

CBC YOUTH MINISTRY GUIDE

MARCH 2016 ISSUE

Yo!

In case you didn't know, (and you haven't seen one of your facebook friends posts on what they're giving up already) we have entered a 40-day period called Lent! You may be asking, what's up with Lent? Isn't that just a Roman Catholic thing? Great question!

Lent is the 40-day period that leads up to Easter, the day that we celebrate Jesus Christ defeating death through His resurrection.

So...why Lent? Well, for starters, Lent is not a scripturally mandated event, so don't let anyone tell you otherwise. It's also not something that you do to earn salvation or some sort of self-punishment for sin. And it's definitely not a time for us to give up carbs with the secret motivation of a toned beach bod (two birds with one stone, right?).

Lent IS meant as a way for us to heighten our relationship with God and increase our devotion and piety (holiness/godliness). It's to prepare ourselves through prayer, repentance, fasting, atonement, almsgiving, and yes, the most evident ones on social media - penance and self-denial.

So, in this month's edition of the CBC Youth Ministry Guide, we're going to try and turn your attention away from yourself and towards God. We're going to try and notice and focus on God in an effort to encourage prayer, repentance, fasting, atonement, almsgiving, penance, and self-denial. So join with me this month in the heart and spirit of Lent!

Week 1 - "Notice"

(March 5 - March 11)

Read

Matthew 6:1-18; Luke 18:9-14

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preaches to the crowds the warnings in Matthew 6:1-18. First off, one thing to note is that hidden in this passage is actually a command to practice righteousness, give to the needy, pray, forgive, and fast. Notice, Jesus says "when" you do these things, subtly telling the people that these are all things that they need to be doing as His followers!

The other, more obvious theme in the passage is Jesus' warning for His followers about how to do those things. He warns them that if they seek attention and to be noticed by others, then they will lose the notice of the Father. If our motivation for doing these things are not founded in the right place, then they are meaningless.

In our almsgiving, prayer, forgiveness, and fasting, we try and notice God more, not to gain notice for ourselves.

Middle School

Out of the four things mentioned (giving to the poor, prayer, forgiveness, and fasting), which do you think you do the most? The least? Jesus commands to do ALL of these things. How can you incorporate the ones you don't do much into your life?

High School

Has your spirituality ever been a status symbol rather than a way to seek God? What does that say about our motivations and priorities in doing those things? Is there anyone in your life that you need to forgive? Make that a priority this week.

Parent/College

Do you consider yourself righteous? Who do you honestly resemble more, the Pharisee or the tax collector from Luke 18:9-14? Talk with your Community Group or family about something you may want to fast from.

Pray

Pray the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) with an earnest heart and as Jesus commands in Matthew 6:1-18. Try praying this prayer every day this week!

Grow

Pray through Psalms 25. Praying through a passage may be something foreign or new to you. The purpose here is not to analyze or even study the scripture per se, but instead to use Scripture as our way of noticing and focusing on God. Here's how to do that:

/ Read the passage and just listen to the words. Maybe try doing it out loud!

// Read it again, noticing anything that sticks out to you. It could be a word, phrase, emotion, or even a picture!

/// Read it one more time, this time praying and asking God to speak to you through the scripture. It's okay if you don't *feel* anything or notice anything, continue chewing on this passage throughout your day and week and maybe God will speak through something else!

Week 2 - "unplug"

(March 12 - March 18)

Read

Exodus 20:8-11; Genesis 2:1-3

In this familiar passage, God sets before Israel the Ten Commandments. The commandment we're going to focus on here is His command to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Let us first remember that these commandments were not just simple rules intended to bind up the Israelites or restrict them. Instead, they were made to describe the principles of a faithful relationship with God. If you look at each command, there is a fundamental truth about God's character and our relationship with Him that is reflected. Ultimately, the Ten Commandments are about our relationship with God, not a set of rules to follow.

Secondly, let's take a look at the first Sabbath ever, found in Genesis 2:1-3. After completing his creation work, God takes an opportunity to sit back, bask in the glory of His creation, and rest. In the same way, we should be obedient to God's commands and be intentional about pausing from the everyday business.

To fully notice God, we need to unplug from our jam-packed, non-stop schedules that distract us from experiencing a full relationship with God. In retreating from the world and resting, we allow ourselves an escape from distractions, drawing us towards reflection, worship, and prayer. It also serves as an opportunity to place our trust in God with our time and lives.

To each person, the distractions will be different. Whatever consumes our attention and draws it away from God is something we may need to consider unplugging from. Maybe keeping the Sabbath holy means unplugging from social media, from video games, maybe even from school work!

Middle School

What kind of things distract you from recognizing and noticing God? Do you think unplugging from those things would help free your attention for noticing God? Why is it hard to unplug from these things, even if it's just for one day out of the week? Does it feel more like a punishment or an opportunity to draw close to God?

High School

Why is it hard to keep and maintain a regular and consistent Sabbath? Why is it important for us to keep the Sabbath anyway? What kind of lifestyle changes might you need to make in order to be obedient to God's command?

