

Return *to me*



Daily Lenten Reflections

About *Return to Me*

“Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.”
—Joel 2:12-13a

These Ash Wednesday verses set the stage for a Lenten practice. Over the next 40 days, you are invited to explore the journey of return. In the Hebrew scriptures, God’s people turn away from God and return to God again and again. The process is not linear, nor is it ever complete.

The next six weeks we will explore the theme *Return to Me* through creating a hands-on Lenten space, fasting, praying, giving, journaling, and spiritual practices.

While we use these practices during Lent, none of them are exclusive to the season. They can be used at anytime in your faith journey.

The reflections and practices in this booklet are designed for use by the whole congregation—from children to adults. While some prompts are adjusted for age, feel free to tweak them to best fit your context.

Use these prompts as a guide in a daily practice of seeking God. Let this practice of seeking and connection empower you to love and serve your neighbor.



PrePare



PREPARATION - ASH WEDNESDAY WEEK

Either on Ash Wednesday or in the days before, clear some space in a frequently used part of the house to create a Lenten space. Over the next six weeks, you'll add different symbols to this space to guide you on your Lenten journey.

ASH WEDNESDAY - DAY 1

LENTEN SPACE

"Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Pour sand into a dish. Experience the feel of it. Trace a cross into the sand, and remember that you are made from the earth and will return back to it.

THURSDAY - DAY 2

GIVE

Write an invitation from God to you to participate in Lent. How is God asking you to return? Who else can you invite to join you on this Lenten journey?

FRIDAY - DAY 3

GROW

Journal: It can be hard to start something new. What holds you back? How can you remember that God is with you?

SATURDAY - DAY 4

Spend time drawing close to God today by using a labyrinth. If you don't have access to a labyrinth to walk, scan the code to print one to trace with your finger.

PRACTICE



Tear



SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.”
—Joel 2:12-13a

“There is a crack in everything that you can put together: Physical objects, mental objects, constructions of any kind. But that’s where the light gets in, and that’s where the resurrection is and that’s where the return, that’s where the repentance is. It is with the confrontation, with the brokenness of things.”
—Leonard Cohen

This week is about exploring the beauty in what’s broken, finding the holy in what’s been torn. Take time to break open what is solidified inside you and to be vulnerable before God.

MONDAY - DAY 5

LENTEN SPACE

Tear a sheet of paper into a heart. Observe the torn edges and imperfections. The heart is just how it is supposed to be.

What are the torn edges and imperfections in yourself that can use compassion when you look at them?

For Kids: No one is perfect. God finds lots of ways to use us—even our imperfections. How can you share God’s love with your whole self?

TUESDAY - DAY 6

PRAY

Feeling and naming emotions can open us up to growth and wholeness. Reflect on a list of emotions—which do you feel regularly and which do you avoid? Pick a few to pray about—how they’ve impacted you in the past or in the present. Which would you like to feel more of?



scan for list
of emotions

For Kids: Talk through a few of the emotions and when they show up. How is God present in all the different emotions? Say a prayer thanking God for your emotions.

WEDNESDAY - DAY 7

FAST

Fast from making everything okay today. If negative emotions or hard circumstances arise, let them be. Allow yourself space for discomfort.

Read more about “The Tyranny of Relentless Positivity.” →



THURSDAY - DAY 8

GIVE

Often we take for granted or belittle our gifts—we don’t see them as the wonders they are. Try to look at your gifts from God’s perspective. How do your gifts serve the world? How can you offer yourself today?

For Youth + Kids: What is unique about you? What gifts do you have? Knowing that the wonder of who you are is given by God, how can you share yourself and/or your gifts today?

FRIDAY - DAY 9

GROW

“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.”

– Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*

Journal. What does vulnerability mean to you? When have you chosen to be vulnerable and how did it turn out? What did you learn from that experience?

For Kids: Trust comes before vulnerability. Who do you trust enough to be vulnerable with? Why do you trust them?

