

Presbyterians

Read



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Lenten Spiritual Practice

“Lent is a great time for pausing and pondering, for reading more deeply and, perhaps, more slowly.”
—N.T. Wright, *Lent for Everyone: Matthew, Year A*, p. 31

During Lent, we prepare to celebrate Christ’s resurrection by reflecting on his life and death. Over the next several weeks, we’ll be taking the time to pause from our busy lives and reflect on Christ’s life as it is told in the Gospel of Matthew. Reading prayerfully will be our spiritual practice for Lent.

Set A Time & Place

Time: We recommend creating a specific devotional time each day. Set aside 15–20 minutes at a time that works for you. Some people find it is best to start the day with devotional time and, therefore, get up earlier than they would normally to spend time reading scripture and praying. Others enjoy unwinding after a long day with the Word of God and, therefore, make time for reading and prayer before bed. You may find that pausing in the middle of the day, during your lunch break, for example, is the best time for your daily devotions. Whatever time you choose, make it a priority over Lent. Put that time in your schedule and do not allow other things that come up to infringe upon it.

Place: Many of us live in busy households and work in busy workplaces, so it can be a challenge to find solitude and quiet in our lives. But, choosing a quiet place for your daily devotional time is important. Perhaps you choose to sit and read in your favourite chair before everyone gets up or you find a quiet corner in the cafeteria at work. Wherever you choose spend your devotional time, do something to make it special. If you like candles, have a candle on hand to light. If you have prayer aids or visuals (e.g., cross, prayer beads, a prayer shawl), bring them to your prayer space with you.

Praying Scripture

As part of our daily devotional times this Lent, we’ll be praying using scripture. In the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun explains how praying with scripture opens our hearts and minds to God in fresh ways:

“Praying Scripture is a way of entering deeply into the text with a heart alert to a unique and personal word from God. Words and verses that catch our attention become invitations to be with God in prayer. When our prayers seem to be more about maintaining control and offering God our agenda for his stamp of approval, praying Scripture can return us to a simpler state of openness

and attentiveness to God. We lay aside our own agendas and open ourselves to the prayers given to us in the Bible.” (p. 279)

During our devotional time, our goal is to let go of control, as Ahlberg suggests, and let scripture shape our communication with God.

Devotional Time Routine

1) **Pray a Psalm:** We recommend you begin your devotional time by praying a psalm. N.T. Wright uses the psalms from the Revised Common Lectionary as the basis for his Sunday devotions. Use the Sunday psalm to start your prayers each day for the whole week or rotate through the psalms for Lent:

- Ash Wednesday Week: Psalm 51:1-17
- Week 1: Psalm 32
- Week 2: Psalm 121
- Week 3: Psalm 95
- Week 4: Psalm 23
- Week 5: Psalm 130
- Holy Week: Psalm 31:9-16
- Easter Week: Psalm 19



Suggestions for Praying Using the Psalms

*This exercise is adapted from *Holy Solitude: Lenten Reflections with Saints, Hermits, Prophets, and Rebels* by Heidi Haverkamp.

- Invite the Holy Spirit to join you.
- Copy the psalm out in your own handwriting.
- Read it slowly out loud.
- Draw or doodle around the psalm, underline words or verses that stand out to you, add any names, thoughts or ideas that come to you in the margins beside the psalm.
- Reflect or journal:
 - What phrases particularly draw your attention?
 - What emotions being expressed resonate with you?
 - What feelings come up in you as you read the psalm?
 - Where do you see Jesus in this psalm?
 - What needs, fears or hopes do you see in this psalm?
 - What might God be calling you to pray for or be present to today?
- Read the psalm out loud again.
- Pray for whoever or whatever has been brought to your attention through the psalm.

2) **Read Lent for Everyone:** Take the time to read the scripture verse and reflection for the day set out in N.T. Wright’s *Lent for Everyone*. Underline or highlight ideas that stand out to you. Write your thoughts in the margins. If there is anything you are having trouble understanding, make note of it and keep reading. Later, you can search for an answer to your question online, save it for your discussion group, or bring it up with your minister.

3) **Pray Using the Lord’s Prayer:** To close your devotional time, choose a version of the Lord’s Prayer that you are comfortable with, or, if you like variety, try praying using different versions. Use the model below, from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun’s *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (p. 260), to go deeper with the Lord’s Prayer.

Lord's Prayer as Intercession

- “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”
Spend some time thanking God for God’s heavenly love and attention. Ponder who God is and adore God’s majesty, holiness, sovereignty, goodness and beauty.
- “Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
Turn your intercession to God’s purposes in the world. Where are you trying to bring in your kingdom rather than putting your efforts toward God’s kingdom agenda? Confess where God’s priorities have been replaced with your own. Consider what God’s kingdom agenda might be in your relationships and in the world. Pray for these things. What might partnering with God around God’s will look like?
- “Give us today our daily bread.”
Pray for your needs and those whose lives are closely linked with your own. Pray for those who are in danger, suffering, and in places of decision making or costly love.
- “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”
Confess your grudges, bitterness and oversensitivity; dwell at the foot of the cross. Thank God for what it is like to be forgiven.
- “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”
As you look ahead into your day, notice the tasks and transactions ahead of you. Where might you get off track? Become aware of the ways you may be tempted to spin the truth, manage your image, live out of your false self, lose your patience or envy another. Pray for the Spirit to work in you to change you. Ask for protection and courage for the day.
- “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”
End your time of intercession with prayers of trust in God’s goodness and his redemptive plan.

