days. But that's not to say I haven't walked through wilderness seasons. I've felt the pang of emptiness. I've struggled to find energy. I've felt isolated, uncomfortable, and aimless. And when I've allowed myself to actually live in those places – not forcing a way out or salvaging crumbs or clinging to what's no longer there – I have met God in a new way. I've been stripped of so many of the things that gave me comfort and validation and affirmation. And I've slowly learned to rest in the very simple reality of being His. And finding that to be enough.

Whether you're actively participating in Lent or you've been led into your own wilderness, I pray that you come face to face with the most true thing about you: you are His. *Written for Polished by Lindsey Wright.*



WEEK 3 - REPENTANCE

Will you embrace forgiveness ...

For the impatience you conceded
the harsh tone you repeated
the mistakes you still defend.

For the truth you bent
the judgment you dispensed
the self you repeatedly forgot.

For the friend you disappointed
the person you avoided
the family you had to cut off.

For the times you stayed small
the avoidance of your call
the apathy you willingly embraced.



For the ways you over-indulged
the secrets you told
the people you never meant to hurt.

For the choices you regret
the pain that still upsets
the wreckage that haunts every day.

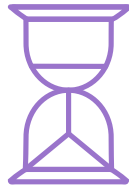
For the resentment you harbor
the ways that you barter
and all the things left unsaid.

There is forgiveness for you.
Forgiveness for that too.
Forgiveness whose flow never ends

Will you believe it?
Will you receive it?
Will you embrace it as true?



If most of life is
lived in the in-
between, then
what does it look
like to embrace
the unknown?



WEEK 4 - WAITING

The In-Between Space

So much of life is lived in-between.

In between your current job and your dream career.

In between time spent with people you love.

In between the hope you hide in your heart and the reality of right now.

In between work and play.

In between seasons.

In between relationships.

In between hard times.

In between good times.

The space in between tends to be the place where life is lived – on the journey between mountain and valley and mountain again. The in between is full of unknowns. Full of waiting. Full of living.

If most of life is lived in the in between, then what does it look like to embrace the unknown? To welcome the waiting? To live your life with connection, meaning, and joy?

What if the point of it all is presence ... and His presence?

Whether you're atop a mountain, shadowed in a valley, or somewhere in between, there is an invitation to practice presence. Be present with yourself. Be present with those around you. Accept His presence with you through it all.



WEEK 5 - EMPTIED AND FILLED

What's filling you? Where can you make space to connect with Christ?

Letting go of ...
people pleasing
pursuit of control
self-righteousness
spiritual bypassing
needing certainty
titles and salaries
self-condemnation
unspoken rules
dismissiveness
divisiveness
judgment
clinging to fear



Taking hold of ...
grace for yourself
grace for others
thoughtful boundaries
time in nature
the ways you are growing
God's love and acceptance
your unique gifts
space to feel
prayer
creative expression
a curious faith
unanswered questions

There are 2.5 more weeks of Lent. As you pay attention to this season, what are you choosing to let go of? What does that make space for you to take hold of?



Today when you
hear his voice,
don't harden your
hearts as Israel
did when they
rebelled.

Hebrews 3:15



WEEK 6 - HUMILITY

Have you ever experienced that thing where you have felt hungry for so long that you somehow don't feel hungry anymore? It's as if your brain tries to console your stomach's unfulfilled longing by signaling a removal of the hunger cues. Like that makes it better. As if that meets the need. But if you've ever gone past the point of feeling your hunger, then you know what's next. You lose your appetite.

The reality of an empty stomach hasn't changed, but your body adjusts to what it's given. In a way, it recalibrates what it feels it will receive. Your actual needs haven't changed. Just your ability to sense what you need.

I wonder if the proverbial wilderness brings on a similar experience for our spiritual lives. We can only endure the wilderness for so long. At some point the isolation, the emptiness, the confusion, the abandonment – it takes a toll. And I wonder if our brain's instinctive (and protective) response is to diminish the sensed need. We numb. We forget. We lose sight. We harden. But none of that changes the reality of what our souls need.