SATURDAY - DAY 10

PRACTICE

Prayer of the Heart*. Use your breath to pray today with one of the phrases below, or scan the QR code for instructions on how to develop your own Prayer of the Heart.

Your grace // is enough for me

In Christ alone // my soul finds rest

Holy Wisdom // guide me



For Kids: As you breathe in, imagine being filled with God’s light. Feel the warmth inside your body. As you breathe out, imagine God’s light filling the world.

Turn



SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

– Psalm 51:10-12

In order to return to God, we must acknowledge the ways we have become distant. When we confess our sins to God, we name the places where we have turned away from God and how we want to turn back. We trust in God’s mercy to forgive our sins and return us to wholeness. Do you find confessing your sins to be natural or difficult? Why do you think that is?

MONDAY - DAY 11

LENTEN SPACE

“Confession is the sacrament of the tenderness of God, God’s way of embracing us.”

– Pope Francis

Place a stone in your Lenten space. Name the places you have turned away from God. Now flip the stone over and know that God is always there waiting for your return.

TUESDAY - DAY 12

PRAY

Confession Body Prayer. Pray the prayer below with your voice, and use the movement instructions to also pray with your body.

O God, we try to hide from you,
hoping you won’t see our wrongdoings.
We have turned away from you,
trying to make our own path.
Help us let go of what we hold tight
and draw us close to you.
Amen.

touch head
touch eyes
push arms out
press arms down
make fists and release them
wrap arms around self

WEDNESDAY - DAY 13

FAST

Fast from Idols. What do you spend your time thinking about or wishing for? What prevents you from feeling fulfilled in your life? Write it down on a sheet of paper and offer it to God by placing it in your Lenten space. Each time those desires pop up during the day, offer them to God instead of dwelling on them.

For Kids: It's easy to let things take the place of God in our hearts and lives. Make a list of those things on a sheet of paper, and offer them to God by placing the paper in the Lenten space.

Pray together: "Dear God, fill our hearts with your love so that all we say and do may be like you. Amen."

THURSDAY - DAY 14

GIVE

Give as many blessings as you can today. A blessing can be as small as a smile filled with God's love, as intentional as placing your hand on someone and offering words of kindness, or as fun as blowing bubbles to remind us of the joy of God's goodness and mercy.

For Kids: Take turns blowing bubbles on family members. Once the bubbles are in the air say, "God blesses you with ____" and name a blessing. You can choose words like love, peace, and joy—or be creative!

FRIDAY - DAY 15

GROW

Journal. Imagine yourself turning toward God. What is behind you that you are turning away from? What does the path in front of you look like?

For Kids: What are the things in your life that separate you from God? After brainstorming for a moment, take turns standing up, turning to face a new direction, and say what you're turning away from.

SATURDAY - DAY 16*

PRACTICE

Prayer Knots. Find a small rope or string. As you hold the rope in your hand, consider what you seek forgiveness for. As these come to mind, make a knot in your rope. Continue this process until you have 4-5 knots in your rope. Go back to the first knot, holding it and the confession that knot represents. Hear God's assurance that you are forgiven. You are loved. Continue the process for each knot.

Guide



SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

– Psalm 119:105

We do not travel the path to God on our own. Our journey is filled with guides—scripture, mentors, teachings—that assist us on our path. In turn, we too can be guides for others. Spend time reflecting on the guides that have been present in your life.

MONDAY - DAY 17

LENTEN SPACE

Write a Bible verse or quote that is a guide for you and place it in your Lenten space.

TUESDAY - DAY 18

PRAY

Breath Prayer. Pick a word or phrase to say on your inhale, and one for your exhale. It can be two parts of a bible verse, or what you need from God and what you want to offer to the world.

Your grace // is enough for me.

In Christ alone // my soul finds rest.

Holy Wisdom // guide me.

For Kids: As you breathe in, fill yourself with God’s love. As you breathe out, blow God’s love into the world.

