



# fasting *help* for lent

I have food to eat that you do not  
know about.  
- Jesus

"Look," I said, index finger tapping a dictionary entry, "'Lent' in its root word, means 'spring.'" My two young sons glanced out the window at the snow covered yard.

**"That means Lent is a time for us, like other living things in spring, to grow."**

- Gayle Boss, in *Wild Hope: Stories for Lent from the Vanishing*

The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread (or, God), but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the **reality of its hunger** is not a belief, it is a certainty.

- Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

Fasting is a form of prayer,  
a way to pay attention to God.

- Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

## Thinking of [fasting for Lent](#)?

Me too. And in my experiences of fasting food, I've found myself early on grasping for inspiration, imagination, and, well, distraction, to be honest! That's why I've gathered some quotes, prayers, songs and poems to help us remember **why** we are doing this - or reimagine **how** we are doing it - when the going gets tough.

Hope they **help**!

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## 40 fasting ideas\*

Food for a day (or during daylight hours, or until supper)	Phone use (apart from certain, specified things)	Lying (little “white lies” or un-truths included)	Amazon and/or any online shopping	Sweets
Complaining	Going to bed late	All drinks besides water and/or tea	Podcasts or music during certain activities (like while driving, washing, walking)	Flattering people
Alcohol	Driving (when walkin, carpooling, or taking public transportation is possible)	Online Games	Email-checking (besides once a day or something)	Hitting Snooze
Caffeine	Social Media	Colorful clothing (a friend one year wore only black & neutrals)	One meal a day or week	Eating Out
White Fragility (with help from <a href="#">Layla Saad</a> )	Out-of-season produce (takes some research)	Makeup	TV and/or TV shows	To-do Lists
Gossip (talking about, sharing, or receiving other people’s business)	You Tube	Meat	Mirrors (take them down or turn them around?)	Hurrying to things (requires intentionally, margins and honest disclosure when late)
Staying up past a certain time	Fantasizing or daydreaming (i.e. when catch yourself, replace with some other predetermined thought or prayer)	Certain forms of News	Multitasking (when possible - i.e. just doing the task at hand without other audible or visual input)	Perfectionism

**\*NOTE:** We are all different. Thomas Merton said, “I’d rather have the sins of the true self than the virtues of the false self,” meaning, I think, that he’d rather make mistakes while trying to live in congruence with his values, then enjoy the “comfort” of a persona or default-self, however socially/religiously acceptable those might be. In other words, from a spiritual formation perspective, “virtue” and “vice” can look differently for each of us, and so fasting/adding practices take self-awareness, experimentation, and **discernment**. What looks like courage for me (for example - engaging in conflict) might be something you sense you need to ease up on for a season. :)

So, choose....**playfully!**



## 30 adding ideas

“When we ‘rend our hearts’ we break them open to things that we are refusing...perhaps we’ve refused to put the effort into reviving old spiritual practices like visits to church, meditation in the morning, and memorizing the psalms. Maybe we’ve refused to repent of old abrasions, quick words, harsh judgements made in haste and expiated never. We have closed the doors of our hearts, as time went by, to so many of the things we need to live full and holy lives. Lent is a time to let life in again, to rebuild the worlds we’ve allowed to go sterile.”

- Joan Chittister in *Lent 2021: To Live Anew*

Taking a photo of something in nature	Cold water swimming	A spiritual discipline (of prayer, reading, study, silence, nightly examen, etc.)	Making the sign of the cross	Putting things back right after using them (including the carts at the grocery store)
Taking responsibility for your part in any given situation (rather than pointing out/focusing on another's)	Sex (when and where appropriate of course :))	Journaling or writing habit	Giving the benefit of the doubt (to a roommate, friend, family member, colleague, partners, drivers, or humans in general)	Reading before bed
(Good) movie watching	Forgiving yourself	Flossing	A uniform (as in same general outfits certain days of the week)	Baths
Neighborly presence & availability (requires some intentional margins around comings and goings)	Joining a <a href="#">Recovering from White Conditioning Mtg</a> (brilliantly modeled after 12 step mtgs; very welcoming to newcomers)	Forgiving (i.e. keeping short accounts with a close other)	A Sabbath Day	Sharing creative work (like songs, art work, writing, projects)
Taking a class or e-course	Doing anything in the moment that takes 2 minutes or less (rather than waiting to do later)	Candlelight only before dawn or after sunset	Timers (for your varied tasks, like a modern “monastic bell,” stopping/letting go of whatever you’re doing when it goes off)	Walking
Making eye contact (with roommates, colleagues, children and partners when they’re talking to you)	Hiking	Memorization of scripture, a sacred text or poem	<a href="#">Somatic Abolitionism</a> (via <a href="#">Resmaa Menakem</a> )	Stretching



