

SIMPLE WAYS TO CREATE  
MEANING FOR THE SEASON

# FAITHFUL FAMILIES

FOR LENT, EASTER, & RESURRECTION



*A companion to **Faithful Families:**  
Creating Sacred Moments at Home*

T R A C I   S M I T H



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## **Praise for *Faith Families for Lent, Easter, & Resurrection***

“Traci Smith has done it again! In *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, & Resurrection*, Smith welcomes us to let intuition be our guide as we journey with her through Lent and then celebrate the season of Easter. She is as clear and engaging as ever, providing fresh and engaging prompts and practices that can be done in the ‘holy mess’ of family life. I highly recommend!”—**Jennifer Grant, author of *Maybe God Is Like That Too* and *Dimming the Day***

“*Faithful Families: For Lent, Easter, & Resurrection* by Traci Smith is an excellent resource for anyone who has struggled to share the more difficult portions of the Jesus story with children during this high holiday season. From the reminder that we are the stuff stars are made of on Ash Wednesday, all the way throughout Lent, and culminating in Easter’s focus on Resurrection, the triumph of life, hope, and justice shines bright for our little congregants. This is the book I wish had existed when my children were young. Whether you are a parent or involved in children’s ministry desiring a better approach to sharing the gospel narratives during the Easter season, this book will help you do so in honest yet healthy, age-appropriate, and life-giving ways. I unreservedly and passionately recommend this timely and much needed volume.”—**Herb Montgomery, Director, Renewed Heart Ministries**

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*This one's for you, Mom. Every good idea I've ever had came from you. Thank you for teaching me how to treasure all the good things life has to offer.*

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## Introduction

When I was a child, Easter meant new shiny white shoes, a bonnet, and a spring dress—usually covered up with a winter coat in our chilly Chicago climate. Easter meant jelly beans and chocolate bunnies, plastic eggs and fake grass. Easter meant church, too: a brass quartet, lilies, flowers on the cross.

As I got older, new layers of meaning unfolded around the Easter story. I began to gain awareness that there were dark, heavy, and sad parts to the narrative—namely, that Jesus was *tortured* and killed before he rose from the dead. Though these details were hard to absorb, I appreciated the cyclical nature of death and life. Something dies, and there is new life.

Over time, the theological meaning of Easter took on a new and richer meaning, as did the season of Lent preceding it. I started to understand the history and importance of a reflection period before Easter and began to appreciate the season of celebrating new life and resurrection as well.

In *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, and Resurrection*, we'll go on a journey together and explore simple ways to experience all the richness this important season has to offer. If the season feels daunting or confusing, either on a personal level or in sharing with your family, you are not alone. I invite you to find where you connect to the story most strongly and choose the pieces of this story you'd like to highlight for yourself and for your family. There are

far more ideas in this book than you could use in one year. Read through and focus on the ones that speak to you, and let your intuition be your guide.

## **What Is Lent?**

Lent is the Christian season of holy preparation before Easter. It is the forty-six days from Ash Wednesday until Easter. Traditionally, Lent is a time for prayer, fasting, and giving. There are great variations in the ways Christians celebrate Lent, and many Christians emphasize their own traditions and values. This book presents a variety of different tools, rooted in mainline Protestant practice and theology. I hope you feel free to use the ideas here as a canvas on which to paint your own traditions, old and new.

## **What Is Holy Week?**

The final week of Lent is called Holy Week. Holy Week is considered the most significant week in the Christian calendar, and includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.

## **What Is Easter?**

Easter is the day Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This day, which we now call Easter, was the beginning of the movement we now call Christianity. It is the most important day of the Christian year. We celebrate Easter not on a specific date, but on a day referred to as a “moveable feast.” Specifically, Easter happens on the first Sunday on or following the spring

equinox. (If that's confusing for you, do as I do and ask Google to tell you the date!)

Though Easter has very specific (and important!) religious significance for Christians, it is celebrated broadly in our culture. Symbols of Easter can be both religious and non-religious. Many parents trying to teach their children the spiritual and religious significance of Easter want to keep the holiday free of secular (non-religious) symbols such as the Easter Bunny, jelly beans, or Easter eggs. In my view, these secular symbols can add to the celebration of the holiday and even enrich our celebration of it. For this reason, you will find a variety of both religious and non-religious symbols in the pages of this book. I stop short of including the bunny—although the Easter Bunny certainly makes an appearance at our house, and the basket is proudly displayed right alongside our other Easter symbols!

