

All-Church Lent Activity

Note: This outline presumes you will have a team of at least 3 people: one for adult/youth activities, one for children's activities and one to oversee hospitality (prepare and set out the snacks). Your team should have a working knowledge of the season of Lent and the questions that folks may have about the season. You know your team best so decide in advance if there should be a team training prior to this event.

Note: This outline assumes you have 90 minutes to 2 hours to complete these activities. If you have less time, select the activities within that make the most sense for your context or divide the session into two.

Gathering (have one person from your team oversee this time)

As participants gather take time to welcome them.

If your church does not use nametags, consider having single use nametags available and ask participants to fill them out and wear them.

Invite participants to lead an **opening prayer**. If none are willing then use your pre-prepared opening prayer.¹

Following the opening prayer divide the group in two(adults/youth and children) for **the ice breaker activity**. If you have a large number of participants each group should have no more than 8 persons.

Ask each group to elect a scribe and then spend 5 minutes brainstorming the questions the group has about Lent. Invite the scribes to then put the post-it notes on a blank wall or bulletin board so all can see them. Let the participants know that at the end of the session they will return to these questions to confirm whether all have been answered. If there are any unanswered questions after

¹ I recommend either writing your own or looking to prayers written from within your own tradition. For example, you could write a prayer based on this saying of John Wesley from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, "All that a Christian does, even in eating and sleeping, is prayer, when it is done in simplicity, according to the order of God, without either adding to or diminishing from it by his own choice."

Supplies Needed

Environment:

If you are using tables consider creating center pieces that include: purple fabric, sand, palm fronds, containers of ashes, and stones. Otherwise find ways to incorporate these Lenten symbols into the space you are using for this session.

If your church is participating in an all-church Lenten almsgiving activity such as raising money, a supply- drive, or writing letters to your local legislature, have items representing that project also present in your room design.

Gathering

(Optional): Single-use name tags and markers

Opening Prayer

Pre-prepared opening prayer

Ice Breaker Activity

Large post-it note paper
Easel
Marker
A blank wall or space to hang the post-it note paper.

the session those questions will be addressed during the closing time.

Activity 1 (Age separated - requires 1 facilitator per group)

Keep the same groups from the ice breaker activity.

Invite groups to each go to a separate table.

Facilitator will explain to her/his group that each person is to select an image from those assorted on the table that speaks to them most about what they remember of Jesus' time in the wilderness. The facilitator should also select an image.

When each person has selected her/his image invite each person in the group to share why she/he chose that particular image.

For sharing time, use the mutual invitation approach.² One person begins and then invites another to share. The second person has the opportunity to share, "pass" or "pass for now". "Pass" means the person does not want to share. "Pass for now" means "come back to me later." The second person then invites the third (even if the second person chose to pass). This method honors both those who wish to speak and those who do not.

Scripture Time 1 (Age separated - requires 1 facilitator per group)

Keep the same groups from the previous activity.

Distribute Bibles to participants.

Adult/Youth facilitator will explain (use these words or modify as desired):

"Immediately after Jesus' baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted. In Jewish tradition, Satan means "adversary," and the Satan was not seen as a fallen angel or ruler of hell but as a member of God's holy court whose role was to test believers. Scholars understand this passage as Jesus claiming ownership of his messianic identity.³ Remember, Jesus is fully human as well as being fully divine, so therein lies the possibility that he could have done what Satan asked and refused his earthly ministry. Instead, Jesus uses passages from Scripture – words he would have learned in synagogue like any Jewish boy of his time – to refute Satan's claims and take ownership of his divine role. "

² *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, Eric Law

³ *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching – Matthew*, by Douglas R. Hare

Supplies Needed

Activity 1

1 copy of Si Smith's "40 Book" per group

Alternative: curate your own 40 Lenten images or use a Lenten image series you prefer

Scripture Time 1

A Bible per 1-2 participants*

*use a children's Bible for younger participants such as *Children of God Storybook Bible* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Children's Group Facilitator:

"After Jesus was baptized he was led into the wilderness/the desert to be tempted.

What does being tempted mean? [Invite responses].

Jesus had to make big decision – did he want to do what God wanted him to do?

Let's find out by reading the story. "

Invite participants to read Matthew 4:1-11. The method of reading is to the will of the group. Options include: having each participant read 1-2 verses, have three readers: narrator, Jesus and Satan, reading silently.

Discussion Questions

What surprised you about this story?
Why do you suppose the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted?
What promise or claims does Satan make in this story?
How could Jesus have responded to the questions put forth by Satan?
What happens immediately after Jesus' temptation according to Matthew?
Share with a partner a time when you experienced temptation and how you overcame the temptation.
What does this story have to do with the season of Lent?