## inspiring quotes

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, **"I have food to eat that you do not know about."** So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."  
- John 4:31-34

As life becomes harder, it also becomes richer, because the fewer expectations we have, the more the good things of life become **unexpected gifts** which we accept with gratitude.  
-An excerpt from *An Interrupted Life* by Etty Hillesum

Fasting is the affirmation and experience of another world. That's why I like to say that **fasting is feasting**. Fasting aligns us with the movements of God's Kingdom and in this way, it increases the power of what we do.  
-Dallas Willard

Fasting is already a regular spiritual practice of my evangelical faith. Each year..., I have done a graduated one-month fast during the Lenten season; eating less and less over the course of the month until the last week when I eat no food at all. Each time I fast, whether for one day or one month, the practice bears much fruit. The spiritual discipline of fasting **serves as a deep cleanse for the soul**; raising all the soul's sludge to the surface so that God might wipe us clean.  
-Lisa Sharon Harper

In liturgical terms: we fast before we feast. In our time, we struggle with such paradoxes. **Many of our feasts fall flat** because there has not been a previous fast.  
-Ronald Rolheiser

Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.  
-Jesus to a woman at a well in John 4.14

*"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."*

At the moment of saying these words, we must have already remitted everything that is owing to us...All these are the rights that we think the past has given us over the future. First there is the **right to certain permanence**. When we have enjoyed something for a long time, we think that it is ours and that we are entitled to expect fate to let us go on enjoying it.  
-Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

Disciplinary fasting is something you do on a regular basis to keep under control your need to have what you want... It **accustoms us to not having what we want** and being quite comfortable and happy with that—not grumpy and dissatisfied.  
- Dallas Willard



## learning from Islam

For one month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Muslims all over the world abstain from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity between dawn and sunset.

But this physical fast is only a symbol of the spiritual fast, as mere abstention from food alone has no effect on the spirit: the Prophet has said that many a fasting person gains nothing from his fast but hunger and thirst!

During this time we fast from negative thoughts, from backbiting, from pride and anger, while endeavoring to establish good spiritual habits and practices that will carry us through the year.

**As we fast, we practice leading our bodies as the rider leads the horse, becoming increasingly aware and confident of our primary identities as souls.**

...

When we fast, we abstain from physical food so as to better partake of spiritual nourishment, including prayers and reading the Qur'an in its entirety throughout the month.

Ramadan is a month of **spiritual bounty** and blessings, which is why when we greet each other during this time we wish each other a "**generous Ramadan,**" or *Ramadan karim*.

-Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf,  
in a [conversation](#) with Lisa Sharon Harper in Sojourners

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"This year, for the first time in my life, I have fasted for all of Ramazan. The Quran says during Ramazan you're supposed to "eat and drink until the **white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread of night.**"

And then fast until sunset—no food, no drink.

The black thread/white thread part fascinates me, eating in the predawn morning until it's light enough outside to tell the white thread from the black."

-excerpt from the [article On Fasting by Kaveh Akbar](#) in *The Paris Review*

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## 12 graces of fasting

The [Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#) has gathered some things he's learned from fasting. "Ponder them" he said, "and let them lead you deeper into prayer." Perhaps **pick one a day or a couple a week** to focus on during whatever "fast" you choose....

- **Hunger:** I am led to inquire of myself what I most deeply want. I discover my hunger for God.
- **Discipline:** I practice conscious, intentional choice making, and allow God to manage my will.
- **Detachment:** I let go of desire and the need to fulfill it, and turn my desires over to God.
- **Weakness:** I experience the limits of my powers, my dependence on God, and willingness to turn to God alone.
- **Slowing :** I am not able to be so active. Fasting from food leads to fasting from hurrying. I am not able to be so driven, so bent on justifying myself. I have to adopt a more sabbath-like pace.
- **Simplicity:** I practice contentment. I practice accepting what is instead of wishing it were otherwise.
- **Suffering:** I find I can experience discomfort and still place my attention on God.
- **Compassion:** As Jesus suggests in Mt. 6.16-18 I don't usually let people know I am fasting. I bear it silently. I know anyone I meet may be enduring secret burdens and struggles, and I can be more sensitive and compassionate toward all people.
- **Justice:** I am more aware of the poor and hungry, and I am more able to be in solidarity with them in prayer and action.
- **Transformation:** I let God change my hunger for food into a hunger to let God's love flow through me.
- **Grace:** I am more mindful of receiving what I can't control, and trusting grace.
- **Delight:** I'm more aware of food, the gift of taste, the delight of eating. I get over taking things for granted.



