

What's Next?

7TH WEEK OF EASTER



SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 28:30-31 — [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

The Book of Acts, and thus our journey together, ends in a very open ended way. What's next? The book of Acts leaves it open. The only thing we are left with is the truth that Paul continued to be faithful to the people to whom God had sent and that he continued to teach about Jesus faithfully and boldly. As we leave the Easter season and move toward what is next, let us be confident that we don't need to have absolute clarity on the next steps. We need only to be faithful and trust God to guide us.

Faith Practice

DAILY EXAMEN

The Ignatian Examen is a time to review the day and consider where we have seen God, where we have had the opportunity to show God's love, and where opportunities have been missed. With very little ones, we can use very simple questions like "Who did you share with today?" or "What made you happy today?" As we go into a season of "ordinary time," may we go knowing that our days are anything but ordinary.

Faithful Families

LENT + EASTER
REFLECTIONS



14 WEEKS OF REFLECTIONS
FROM ASH WEDNESDAY TO PENTECOST

INTRODUCTION

Lent is a time for extra spiritual practice and added reflection. In this simple guide, families are given one simple meditation and faith practice per week for the weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter. These thoughts and practices are meant to work around your schedule and fit in to your life as makes sense for you. Here are some ways other families have chosen to use this booklet:

- » Reading the verse and meditation together on a consistent day of the week and time of day. (Sunday evening at supper, for example.)
- » Flipping through and reading one of the meditations as time allows.
- » Keeping the booklet in the car (yes, the car!) and reading it in those moments before something else is to begin.
- » Choosing one of the practices in the booklet to do every week for the duration of Lent and Easter, rather than trying a new practice every week.

This booklet doesn't stop with Lent. It continues on through Easter as a reminder that the work of resurrection doesn't end at Easter. It keeps going!

May these weeks of Lent and Easter be a blessing to you and your family.

Grace + Peace,



Author of *Faithful Families*, *Prayers for Faithful Families*, and *Faithful Families Advent*

ABOUT TRACI

Traci Smith is an ordained minister, mother of three, and author. Traci's passion is helping families find times for connection and spiritual nourishment amid the hustle and bustle of daily life. What began as a quest to help her own family has provided valuable insight for thousands of others. Traci believes faith practices should be fun, easy to fit into daily life, and accessible to all. Visit her at traci-smith.com.

Traci also sends out a weekly newsletter called Treasure Box Tuesday which is a weekly email with resources, links and treasures sent directly to your inbox every week. These treasures are related to faith and family, and help connect parents and ministry leaders to wonderful things!

Learn more at traci-smith.com/treasure-box-tuesday/.



Sacred Objects

6TH WEEK OF EASTER

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 19:11-12 — God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

I love these verses. What a wonderful time it must have been to see how miracles spread through the early church. Even objects that touched Paul's skin were used to heal people. Did that "really" happen or was that just the perception of the people? Who are we to say? Many times, folks in my congregation will say "Why doesn't God perform real miracles like that anymore?" I always respond by saying I think God does perform real miracles, we simply explain them in different ways.

Faith Practice



CLAIMING A SACRED OBJECT

Find a special blanket or handkerchief that you bring out during times of prayer or illness. Thank God that they are special and hold them as you pray. For babies and very young children, find a blanket that is only taken out during times of prayer or illness. There's no need to tell children that the blanket has healing properties, but over time the object will have sacred meaning in your home.

The Journey

5TH WEEK EASTER



SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 15:3 — So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

As we've journeyed through the book of Acts, we've seen the apostles travel through many different cities and towns. Each city brings new joys and challenges and lessons. Everywhere they go they bring the Good News of Christ. Throughout scripture we hear of those who opened their homes and offered hospitality. Lydia is one such example. After her conversion in chapter 16, she invites Paul into her home.

Faith Practice

SHARING THE GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

Who do you know that is traveling through? Perhaps your family knows mission co-workers or others who have made a career of sharing the gospel with others in far away countries. Consider opening your home to someone like this during the week. If it's not possible to host someone, perhaps hospitality is something that can be shown through a card, letter, or care package sent to their home.