History of Lent Teaching (All-ages)

Gather all of the participants back together. Have one or more facilitators explain (use these words or your own):

"Today, Lent is the season in the church year which immediately follows the season of Epiphany (Or Ordinary Time if that is what your context calls it). Scholars do not know how the season of Lent was celebrated in the earliest Christian communities but we do know it was a topic of discussion at the council of Nicea in 325 as the church was seeking to standardize its calendar.⁴ We mark the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday. Lent is a preparing/fasting season, like Advent, where we prepare our hearts and souls for the feasting season of Easter. During Lent we focus on three spiritual practices: fasting (or giving something up that isn't doing us any good), prayer (deepening our relationship with God) and almsgiving (performing acts of charity or justice). We will be learning more about these in the second part of our session.⁵

In the same way that Jesus claimed his divine role after forty days in the wilderness, we are invited, through these practices, to reclaim, reestablish or strengthen our identity as Christians and children of God.

Lenten Hospitality (all ages; facilitator at each table)

Depending on time you may either invite participants to set their own tables or have the tables pre-set with plates, cutlery, etc.

⁴ "The Early History of Lent: by Nicholas V. Russo

<http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193181.pdf>

⁵ If you choose to divide this outline into two sessions it would be good to break following the Lenten Hospitality time and a closing prayer.

Supplies Needed

Lenten Hospitality
Tables/chairs
Plates, forks, knives,
napkins
Drinking cups
Water or other beverages
Silver-dollar pancakes
King's Cake
If you have other Lenten
snack ideas, serve them as
well!

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Similarly, you may choose to have a “buffet style” of serving where everyone comes up to one table to select their snacks or “family style” where each table has a designated amount of each snack.

Lenten Hospitality Continued (all ages; facilitator at each table)

Once participants have finished eating and have cleared their plates have participants remain at their tables. The facilitator will review with the participants the different components of the center piece.

The facilitator will explain (in her/his own words or using the wording here):

[While passing around the container of ashes and baby wipes to clean off fingers]

“Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. On this day we receive the imposition of ashes (a smudge on the forehead) as a sign of our mortality and our commitment to entering into the Lenten season. When you receive the ashes you will hear words such as “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” or “Repent and believe the gospel.” The ashes used on Ash Wednesday are made from burning the palm leaves that were distributed in the previous year’s Palm Sunday. “

[While passing around the purple cloth]

“Purple is the color of repentance. Repentance means we are sorry for the things we have done wrong and we are committed to doing better in the future. The church will be adorned with purple as a reminder that we are in a season of preparation where we seek to turn back to God in all things.”

[While passing around the sand and stones]

“Many churches use sand and stones as decorative elements in Lent to recall Jesus’ time in the wilderness. In some churches stone are placed before the altar as a symbol of those habits and relationships that weigh us down and that we seek to let go of during the season.”

Place the items back in the center of the table.

Distribute Bibles to participants.

Scripture Time 2 (Age separated)

Facilitators should tell their groups that the Scripture passage that tells us more about the Lenten season is Matthew 6:1-21 and participants are going to spend this portion of the session delving into those passages. Distribute a postcard to each participant. Explain that these will be used throughout this part of the session.

Supplies Needed

*Lenten Hospitality,
Continued*
Center pieces/Lenten
Symbols (see *Environment*)
Baby wipes

Supplies Needed

Scripture Time 2
Bibles for all ages
Postcards
Pencils/Pens
Plastic coins

Adults/Youth Scripture Study Fasting

Ask:

In your previous experience of Lent, how have you fasted?
Has the practice been helpful to you?
What is the hardest part of fasting for you?

Read: Matthew 6:16-18

Ask:

What stands out to you about this passage?
Does this passage change what you previously thought about fasting?
What are your plans for this Lent?
How will those plans deepen your faith?

Explain*:

Fasting has been a part of Methodism from its early beginnings. John Wesley considered fasting an important part of a Christian's life and he fasted weekly. To Wesley, fasting was an important way to express sorrow for sin and penitence for overindulgence in eating and drinking. He believed it allowed more time for prayer and was more meaningful if combined with giving to the poor. Wesley did advise caution against extreme fasting and against fasting for those in fragile health.

Invite participants to write down their Lenten fasting goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices).

*Modify for your own denominational context

Children's Scripture Study

Fasting

Read: Matthew 6:16-18

Ask:

What is a hypocrite?
What is fasting?
Why does Jesus want us to fast in secret?
What is something you have given up for Lent before?
What do you think you'll give up this year?
Why do you think fasting is important?

Explain*:

Fasting has been a part of Methodism from its early beginnings. John Wesley considered fasting an important part of a Christian's life and he fasted weekly. John Wesley thought fasting was good if we combined it with giving to the poor. So, for example, we can save the money we don't spend on ice cream and give it to a charity / our church's Lenten almsgiving activity.

Invite participants to write down their Lenten fasting goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices). If participants are non-writers ask them to draw a picture.

Remind participants that if they are giving up something they need to tell the grownups in their house. For example, if you give up ice cream but don't tell the person who buys the ice cream then they won't know to save that money to donate at the end of Lent and you'll have the added temptation of ice cream in the house.

*Modify for your own denominational context

Adults/Youth Scripture Study

Prayer

Ask:

In your previous experience of Lent, how have you increased your prayer life? Has this practice been helpful to you? What is the hardest part of prayer for you?