We need love, acceptance, belonging. We need security, purpose, delight. We need God. But extended time in the wilderness can make us forget. The only way to regain hunger cues is to eat. And the only way to reawaken our need for God is to behold Him. Or maybe rather, to behold our belovedness in Him.

If you find yourself having forgotten your need for love – that is, God – then receive this as an invitation to consider your belovedness. You are fully known, fully loved, and fully accepted just as you are. There is fullness to be found in connecting with the truth and love that is God within you. You can find revival for your soul even here, even now, even in the wilderness. *Written for Polished by Lindsey Wright.*



PALM SUNDAY - BOTH/AND

Palm Sunday begins Holy Week, the most solemn and significant seven days in the annual Christian calendar. Palm Sunday highlights the reality of the both/and of the Christian life. We are invited to embrace it all.

Both the Triumphal Entry of Jesus and the entrance into his place of death.
Both the joy of his presence and the sorrow of what is to come.
Both the power of his being and the humility of his reign.
Both the world's excitement for his coming and his anticipation of what's next.
Both the crowds of people who welcomed him and the few who would remain just a week later.
Both the fulfillment of a prophecy and the misunderstanding of what it would mean.
Both the symbol of victory with the palm branches and the actual victory which had yet to come.
Both the hope for freedom from oppression and the faith to continue believing even if it's not what we hope.
Both the desire for political peace and the need for spiritual peace.

Take some time today to consider where you may need to make space for both ... and ... in your life today. Maybe there is the presence of both joy and sorrow. Perhaps your days are filled with both laughter and tears. It could be that you need to both accept that you are loved and continue to pursue growth. Maybe you're realizing that others have both done their best and still let you down. Maybe you are both overwhelmed by and grateful for your job.

We are quick to create false dichotomies for ourselves and others. But when we look at Palm Sunday, we have to accept that often more than one thing is true. We can both celebrate the arrival of our King and accept that we don't know what's next. What both/and realities is He asking you to make space for today?



So they took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!”

John 12:13



MAUNDY THURSDAY - GETHSEMANE

Jesus wept. Those two words — that one short verse — give me comfort that is indescribable. It feels odd, I know, to find comfort in the sorrow of Jesus Christ Himself. But when I see how Jesus expressed emotion, that He grieved, even when He knew the ending, I feel freedom to access my own pain.

You see, Jesus wept over His friend Lazarus in John 11:35, even though He knew full well that the man was about to walk out of that grave. While He knew the other side of the pain, He shared in the grief of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, and suffered the sting of death.

We see this painful sting hit Jesus again in Mark 14:34. As He sits in the Garden of Gethsemane, waiting to be taken to the most excruciating death any human could sustain, one friend betrays Him and others neglect Him in His time of need. It is then that He says, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

If you have experienced significant trauma, you have an understanding of that overwhelming sorrow. I imagine we can all recall a time when pain overtook us. And how beautiful it is that He knows that sorrow too. How wonderful it is that He continued on despite it. How life-giving that Jesus knew the other side of what was to come and yet, there was still grief in the journey.

We can lament, even when we know that there is another side of Heaven waiting for us one day. We can lament even when there is still so much good in our lives. Regardless of what we know to be true, our pain is real, and He knows that well.

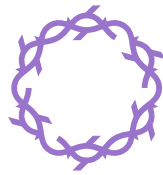
Today, if you need to, allow yourself to feel that overwhelming sorrow. Don't hold it in. Feel as Christ felt. And know that as you weep, He wept too. *Written for Polished by Erin Baxter.*



“Maundy” comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning “command.” This stems from Christ’s words in John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”



He was
obedient to
death, because
He loves us.



GOOD FRIDAY - DEATH, SUFFERING, ENDINGS

If there's one reality none of us can escape, it's death. Literal death. Metaphorical death. Tangential death. Death of loved ones. Death of dreams. Death of seasons. Death of our own selves.

It's a reality that our culture doesn't have much of a framework for. We tend to avoid thoughts of it, talk of it, and feelings around it – even in the face of it. When we feel threatened by death, we turn to control. We look for pieces, patterns, and power to grab hold of. We build walls, close fists, and look away. We become desperate for some way to secure our lives as we want them to be.