The Baptism of Jesus

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 3:21-22 — Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

WEEKLY MEDITATION

God called Jesus at the beginning of his ministry with simple words of affirmation and blessing. In the same way, we can begin our Lenten journey with our children with a reminder that we too are beloved. We too are called and blessed by God. As we begin our journey together, may we never lose sight of the blessing it is to be God's own child.

Faith Practice

REMEMBER YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM

Dip your finger in a small amount of water and make the sign of the cross on the palm your child's hand. As you do, say these words:

"[Name], you are beloved by God and by me. May you know the love of God all of your days. In the name of the triune God I pray, amen." If your child is old enough to dip his or her fingers in the water and make the sign of the cross on your hand, give that a try, too!

Good News for the Poor

1ST WEEK OF LENT

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 4:18-19 — “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

WEEKLY MEDITATION

Jesus began his ministry by declaring his mission: to bring good news to the poor. Let us follow his example by anchoring our Lenten practice in service and giving. This type of focus is a great habit to get into, no matter what age your children are. Even the littlest among us can understand the concept of sharing and giving to others.

Faith Practice



START A “GIVING BOX” IN YOUR HOME TO BE USED THROUGHOUT LENT.

Add something to it each day or week during Lent. We’ll revisit the idea during the second week of Easter. If you have a very young toddler or baby, consider collecting items you already have around the house such as baby food and diapers to donate to a local diaper bank or shelter. For children who are old enough to participate, consider food or toys as they are tangible representations of everyday needs for very young children.



Barnabas & Saul Commissioned

4TH WEEK OF EASTER

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 13:1-3 — Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

This brief story of the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul is a reminder that some people are given a special calling for a particular ministry. Here we read that the Holy Spirit sets the two of them apart for a special work. The community supports them by the laying on of hands and sending them out.

Faith Practice

RECOGNIZING LEADERS

Who in your community has been set apart for ministry? Perhaps it is a Sunday School teacher or pastor. This week take time to lay hands on these leaders, whether literally or figuratively by offering a card or note of appreciation. For small babies, give the gift of a handprint or footprint on a card for nursery teachers and helpers.

Friendship

3RD WEEK OF EASTER

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 8:29-31 — Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts chapter 8 is a story of friendship. Each person offers something to the other and together they sit as a team looking at the scriptures together. We are not meant to journey alone. This story invites us to see our spiritual growth as an opportunity to sit alongside others and study scripture together, as a team.

Faith Practice

FRIENDSHIP



How might you share the gift of your faith with a friend this week? Encourage children to invite a friend to church this week, or invite someone who hasn't been to church in awhile to join you on your journey. Consider how a friend who has not been to church before might experience it. What can you do to make your friend feel comfortable and welcome? How can you learn from one another?



Jesus Calms the Storm

2ND WEEK OF LENT

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 8:24 — And Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

The story of Jesus calming the waves and creating calm is a story parents and young children need on an almost daily basis. There is always motion and sometimes a little bit of chaos, too! It's a gift to find moments of stillness, and to call on Jesus to provide them. Where are the moments of calm in your life? How can you find more of them?

Faith Practice

PRAY WITH THE WAVES!

This prayer simulates Jesus calming the waves of the boat and can be done with even the smallest baby. Sit on the floor with your child protected safely in your lap. Rock or sway from side to side saying “swish, swish swish swish.” After a few seconds say “And now we are still!” As you say the word “still,” immediately stop rocking and feel the stillness in your body. Babies and little ones love to anticipate what will happen with the word “still.” If your child is old enough, take the time to explain the story of Jesus calming the waves.

Do Not Worry

3RD WEEK OF LENT



SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 12:22 — Jesus said to his disciples... “Do not worry about your life.”

WEEKLY MEDITATION

Though some parents worry more than others, it seems to me that worry and parenting are like peanut butter and jelly: they go together! We can all learn to worry less, and yet the command “do not worry” seems easier said than done. The first step in learning to worry less is to be kind to oneself. After all, if one worries about worrying, it defeats the point! One way to keep worries at bay is to remember Jesus’ words that “tomorrow has enough worries of its own.” When we focus on the present moment, we are unable to give attention to the burdens of the past or the anxieties of the future.