Read: Matthew 6:5-8

Ask:

What stands out to you about this passage? Does this passage change what you previously thought about prayer? What are your plans for this Lent? How will those plans deepen your faith?

Summarize:

Prayer is our opportunity to talk to and listen to God. We can pray anytime, anywhere. We can pray out loud, in our hearts, using pre-written prayers (like the Lord's Prayer) or speak spontaneously. God wants to be in relationships with us at all times, not just during Lent. However, Lent can be an excellent time to take stock of our prayer life and seek ways to improve it.

Invite participants to write down their Lenten prayer goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices).

For busy hands

Consider investing in some ceramic prayer hands that could be decorated with markers during the discussion.

Another option would be to use a [finger labyrinth](#).

Children's Scripture Study

Prayer

Read: Matthew 6:5-8

Ask:

When do you pray at home?
Who do you pray with?
What do you pray for?
What do you need that God already knows about?
Why does Jesus want us to pray in secret?*

*If children struggle with this question provide them this example:

Imagine you had a friend who was only nice to you when other people are looking. How would that make you feel? In the same way, God wants us to talk to God because we want to spend time with God, not because it will make us look good to other people.

Explain:

Prayer is our opportunity to talk to and listen to God. We can pray anytime, anywhere. We can pray out loud, in our hearts, using pre-written prayers (like the Lord's Prayer) or speak spontaneously. God wants to be in relationships with us at all times, not just during Lent. However, Lent can be an excellent time to take stock of our prayer life and seek ways to improve it.

Invite participants to write down their Lenten prayer goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices).) If participants are non-writers ask them to draw a picture.

Adults/Youth Scripture Study

Almsgiving

Ask:

In your previous experience of Lent, how have you given alms?

How do you decide where your alms (or charitable giving) will go?

Read: Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21

Ask:

What stands out to you about this passage?

What is your treasure?

What plans do you have to give alms this Lent?

How will you work for systemic change around the issue you are donating to? (Example: if donating food to the food bank, also write letter to local government about issues related to food scarcity).

Explain:

Our personal budget is a moral document. A good practice during Lent is to review your family's finances and see what they tell you about your values. This, of course, assumes that your family is able to meet all of its financial obligations. If not, the budget becomes a matter of prioritizing and there is no shame in that; we live in a broken world. John Wesley writes that we should "earn all we can, save all we can and give all we can." When reviewing your family budget particularly consider your giving. Some choose to do an extra level of giving (if possible) during the Lenten season either with their treasure, time or talent.

Invite participants to write down their Lenten almsgiving goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices).

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Children's Scripture Study

Almsgiving

Read: Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21

Ask:

What things does your family donate?

Why is it important to share with others?

Why does Jesus want us to not make a big deal about donating/sharing what we have?

What is most important to you? What do you think God thinks about that?

What do you want to donate to this Lent?

Invite participants to write down their Lenten almsgiving goal onto their postcard (remind them to leave space for the two other practices).

If participants are non-writers ask them to draw a picture.

Activity: Give, Spend, Save

Give each participant a handful of plastic coins. Tell the participants they get to choose how they use the plastic money in the given scenarios.

Scenario 1:

You have 5 coins. The church wants to help people who are hungry. The church needs 3 coins. You want to buy a new toy. It costs 3 coins. How do you use your money? (After hearing their answers, remind participants they could save the two coins and buy the game later).

Scenario 2:

The grownups in your house want to you save some of your money, spend some and give some. How will you decide how much money you will put in each category?

Summarize (All ages)

Bring the groups back together. Have one facilitator offer the following summary (use these words or your own):

“The three practices of Lent should be viewed in tandem. For example, if you are fasting from a tangible thing (ex: eating out at restaurants), then you would pray for wisdom on where to give the money (alms) saved from eating out. If you are fasting from something intangible (ex: anger) then you would pray for wisdom on how to reconcile with those who are causing your anger and give the gift of your time and talent to restoring or ending those relationships.

Lent is our annual opportunity to recommit ourselves to loving God, our neighbor and ourselves.

Please take your postcard⁶ home with you and put it somewhere you will see it and remember it in the weeks to come.

Closing Prayer

Option 1: Invite the participants to offer a closing prayer or offer a pre-prepared prayer of your own.

Option 2:

Have participants stand in a circle. Invite participants to hold hands (or hold out their fists to do a “fist bump” if that is more comfortable). The first person starts praying out loud. When the first person is done praying she/he “bumps” (fist bumps or squeezes the hand) of the person next to her/him. The second person has the option of praying out loud or silently to themselves. Upon completion of praying the second person “bumps” the third and so on and so forth until everyone has had the opportunity to pray.

Session Tip

Because it can be difficult to discern how much time different age groups will take the activities provided I highly recommend having a few “time permitting” activities for both ages in case there is extra time. It is also important to have at least one facilitator who acts as “time keeper” so that one group doesn’t end up far behind the others.

⁶ For the postcards, I recommend designing your own using www.canva.com.