WEDNESDAY - DAY 19

FAST

Fast from Wasting Time. What do you use to distract and/or entertain yourself? Social media? YouTube? Binge watching? Spend the day going without, and offer those distractions to God.

For Kids: What is your favorite way to entertain yourself? Imagine offering it to God for the day and spending one day without it. If it’s small enough, you can even place it in your Lenten space to show that it’s for God today.

THURSDAY - DAY 20

GIVE

Think of someone who has taught you—a teacher, mentor, or spiritual guide. Write a note of thanks for the ways they have guided you and send it to them.

For Youth: Think of your favorite teacher from either this year or a previous year. Write them a note of thanks and give it to them.

For Kids: Make a card or draw a picture for your teacher thanking them for their hard work.

FRIDAY - DAY 21

GROW

Journal. What scripture speaks most to you right now? Write it down and your thoughts on why it is a guide.

For Youth: Pick one of the following scripture passages (or one of your favorites). What meaning does it have for your life right now?

“Be strong and courageous. Don’t be alarmed or terrified, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” – Joshua 1:9

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” – Amos 5:24

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” – Luke 10:27

For Kids: Draw a picture of one of the verses printed above and hang it up somewhere so you’ll be reminded of its message.

SATURDAY - DAY 22

PRACTICE

Meditation on the Heart’s Longing*

“The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’”
—John 1:35-38

Imagine Jesus asking, “What are you looking for?” What would you say? What are you searching or longing for? Spend time in silence pondering this question.

For Kids: Let Jesus be your guide today. Think about his instructions to love one another in all that you do.



SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

– Isaiah 40:28-31

No matter how good they are, journeys are exhausting. They pull us out of our regular routines and immerse us in a new place. We're more than halfway through our Lenten journey, and it's easy to lose momentum from here on out. Take each day as its own journey, trusting in the present moment, and know that God's strength is there for you.

MONDAY - DAY 23

LENTEN SPACE

Our own rhythms are tied to the rhythm of nature around us. Head outside today to find something that speaks to you or represents where you are on your journey and add it to your Lenten space.

TUESDAY - DAY 24

PRAY

Walking Prayer. Take your prayer on the go today and pray while you are taking a walk. You can give thanks for creation, pray for neighbors, or look for signs of new life.

WEDNESDAY - DAY 25

FAST

Fast from Unexamined Habits. Without regular evaluation, we often carry too much on our journeys. Take time to reflect on what you are carrying these days. What still serves you? What can you lay down? Fast from what no longer serves you today.

Youth and Kid options continued on next page.

WEDNESDAY - CONTINUED

For Youth: Think about what you do automatically every day. Is there anything you wish you could change? Pick one habit to do differently today. How does it feel?

For Kids: Think of your daily actions. Are there any that aren't kind or helpful? Even though it's hard, try not to do those things today.

THURSDAY - DAY 26

GIVE

Physical items can also weigh us down. What do you have more than enough of that you can share with someone else? Collect those items and give them to help another.

FRIDAY - DAY 27

GROW

Journal. Our journeys don't follow a straight path—they wander and circle back on themselves. Where are you on your journey? At a stage of newness? Marching down a well-worn path? Reaching a peak or goal? Trudging through the sand?

For Youth: Reflect on your life's journey to this point. What are some of the key moments? Where are you headed right now, and how is God present with you?

For Kids: What are the most important moments in your life? How was God present in those moments?

SATURDAY - DAY 28

PRACTICE

Plan a pilgrimage. Find a place near you that would be meaningful to visit and schedule a time to go.

Nourish



SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

– John 6:35

When health professionals tell us to nourish our bodies, we know to load up on fruits and vegetables. Similarly, our souls need nourishment, too. Things like scripture, prayer, communion, and community can nourish our souls, but nourishment doesn't have to stop there. What actions or practices nourish your soul?

MONDAY - DAY 29

LENTEN SPACE

Think about what nourishes you spiritually. Use modeling clay or find an object in your house that represents what you picked.