But in the end, we all come to the realization that we do not have power over death. We cannot control it, avoid it, or overcome it. Death will happen in its own time, despite whatever we may think, say, feel, or do. Any control we conceive of is an illusion when it comes to death. We are all bound to this reality. Except one.

Jesus.

The one person to live on this earth with the actual power and control to avoid death – and He didn't. Instead, He submitted Himself to the point of death. And this upside down way of living – and dying – His death is what we remember today.

In a world full of death and people who are fighting against it, there once was a man who had the power of God to shape His own fate, and yet He chose (or at the very least allowed) death. And for today, this is where we sit. At the foot of the cross. With swirling unanswered questions and confusion about what's real. Let the remembrance of Good Friday be an invitation to stay here. Even for just a moment. We know Sunday is coming. But today is here now and it has something to offer us.



Meditate in the quiet of the liminal space. Today, we know Resurrection Sunday comes, but 2,000+ years ago, the disciples were left in confusion and fear.



HOLY SATURDAY - FEAR, CONFUSION, SILENCE

If you've ever felt confused about your faith, you're not alone. If you've ever felt like the rug was pulled out from under you, you're not alone. If you've ever felt like everything you thought was real has suddenly come crashing down, you're not alone. If you've ever felt afraid to associate with Jesus, you're not alone. If you've ever felt the devastating loss of someone you desperately loved, you're not alone. If you've ever hidden away from the world because you don't know what to do next, you're not alone. If you've ever felt like all the momentum in your life came to a screeching halt, you're not alone. If you've ever felt like everything you believed might actually be untrue, you're not alone.

As post-resurrection Christians, we often overlook the experience of Holy Saturday. But just as it harms us to spiritually bypass our real experiences now, it does us a profound disservice to breeze past the real experiences of the disciples after Jesus' death. That day between the crucifixion and the resurrection has so much to offer us. So much we can identify with. So much space to help us accept our own experiences. So much validation for our own confusion, fear, and pain.

While we may know the full story of Easter, the reality is that we've never lived to see, hear, or touch Jesus in flesh and blood. Our lives are lived in the belief that a story that's been passed down through generations is real and true and relevant to our lives today. In a way, our lives are lived in the fog of that Saturday. We've been told the story of resurrection, but we still have to hold onto belief for its truth.

Friend, there is so much grace for your story. Will you let today be an invitation to imagine Holy Saturday from Jesus' loved one's perspective? And will you allow that to open a door for you to engage with your own story? Your confusion, your heartache, your fear, your anger. It's all valid. Tomorrow, we'll remember the miracle of resurrection and all that it has to offer us, but for today, give yourself space to be human, even if that means you don't know what to think, feel, or believe.



The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay."

Matthew 28:5-6



EASTER SUNDAY - HOPE, RESURRECTION, LIFE

The first people to *hear* the good news of Jesus' resurrection? Two women.
The first people to *share* the good news of Jesus' resurrection? Two women.

At a time when men often avoided women, so as not to become ceremonially unclean, Jesus sought them out and spoke with them. At a time when devout men literally thanked God that they were not women, Jesus invited women to follow Him. Maybe it was divine orchestration that allowed women to be first to the empty tomb. But maybe it was something else, too.

Perhaps women were first to the tomb, because they'd been so profoundly aware of how divergent He was from so many of the other men they'd encountered. Perhaps they were sensitive to noticing how He was turning things upside down because, for women, His treatment of them was upside down.

Maybe their intimate connection and loyal devotion to Jesus was rooted in their experience of Him restoring what had never been given to them by the world they lived in. Jesus offered and continues to offer women dignity, respect, freedom, and invitation.

But maybe also, part of the reason it was women who first heard and shared the good news is because the impact He had on them was so radical that they literally could not care less what danger or criticism they faced by following Him ... even to death ... and back to life.

Today we remember and celebrate that He is risen! And we nod our heads to a Jesus who, for whatever reason, revealed that first to women. May we embrace His radical acceptance of all who may be cast out and trust that if He restored dignity to the women in His life, then maybe we can believe He offers us the same.