## poems, songs & prayers

### Poems

- [won't you celebrate with me](#) by Lucille Clifton
- [What the Fig Tree Said](#) by Denise Levertov
- [Incantation](#) by Chris Abani
- [Ode to Dirt](#) by Sharon Olds
- [Fasting](#) by Steve Garnaas Holmes
- [Dawn Prayer for All](#) by Simon Ortiz
- [Sunrise](#) by Joy Harjo
- [Father's Song](#) by Gregory Orr
- [Otherwise](#) by Jane Kenyon
- [In the eyes of men he falls](#) by Leonard Cohen
- [Stations of the Cross](#) by Pdraig O Tuama
- [Englewood's 7 Favorite Lent Poems](#)
- [On Generosity](#) (for Easter) by Walter Brueggemann

### Instrumental Songs

- [Part: Spiegel im Spiegel](#) from Into Silence by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra
- [Bach's 6 Cello Suites by Yo Yo Ma](#), all from memory!
- [Kensington Blues](#) by Jack Rose
- [Primavera](#) by Ludovico Einaudi (*primavera* means spring, and the song takes you there!)

### Prayers

- [30 min. Fasting Morning Prayer Liturgy](#) for a group (in-person or virtual)

O Lord, refresh our sensibilities. Give us this day our daily taste. Restore to us soups that spoons will not sink in, and sauces which are never the same twice. Raise up among us stews with more gravy than we have bread to blot it with, and casseroles that put starch and substance in our limp modernity. Take away our fear of fat, and make us glad of the oil which ran upon Aaron's beard. Give us pasta with a hundred fillings, and rice in a thousand variations. Above all, give us grace to live as true folk - to fast till we come to a refreshed sense of what we have and then to dine gratefully on all that comes to hand. Drive far from us, O Most Bountiful, all creatures of air and darkness; cast out the demons that possess us; deliver us from the fear of calories and the bondage of nutrition; and set us free once more in our own land, where we shall serve thee as thou hast blessed us - with the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.

-Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb*

### **Prayer for Charity and a Preferential Option for the Poor**

*Poor Ones,  
Please take the bread.  
It is yours.  
The house with running water  
belongs to you.  
A plot of land, a dignified job—  
all yours.  
Forgive me for offering it.  
Charity is no substitute for justice  
but your children are hungry now.  
Spirit of Justice,  
break open our hearts.  
Break them wide open.  
Let anger pour through  
like strong winds,  
cleansing us of complacency.  
Let courage pour through  
like spring storms,  
flooding out fear.  
Let zeal pour through  
like blazing summer sun,  
filling us with passion.  
Force of Justice, grant me  
anger at what is,  
courage to do what must be done,  
passion to break down the walls  
of injustice  
and build a land flowing  
with milk and honey  
for God's beloved,  
God's special love,  
God's Poor Ones.  
Spirit of Justice  
break open our hearts.*

— Mary Lou Kownacki

*Lord, here is my Bible;  
Here is this quiet room,  
Here is this quiet time,  
And here am I.  
Open my eyes; open my mind; open my heart; and speak.  
—From *The Lion's Book of Children's Prayers**



*O God, when I have food, help me to remember the hungry;  
When I have work, help me to remember the jobless;  
When I have a home, help me to remember those who have no home at all;  
When I am without pain, help me to remember those who suffer,  
And in remembering,  
help me to destroy my complacency;  
bestir my compassion,  
and be concerned enough to help by word and deed,  
those who cry out for what we take for granted.  
Amen.*

-by the 20th century American Disciples of Christ minister Samuel Pugh

**A breath prayer:**

[inhale]

*I can grieve in the wilderness.*

[exhale]

*I will not look away from suffering.*

-Cole Arthur Riley, [Black Liturgies](#)

Lent is a time to think about another diet, another nourishment, another loyalty.  
In various ways, we are all seduced, domesticated, and bought off -  
economically, religiously, intellectually, politically, morally.  
It is the story of our life, and bought-off people never have power for life.

*In this season of Lent, teach us again the source of true power for life.  
Feed us with spiritual food that will fill us with the energy, courage, freedom and authority  
that we need to be your agents of healing in the world.*

*Amen.*

-Walter Brueggemann,  
*A Way Other Than Our Own, Devotions for Lent*

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