

Lent 2021 Prayer Pals A 40-day Journey of Noticing God More

When you think of Lent, chances are one of the first things that come to mind is “giving something up,” as in “I’m giving up chocolate for Lent.” That is sort of right. But not quite. When you stop doing something you’re used to doing (like eating dessert), you notice different things. Lent is like that.

Our Lenten Series, adapted by a Fuller Youth Institute curriculum, will provide us weekly opportunities to consider subtracting something from our lives. Subtracting something is not just for the sake of ‘giving something up’ or to assist us in earning God’s favor or to punish us for what we did or did not do all the other seasons of the church year. Rather, together we will weekly subtract something so we – or perhaps God – can add something new, in order for us to notice God more.

Wednesday Themes for Lent

February 17 (Ash Wednesday): Notice, Matthew 6:1-18

February 24: Unplug, Exodus 20:8-11

March 3: Receive, John 1:1-16

March 10: Yield, Philippians 2:1-11

March 17: Simplify, Matthew 6:25-34

March 24: Lament, Psalm 77

Prayer Pal Student/Adult Expectations

- Meet weekly for 20 minutes. If possible, set the same time each week or plan all six-week meeting times in advance. You can choose to meet in person or via zoom or facetime, depending on your covid-comfort level.
- At your weekly meeting:
 - Notice God in Word: Read the designated Bible passage
 - Notice God in the Moment: Use the question prompts to assist in your discussion.
 - Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting from your week.
 - Notice God Speaking: Pray together
- Encouraged, but not expected:
 - Pick-up from the church, beginning Ash Wednesday, a Lent in a Bag, which is filled with weekly projects to enhance your discussion. If your family is not participating in Lent in a Bag, Prayer Pals can.
 - Join us at the cross on Wednesdays at 12:00 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. in our parking lot. To participate, you can stand outside by the warm fire or in your car, listening in on your FM radio. The Wednesday worship time lasts approximately 20 minutes. I strongly encourage attending on Ash Wednesday, February 17.

- NOTE: The overall purpose of Prayer Pal time is to create and foster a friendship with a person of faith. The discussion questions are to assist you, but you are not obligated to complete them for success. The most important part of Prayer Pal Time is actually meeting, chatting and building a friendship. Worry less about completing the materials. Focus on what you can do and discuss in the time you have together. For example, if you only get to sharing a God Sighting and prayer, bravo!
- NOTE: If you or your pal doesn't have a Bible, go to biblegateway.com. This is a tool to look up Bible passages. We tend to use the Common English Bible or the New Revised Standard Version

Weekly Lent Prayer Pal Meeting Materials:

February 17 (Ash Wednesday): Notice

- Notice God in Word: Read Matthew 6:1-18
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - Notice what Jesus is asking followers to do. Why do you think he expects this? (Notice Jesus states the expectation with the words “When you...”)
 - Lent involves a form of “fasting”, which usually means some kind of hunger (subtracting something). Fasting may mean we avoid eating a food, choose to go without TV, Snapchat or Xbox, for a certain period of time. Why is fasting/subtracting something a spiritual practice? Perhaps, so God can add something new in the gap left by whatever you choose to give up.
 - Consider what you may subtract as a team this Lent.
 - Now, don’t subtract just for the sake of giving something up. Instead, discuss what you will add. (God’s math equation!) For example, if you give up an hour watching television, what will you do with that extra time? If you give up lattes, what do you do with the extra money?
 - Commit to sharing each week how you are doing? Are you noticing God working?
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting from your week.
- Notice God Speaking: Use “The Fast Life” poem as a form of prayer. Conclude with the Lord’s Prayer.

The Fast Life

Fast from judging others; Feast on Christ dwelling in them.

Fast from fear of illness; Feast on the healing power of God.

Fast from words that pollute; Feast on speech that purifies.

Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude.

Fast from anger; Feast on patience.

Fast from pessimism; Feast on hope.

Fast from negatives; Feast on encouragement.

Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness.

Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion.

Fast from suspicion; Feast on truth.

Fast from gossip; Feast on purposeful silence.

Fast from problems that overwhelm; Feast on prayer that sustains.

Fast from anxiety; Feast on faith.

~Author Unknown~

February 24: Unplug

- Notice God in Word: Read Exodus 20:8-11
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - The Ten Commandments are much more than a set of rules. They describe principles for being in relationship with God and neighbors.
 - Sabbath means “stop”. A Sabbath is an intentional interruption of your schedule to spend time being in relationship with God and neighbors. Think of Sabbath as “unplugging” a distraction in order to engage deeper in relationship with another.
 - Name all the distractions in your life – the things that cause you anxiety, fear, or stress.
 - Discuss together what is a distraction you can intentionally unplug from to create space to notice God? This doesn’t need to be something that literally plugs in. This can be any of life’s distractions. It could be you saying “no” to an unnecessary commitment, etc.
 - Take it a step further (doing God’s math), what will you add? Time with a family member, silence in a noisy day, a walk?
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting from your week. If you subtracted or added something, share how God has been at work.
- Notice God Speaking: For your prayer, read the excerpt from Psalm 46 twice. Once by the student, once by the teacher. Conclude with the Lord’s Prayer.