Faith Practice

MINDFULNESS IN THE HERE AND NOW

Pick a time throughout the day (or perhaps several times) to stop and notice what is around you. The more mundane and common moments offer opportunities to stay anchored that can otherwise slip right past. Breathe deep and notice the smells, sights, tastes, sounds, and textures all around you. Give thanks to God for each moment. In time you will find that worry and being present are incompatible.

Sharing Possessions

2ND WEEK OF EASTER

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 4:32 — Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

The description of the early church in Acts chapter four is lovely. It’s a vision of a church where everyone who has needs is taken care of by the other church members. “There was not a needy person among them,” the scripture tells us. This is a vision of sharing and community. Though it’s a two thousand-year-old vision, it still rings true for the type of community most of us would like to create.

Faith Practice



SHARING WITH OTHERS

If you’ve been keeping up with your giving box we started during the beginning of Lent, this is the week to take your box to its intended recipient and offer a blessing. Before you go, pray for the people who will receive your gift and ask God to provide for them. If you’ve not been doing a box for the duration of Lent, think of another way to share with others this week.

The Spirit

1ST WEEK OF EASTER



SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 2:1-4 — When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

Though the church won't celebrate Pentecost for several weeks, this is the week when our scripture readings take us through the story of the Spirit in the church. Scripture gives powerful images of the Spirit such as a violent wind and tongues of fire. Just as we discussed last week with the planting of seeds to represent death and darkness, this week we might also want to take caution with our analogies, as very young children are quite literal. On the other hand, I'm personally fine with young children believing that God is literally the wind.

Faith Practice

BUBBLE PRAYER

Bubbles are such a magical part of a young child's life. They are easily incorporated into a fun and whimsical prayer. Say any prayer you wish out loud and then blow the bubbles. One idea for this week "God, thank you for the gift of the Spirit. Amen."

Jesus Heals 10 Lepers

4TH WEEK OF LENT

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 17:15 — Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

WEEKLY MEDITATION

In Luke 17, Jesus heals ten lepers. All ten are healed but only one returns to say thank you. I've often wondered why this is? I don't think it's that the other nine are ungrateful, but rather they've moved on to other things. After being sick for so long, they're eager to live new and healthy lives. It's easy for us to forget to show gratitude in our daily lives as well, always rushing forward to something new. Gratitude is like a muscle: the more we exercise it, the stronger we become. Give gratitude a try this week.

Faith Practice

GRATITUDE BOX



Find a box to write down all the things you're thankful for this week. Try to be as specific as you can, and see how many things you can name. If your child is old enough to share or draw, he or she can add to the box as well. At the end of the week, review the items in the box. Which things did you remember, and which had you forgotten by the end of the week?

Jesus Blesses Children



5TH WEEK OF LENT

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 18:15-17 — People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

WEEKLY MEDITATION

When the disciples and others try to dissuade Jesus from “wasting time” with children, Jesus is clear. The Bible even says he is stern about it. “Let the little children come to me,” is the clear message. When we are in places where our children are unwelcome, we can take comfort in Jesus’ full message of inclusion.

Faith Practice

BEDTIME BLESSING

At the end of the day, allow children to rest in the knowledge that they are loved and cherished by blessing them. After snuggling them into bed say something simple like:

“[Name], you are loved and blessed. May you have a restful and peaceful sleep.”

Buried

HOLY WEEK

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Luke 23:44 — “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon...”

WEEKLY MEDITATION

I’m a firm believer in the idea that some stories do not need to be shared with very young children. Some details are simply not age-appropriate for very young ones. The crucifixion and death is one such story. My recommendation for toddler-aged children is to use plain language but not to focus on any violent details. Rather than talk about Jesus’ death on the cross, something simple suffices: “Jesus died and people were very sad.”

Faith Practice



PLANTING SEEDS

Inspired by the Mexican proverb “They tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds,” try planting seeds this week with your little ones. Because their ability to understand analogy is still forming, there’s no need to try and make a direct connection to Jesus. Simply say, “A seed goes deep into the dark and warm earth. Later grass grows. Let’s put the seed in the dark soil and wait for the grass to grow.”