## **What Is the Season of Resurrection?**

Christians often speak of resurrection as a singular event—the day Jesus rose from the dead. And yet our church calendar lists Easter not as a single day, but as a season. In *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, and Resurrection*, I acknowledge this with a full chapter dedicated to resurrection practices. As you try out these ideas, you may begin to see resurrection not only as a singular event, but a full season of celebration.

## Theological Notes for the Season

Theology is the study of God. Just like other “ologies” (geology, ornithology, and psychology, to name a few), there are experts—with or without PhDs—and hundreds of thousands of pages written about the various nuances of theology. When we talk to children about faith or practice faith at home, we are *doing* theology (whether we realize it or not). We are living into the study of God. The faith practices in this book are deeply informed by my own theological perspective, though I leave plenty of room for your family and church community to decide how best to interpret them and incorporate them into your family’s life.

Because the seasons of Lent and Easter deal with the *heart* of the Christian faith, I’ve felt it necessary to add a few theological notes to help you guide your family through the season. If something I say here inspires your family to dive even deeper into theological study, I wish you well on that journey and invite you to consult the “For Further Reading” list found at [www.traci-smith.com](http://www.traci-smith.com). If you’d rather not engage in further study, there is no requirement for you to do so. I’ve done the work of vetting these practices for you, leaving them in what I consider a theological safe zone, neither committing you to fundamentalist or damaging theologies nor making specific statements likely to fall outside the realm of your congregation’s orthodoxy. These practices are, in many ways, a blank canvas on which you can paint the images

most suited to your own tradition and norms. My great hope is that this book is both flexible enough for you to interpret and structured enough for you to find direction and purpose.

## Trauma and the Violence of the Cross

Though I bristle at the word “expert,” I’ve spent a great portion of my career studying faith formation. In addition to researching and writing books about faith practices at home, I regularly speak to groups of Christian educators, ministry professionals, and parents. Over the years I’ve heard countless stories about the lasting damage that can be done when violent stories of the Bible are told in ways that are inappropriate for a child’s age and emotional development.

The bloody and violent details of the crucifixion story are difficult to process, even for adults. Though I advocate tackling difficult topics with children, I do not advocate exposing them unnecessarily to the violent details of the torture, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ. The *Faithful Families* perspective is that violent imagery and symbols should be discussed and incorporated into the story with extreme caution, not because they are unimportant or to be glossed over, but because they are an unnecessary burden for children to carry. An undue focus on violent imagery distracts from the message of the gospel, putting the emphasis not on resurrection and new life where it belongs, but stuck, like a skipped record, on death, torture, and violence.

This book does not look the other way when it comes to difficult subjects such as death, suffering, and grief. In fact, you will find many prayers, practices, and conversation starters to help you and your family navigate the waters of these tough topics. That being said, those practices, prayers, and conversation starters deliberately avoid centering the symbols and stories related to the torture and violent death of Jesus because they are not appropriate for all ages.

What is the right age for parents and Christian educators to bring up these harder details of the story? This is a hard question to answer, and it depends greatly on the individual child. As a general rule of thumb, I believe middle school-age is the earliest we should start to discuss the violent and traumatic details of the story.

## **Atonement Theory and the Meaning of Jesus' Death**

The phrase “Jesus died for our sins” is so common in Christian churches (and even in popular culture) that we rarely give it much thought. What does it mean to say, “Jesus died for our sins?” What is the relationship between *sin* and *death*? The Easter story is about death and resurrection. What is the meaning of Jesus' death, specifically, and human death, generally? What is sin? These questions might appear, at first glance, to have simple answers. When we speak to children, we try to make the answers even simpler for them to digest. Yet a statement like “Jesus died for you” or “Jesus died for our sins,” while simple, carries tremendous weight and conveys complicated theological meaning.

In Christian theology, “atonement” is the reconciliation of God and humanity through Jesus Christ. During two thousand years of Christian history, the church has explained atonement in a variety of different ways, using a variety of different metaphors and scriptures. Some of these theories, on the surface, sound like simple and orthodox Christian theologies; but when we peel back what’s really being said, we find a theological message that can be quite damaging for children. Is God an angry God who demands innocent blood? Did God *trade* Jesus’ life for *ours*? Is the torture and death of Jesus a good and meaningful necessity in order to satisfy God’s need for justice? For me, the answer to all these questions is a resounding *no*; I would never describe the mission, purpose, and death of Jesus in this way. It is possible to understand Jesus’ life and mission on earth without using the explanations above, all of which are atonement theories.