Psalm 46

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change,
Though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
The holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
He utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

March 3: Receive

- Notice God in Word: Read John 1:1-16
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - Paying special attention to the wording John uses to describe Jesus, what do you notice? How is Jesus described?
 - Did you notice you are not expected to do anything to receive the gift of Jesus and the gifts from Jesus? (Of course, trusting the gift is yours is important but the gift is still there whether you do or don't!)
 - Part of what makes the message of Christ so radical is that in a world that comes with so many strings attached, God's gift through Jesus is exactly the opposite. It is an expensive gift, but a gift that we don't earn.
 - Too often in life, gifts come to us with "strings" attached – expectations, obligations or work we must do to earn them.
 - During the week, when you see a family member doing something you appreciate, jot down the affirmation on a note and put it in a place they will find it. Next week share what you notice when someone receives an unearned gift.
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting after unplugging during week.
- Notice God Speaking: Pray "Prayer for Daily Grace" followed by the Lord's Prayer

Prayer for Daily Grace

Loving Lord, you have loved me when I was unlovable. I am so amazingly grateful that I know you and I can experience your wonderful presence in my life. Give me this day your grace in how I live my life today. Give me wisdom and gentleness in how I interact with others. Make me peaceable and gentle. May I have a mind that is open to reason and shows mercy. In all of today's tasks, grant me the wisdom and grace to be sincere and meek. Thank you that you pour out your grace upon grace upon me. Amen.

March 10: Yield

- Notice God in Word: Read Philippians 2:1-11
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - To yield something is to give it up for some other reason or purpose. You probably see yield signs on the road, where cars from one direction must yield – or give way – to the cars coming from a different direction. God calls us to yield to God and God’s purposes.
 - In the Bible reading, what did you notice about yielding? How does Jesus yield to God’s purpose? How is yielding connected to last week’s ‘receiving God’s grace with no strings attached’?
 - Every day we are making choices as to whether and how we will yield to God. If you yielded your schedule to God, what might need to change?
 - Discuss an ‘act of yielding’ what matters to you for the sake of another. In other words, how might you act to bless someone in your family or a neighbor?
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting – how did a family member respond to your ‘no strings attached affirmation’ this week?
- Notice God Speaking: Pray together the Yielding Prayer followed by the Lord’s Prayer.

Yielding Prayer

God, part of me would rather do _____ with my relationships, but I am grateful to you, and I want to honor you and learn to trust you. So, here I am offering _____ to build my relationship with you and others. Assist me in yielding to your purpose. Amen.

March 17: Simplify

- Notice God in Word: Read Matthew 6:25-34
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - Simplifying our lives by letting go of stuff helps us to notice and trust in God's provision for us each day.
 - Make a list of the ways God has provided for you today.
 - Name one "thing" that you don't need but keep anyway. Why?
 - In the Bible story, Jesus invites us to live a life that is not complicated by fear and worries of this world, but is guided by the simple truth that we can put our trust in God who knows our needs and provides for us. Why is this difficult?
 - Discuss committing to cleaning out your bedroom closet and find one item to donate. Share places you know that will take donations.
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting after serving this week.
- Notice God Speaking: Pray the 'Everything We Need' prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Everything We Need to be Satisfied:

Dear Lord, life has a tendency to become more complex. More filled up. Busier. Our culture asks us to do more, to be more, to have more. Others have agendas for our time. We have expectations for ourselves. We have hopes and plans for the future.

I pray you would give us rest from all of that. Rest from striving. Rest from other's expectations. Rest from all the stuff that accumulates around us. That we would rest in the knowledge that you've given everything we need in this moment to be satisfied. Amen.

March 24: Lament

- Notice God in Word: Read Psalm 77
- Notice God in the Moment:
 - Share your top five favorite songs. Why? Sometimes songs become our favorites because they have a good beat or a catchy tune, but often songs move us because they articulate our feelings. They help us express that giddy feeling when we see that special guy or gal or how angry we feel that our parents are divorced. Are these emotions expressed in your favorite songs also emotions you share with God? Why or why not?
 - A Lament is a form of prayer or worship that allows us to cry out to God in the midst of painful experiences. Laments help us keep our relationship with God honest. It is about naming and embracing our deepest emotions and bringing them to God instead of ignoring or not dealing with our disappointments. Laments do acknowledge God's presence.
 - The writer of Psalm 77 has essentially created two lists. The first nine verses line up disappointments and grievances against God and don't seem to hold anything back! Then in verses 10-20 the list switches to the character and actions of God.
 - Take time to create your own two lists – one with doubts, hurts, fear and disappointments and the other with what you do know to be true about God.
- Notice God throughout the Week: Share a God Sighting from your week of simplifying a closet.
- Notice God Speaking: Pray the 'Remind Me God' prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer.

Remind Me God

Dear God, I come before you. I am laying my fear and anxiety at your feet. I ask that you help me get through all of the doubts and fears when I feel as if I am being crushed. Remind me that you are a powerful God. Remind me that I can trust you. Remind me that you always show up. I know I can't do this on my own. I need you. I am glad that nothing can separate me from your love; neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, because of the love you reveal in Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:38-39) Amen.