Parent/College

The Pharisees observed a strict observance of the Sabbath, but lost the heart of it. Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath is a gift for man, not a punishment. Does the Sabbath sometime seem inconvenient? What does that say about our trust in the Lord?

Pray

Unplug from all distractions. This might mean retreating to an empty room, turning off your devices, putting in earplugs, or turning off the lights. Imagine all the distractions in your life fighting for your attention written on a whiteboard. Next, imagine them all being completely erased from the whiteboard and rest in the stillness and silence that results and meditate on God for 30 seconds.

This might be hard the first time, but try this a few times through the week!

Grow

Pray through Psalms 46. Follow the suggestions from Week 1.

Week 3 - "Yield"

(March 19 - March 25)

Read

John 13:1-15; Philippians 2:1-11

Here we see Jesus preparing the disciples for the time ahead after Jesus was to be crucified. He demonstrates an example of servanthood and yielding to the Father as well as showing humility in serving his disciples. Jesus, through whom all things were made, lowers himself to the status of a servant, washing his disciples' feet. Paul echoes this truth, asking that those in the church of Philippi abandon selfish ambition and instead consider others as more significant as Christ did.

The lesson here for the disciples and for us the reader is to serve in humility, to discard our own privilege and status, and to serve those around us, regardless of their status.

Jesus was also a suffering servant to God the Father, yielding to the Father's will. He knows what is to come, yet He chooses to surrender everything to the Father, including His very life! Despite his status, Jesus lowers Himself to the level of us so that he could serve and save us. Philippians 2 supports this, highlighting Jesus' humble obedience, even as it led to the cross.

In the same way, God calls us to surrender and yield all our time, our gifts, our resources, and our very lives to His plan for our lives.

Middle School

When was a time had to do a task that was unpleasant or downright gross? Maybe it was washing dirty dishes or cleaning a toilet! Why didn't you want to do it? Why do you think Jesus didn't complain about washing His disciples feet?

High School

In Philippians, Paul urges the readers to consider others more significant than themselves. When is this hard? Who is this hardest with? Paul also warns the reader to serve out of humility, not out of "selfish ambition or conceit." Has there been a time when you wanted recognition or status out of your service? Remember Jesus' humble obedience at the cross and pray for humility.

Parent/College

God calls us to yield or surrender totally to Him. What areas of our lives have you not yielded? Why not? Pray that God sanctifies you to be more Christ-like in your humility and obedience.

Pray

Pray a prayer asking God to increase your trust in Him so that you can yield and surrender more fully to Him. Ask God to reveal areas of your life that you've tried to own and for Him to take and shape those things in ways that we don't expect.

Grow

Think about how can you put these lessons into practice through serving in humility. How can you serve the community or seek the welfare of the city through your service? Look for available opportunities around you.

Week 4 - "Simplify"

(March 26 - April 1)

Read

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11; Matthew 6:25-34

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon (or at least someone writing as Solomon) recounts his experience in seeking satisfaction or fulfillment. Everything he saw that he wanted, he got, and everything his heart desired, he had. And yet, Solomon laments, that everything is meaningless! "There was nothing to be gained under the sun."

Meanwhile, Jesus preaches a message of living simply, trusting that God will provide and take care of you. He teaches to not be anxious about things, even things as important as food and drink!

We can spend our entire lives chasing the things that we think will make us happy and satisfy us, and in the end, we'll still end up empty and wanting more. That's because we're looking in the wrong place! God provides for us in ways that we cannot for ourselves. It is only in our reliance on His provision that allows us to be free from chasing the wind as Solomon puts it.

So instead, let us pursue things that bring true satisfaction and let us give up the things that the world tells us we need. It is through simplifying that we can notice God's provision and activity in our lives.

Middle School

What is something you really want? Do you think it will bring you happiness? Joy? Contentment? Reflect on how much you really want that thing and imagine if you could live without that.

High School

Do you think Jesus' sermon is realistic? How much do you trust in God's provision for your needs? What is something you can let go of this week to increase your reliance on God's provision? Think and reflect on ways that God has provided for you in your need.

Parent/College

Make a list of some things that you're anxious about. Pray over these things and lift them to God, asking that he provide what you need and for Him to ease your anxiousness over

the things you don't need. Keep the list as a reminder of the ways that things can attack our trust on God and continue to pray over it throughout the week.

Pray

Pray through Psalm 103:1-5 using the method outlined in Week 1.

Grow

Where do you have the most "stuff"? It could be clothes in a closet, digital items in a game, appointments on your calendar, or even a credit card bill. Take a good, long, hard look at those things. Which of those things do you really need? How important are these things to you? To increase your reliance on God's provision, try and simplify in these areas, subtracting so that you can add to your trust in God.

Thanks for reading!

I hope that this season of Lent has been sanctifying for you! As Easter approaches, let us continue in prayer, fasting, almsgiving, atonement, repentance, self-denial, and penance to draw our attention and focus on God, giving glory and worship to Him who deserves all praise!