

## Leader's Guides



The traditional purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer through prayer, penance, repentance of sins, almsgiving, atonement and self-denial. The period of 40 days represents the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted of satan, while emptying himself to prepare for His earthly ministry.

As we move through these 40 days, we consider what we might set aside in keeping with the example of Jesus. As we make these discoveries, let us not just give them up for Lent, but give them up for Christ.

**Week 3. We're entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.**

### Psalm 51:1-2

*"Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness, in your great tenderness wipe away all my faults, wash me clean of my guilt, and purify me from all my sin".*

### 1. How Can We Prepare to Have God Remove Our Faults?

Defects of character are things about us that can often offend or hurt others. We all have them. We all wish we didn't. But knowing what they are requires "knowing oneself". God knows how many hairs are on our head. And he knows our hearts. He is also our loving father in heaven, of whom if we ask for bread, will not give us a stone.

At first it seems we have to work to understand our resistance to seeing ourselves, then acknowledge that God alone can do the "removing". But which should come first – grace or responsibility?

In his poem Ash Wednesday, T.S. Elliot expresses the human dilemma –

And I pray to God to have mercy upon us  
And I pray that I may forget  
These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
Too much explain  
Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done not to be done again  
May the judgment not be too heavy upon us  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still

Ultimately we need to learn how to "get out of the way and allow God's grace to fully operate and set us free". The first step is to fully own & accept that we have "defects of character" and God will help us to do this if we ask him. We must be entirely ready to let God do the job. It is strangely a giving up of control to receive a free gift. As was the prayer of Mary at the beginning of her journey, **"Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"** (Luke 1:38).

## **Lamentations 3:21-22**

*"This is what I shall tell my heart, and so recover hope: the favors of the Lord are not all passed, his kindnesses are not exhausted. They are renewed every morning."*

## **2. How do We Ask God to Remove Our Shortcomings?**

### **James 4:10**

*"Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up".*

Why do we have to ask God for things that he already knows we need? What is really happening in prayers of petition or intercession? Ultimately we are asking not to change God but to change ourselves. "We pray to form a living relationship, not to get things done". Prayers of intercession or petition are one way of situating our lives with total honesty. We can never engineer or guide our own conversion. "Too much 'me' can never find 'you'". We must humbly ask God to reveal our faults to us and then ask him to remove them. If we try to 'discover' and remove our faults by ourselves, we will very likely seek shallowness, or substitute something less disparaging than the many elephants in the room.

We must let God reveal our faults to us. Sometimes this may require our failing or falling a number of times. We then must allow God to remove those faults from our side, in His way. His way of removing our failings is to fill the hole with something much better. Our shortcomings, rather than being driven away, are exposed and starved. So it is important that we ask, seek, and knock, not only during this time of Lent, but as we live our lives to please and glorify God.

Life is a gift, totally given to us without cost, every day of it, and every part of it. If we are not truly grateful each day, resentment can set in. To ask for "our daily bread" is to know that it is being given. To not ask, is to believe we are in control, not God. God is willing to wait for this. As Jacob said in Genesis 28:16-17, *"You were here all the time and I never knew it! This is nothing less than the house of God, this is the very gate of heaven"*. Our faults are merely heavy luggage, that keep us from seeing this gate.

### **Exodus 10:3**

*So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me."*