



Winter is growing tired, our souls are tired. It is the time of year we drag our heavy feet and faces towards the hope promised by Spring. It's the time of year we get cabin fever, we get coughs and fevers, we get ready for something news. Lent invites us to embrace this time. Lent (which means Spring!) is the time to slow down, rest, and get to some of that spring cleaning we've been meaning to all winter. That is what Lent is for—to clear out the cobweb-ridden old boxes that are stuffing the attic, to finally dust behind the picture frames in the living room, to go through that closet that has become the catch-all for the year's unwanted junk. Lent invites us to clear out some of the things that hold us back and take a step toward our better selves, which also brings us closer to God and closer to others.

Lent is a time to challenge ourselves to **choose better things**—for our bodies, our souls, and our spirits. The 40 days of Lent help us contain this new experiment and also help us have more space to discern what else in our lives are blocking us from God, from others, and from being our best selves.

Joan Chittister, author of *The Liturgical Year*, says, "Lent enables us to face ourselves, to see the weak places, to touch the wounds in our own soul, and to determine to try once more to live beyond our lowest aspirations." It reorients, re-grounds, and re-centers us, empowering us to live in a more whole way. It offers us....*Spring*.

Many people associate Lent just with Fasting or "giving up something." Sure that may be a helpful practice, but I think really what fasting and Lent are all about is **creating space** in your life to focus more deeply, see more clearly, and act more authentically. It is the joyful preparation for Easter, where we take a good look at ourselves to get ready for the celebration. Fasting helps clear our vision but it also helps create space to be filled with other and better things than we usually fill ourselves with.

Practices:

So many practices can be helpful around Lent. Each person might discern for themselves what is something it'd be good for them to give up and what'd be something else good to add in?

The traditional practice is to fast from food and fill that mealtime with prayer and the saved money go to almsgiving. There can be many creative takes on this structure though. Spend some time discerning what God is inviting you to in this season. And as always, practices are meant to help draw us closer to God, to community, and to our best selves. So it's not about extreme measures, perfect adherence, or spiritual status. Try to follow what seems right, challenging, and honoring to you.

Fasting

-From food: You can do a meal, a day of the week, or a certain kind of food. The idea is to put you back in touch with what it means to be hungry, to want, and to go unsatisfied for a little bit.

-From distractions: Netflix, social media, the news, novels, anything that is cluttering your internal world. One of the aims of Lent is to make space in our over-crowded lives so we can fill out time and energy with better things.

Prayer

-Praying at a new time: Some form of [The Liturgy of the Hours](#) is often a good Lent practice. Or maybe you get up an extra 20min earlier every morning. Or get to church 30min early to pray. Or pray on your lunchbreak. Or on your commute.

-Praying in a new way: There are so many ways to pray. Try to connect with God in a way that's new to you -art, poetry, contemplative walks, centering prayer, dance, music, silence, yoga. Or pray more in groups or with another -[Small groups](#), Spiritual Direction, or even a prayer with your roommate can often open up new parts of yourself to God.

Almsgiving

-Give Money: We are all acutely aware of the many needs of this country and this world. There are so many people on the ground doing amazing work. If you can't join them, giving money is a great way to support those working for causes you believe in that are helping this world's most vulnerable.

-Give Time: We're all busy. Super busy. But our schedules say a lot about us and what our priorities are. Lent is a good time to [volunteer](#) someplace new, take some time to meet a neighbor, or call a friend who's struggling.

-Give Energy and Creativity: So much of your energy and creativity during the day goes to work. But they shouldn't get it all! There's so much good work that needs to be done in this world, and it doesn't all pay. Trust in your wisdom and experience. Offer your ideas and energy here at the Paulist Center or to some other group or cause that you believe in.

Other

-Assess your bad habits: maybe you haven't been exercising, have been watching a lot of low-quality t.v., have been overspending your budget. Lent is a good time to re-set and reevaluate. Treat yourself well and kindly this season.

-*Spring Cleaning*: Lent does mean “Spring” after all. And cleaning out your house is often a good companion to cleaning out your heart. Making space physically automatically helps you make space mentally, too!

-SO many more! Ideas for practices are endless. But really it’s about discerning what God might be inviting you to. Do any the above ideas (or ones you’ve heard somewhere else) resonate with you? Stick with you over a few days? Challenge you? Make you feel a sense of relief? Take some time and discern before the season begins.

Thoughtful Blogposts, articles, and videos:

Great collection of resources: videos, reading material, and practices:

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/lent>

More ideas for Lent Practices:

<http://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/25-great-things-you-can-do-for-lent>

Lectio Divina prompts for Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/lent/prayer-resources-for-lent.cfm>

Blogposts, podcasts, and resources

<http://www.asacredjourney.net/tag/lent/>

Daily prayers, examens, and reflections (there’s also an app)

<http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/home/>

Small video description of Ash Wednesday

<http://bustedhalo.com/video/ash-wednesday-in-two-minutes>

Small video description of Lent

<http://bustedhalo.com/video/watch-lent-3-minutes>

A Social-Justice Self-Study of Lent

<https://www.ncchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NCCC-Lent-Guide-2014.pdf>

A Lenten Journey towards Racial Justice

<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/lent-2016/>

Collection of Essays/posts about Lent

<http://theseattleschool.edu/category/intersections/lent/>

Reflections on Art and Lent

<http://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/lent/arts-and-faith-for-lent>

Great resource and posts about practicing Lent at home and with family/friends

<http://www.growchristians.org/category/lent/>

Boston College podcasts about Lent

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3sNHhxf5lrYdHFienlaeW11cGc/view>

Reading Material:

[To Dance with God](#) -Gertrude Mueller Nelson

[The Liturgical Year](#) -Joan Chittister

[Wondrous Encounters: Scripture for Lent](#) -Richard Rohr

[Bridges to Contemplative Living](#) -Lent and Holy Week with Thomas Merton

<http://www.anamcara.com/2017/02/7-books-for-lent/>