TUESDAY - DAY 30

PRAY

“O taste and see that the Lord is good.”

– Psalm 34:8

Put a piece of candy in your mouth and let the sweetness fill you as it dissolves. While you wait for it to dissolve, let yourself be filled with the sensation, and say a prayer of thanksgiving for the goodness of God!

WEDNESDAY - DAY 31

FAST

Fast from Processed Food. So much of what we put into our bodies does not nourish us. Fast from processed food today and eat simply. Reflect on how these foods feel in your mouth as you chew them.

THURSDAY - DAY 32

GIVE

Give food to nourish others. Collect or buy food to give to a little free pantry or a food bank. If possible, find out what items are most needed and buy those.

FRIDAY - DAY 33

GROW

Journal. Reflect on what nourishes your body, your mind, and your spirit. Make a list for each of these areas in the space below or in a journal that you can refer to.

SATURDAY - DAY 34

PRACTICE

Pick at least one item from yesterday's lists to put into practice. You can even try to do one from each area!



What nourishes your **mind**?

What nourishes your **body**?

What nourishes your **soul**?



SUNDAY - PALM SUNDAY

PREPARE

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:4-5

There is comfort in knowing that we abide in Jesus—we don’t have to do it all ourselves. The vine is responsible for drawing water and nutrients from the soil and passing it to the branches. The branches can then focus on growing the fruit. Knowing that you are part of a larger whole, what fruit do you grow?

MONDAY - DAY 35

LENTEN SPACE

Get three pieces of string, ideally in three colors. Let the strands represent God, your neighbor, and yourself. Braid them together and reflect on how the kin-dom of God flourishes when these three strands are in balance. Place it in your Lenten space.

TUESDAY - DAY 36

PRAY

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

—Psalm 46:10

Light a candle, and repeat “*Be still and know that I am God*” as you watch it flicker. Dwell in God’s presence and feel yourself filled with God’s love.

For Kids: Lighting a candle helps us feel God’s presence when we pray. Though you don’t want to get too close, the warmth of the flame reminds us of the warmth of God’s love. As the family sits around the candle, let each person take a turn praying, “Our hearts rest in you, O God.”

WEDNESDAY - DAY 37

FAST

Fast from wanting more. Each time a thought of wanting more arises, pause and give thanks for all you have.

MAUNDY THURSDAY - DAY 38

GIVE

“When we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and seeds of hope. We also secure the future for our children.”

– Wangari Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*

Give new life. Jesus told his disciples that he is the bread of life, and we remember these words each time we take communion. You can give new life by planting a tree or plant. It can be physically using seeds, or virtually at onetreerplanted.org.



GOOD FRIDAY - DAY 39

GROW

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

– Psalm 22:1

Journal. On this Good Friday, we remember that even Jesus felt distant from God at times and expressed deep anguish over it. When do you feel far from God? How can you know God’s presence in those moments?

HOLY SATURDAY - DAY 40

PRACTICE

Lose yourself in the spiritual practice of coloring. Allow God’s presence to fill you as you color and wait for Jesus’ resurrection. How does the act of coloring open you to feeling God’s presence?

NOTES

Day 10: Prayer of the Heart. *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* by Teresa A. Blythe.

Day 18: Forgiveness Ropes. By Theresa E. Cho. You can find it and many more interactive prayer stations on her website theresaecho.com.

Day 22: Meditation on the Heart’s Longing. *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* by Teresa A. Blythe.

Bless



SUNDAY - EASTER SUNDAY

GO

“May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.”

—Jude 1:2

Though our Lenten journey is at an end, our spiritual journey continues. Through these weeks of return, our souls have found rest in the One in whom we live and move and have our being. We have journeyed inward to be sustained in our outward journey of caring for God’s people and creation.

Share this blessing from Jude with someone today. If you have members of your family with you, take turns saying it to one another. You can even put your hand on another’s shoulder or head when you say it. If you do not have anyone in person with you, give this blessing over the phone or on a video chat.