This book is my attempt to give you hands-on practices, stories, prayers, and ideas that teach about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in a way that both acknowledges the hard and sad details of the story while keeping the focus on the resurrecting work of Christ.

Answering the question “What does the death of Jesus *mean*?” is a lifelong pursuit. There is room for a variety of faithful perspectives. It is my hope that this book will provide space for you and your family to explore these difficult topics in an honest and open way, acknowledging the hard realities of death without imposing a rigid or simplistic theological framework. For those who wish to

explore atonement theology further, please visit [www.traci-smith.com](http://www.traci-smith.com)

## **Honoring and Embracing Mystery**

Those who are familiar with my first book, *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*, know that I am a strong proponent of using the word *mystery* with children. Mystery invites us into something deep within ourselves, the universe, and the world around us, and acknowledges that we do not know everything. “It’s a mystery” is a great way to acknowledge some of the most profound aspects of our Christian faith. How did Jesus rise from the dead? What does resurrection mean? These are deep and important mysteries. Mystery says, “I don’t know” without saying “I don’t care.” Just as there are many perspectives on death, there are many perspectives on resurrection. What is my own view? Well, quite simply, I believe resurrection is a profound mystery.

Blessings to you and your family as you embark on this journey through the mysteries of faith.

## NOTES FOR PARENTS

### **On Letting Things Go and Trade-offs**

Our time is finite. When we choose to do something, we are, by definition, choosing *not* to do other things. A decision to spend time with family is a decision to not



spend that time working, cleaning, shopping, or attending holiday gatherings. As much as we'd like to think we can "do it all," we can't. The practices in this book invite you to consciously choose time with your family *instead of* some other things. If you approach this book as another to-do list on top of an already full and busy life, you will make yourself crazy! Instead, choose to say no to some other things the season offers.

### **Finding Rest as a Parent**

As a minister, my colleagues often remind me that I can't pour out for others that which I don't have myself. One cannot drink from an empty well. The same is true for parents and children. If you'd like to create sacred and holy moments for your family, you must first start from a place of peace and balance within yourself. It is not selfish, as a parent, to take time for rest and renewal before creating something special for your children and family. If you're exhausted, rest. If you need to seek counsel or healing, do that before trying to create a perfect space for others. If this is not the year to do the practices in this book, set it aside. It will be here next year. Take care of yourself, first and foremost, so that you may have an abundance to share with your family.

### **Being Gentle When Things Don't Go Perfectly**

One constant in family life: Things rarely go as planned. I've embarked on many a family activity, project, or faith moment with my children only to have things end up straying quite far from the original plan. Sometimes

children don't want to participate; they get the wiggles or act out. Sometimes I find I'm much grumpier than I thought I was, and act impatiently. Sometimes we must just let the moment go. But then, there are times when a sacred moment just appears, seemingly out of nowhere. I cherish those moments! It is wise to approach the practices in this book with a sense of lightness. Don't hold too tightly to them. Expect that some will fall flat, while others may surprise you with joy. It's unrealistic to think that every family moment will be a smashing success. Families are messy, and sometimes there is beauty in that holy mess. Try to laugh it off when things don't go as planned. ("Well, *that* was something!") We can try again tomorrow.

## **A Word on Repetition**

The beauty in these practices comes through the repetition. Plowing through every practice in this book is probably not as effective as picking a few practices and repeating them weekly or (in the case of some prayers) daily. Picking a practice or two and repeating them annually over many years is also a powerful way to create lasting memories. Choose quality over quantity, repetition over novelty.

## **A NOTE ON AGES**

Finding activities that are meaningful for family members of all ages can be a challenge. The practices in this book are designed for families with children of all ages. Here are

some specific tips for children at the younger and older ends of the spectrum.

### **Tips for Younger Children**

- Remember attention spans. For the littlest ones, two or three minutes is plenty of time.
- Adjust your expectations. If you don't get through the whole practice or prayer, that's okay. Do what you can, and remember that the goal is to spend time together.
- Ask young children to repeat the words of prayers after an adult says them, one line at a time.
- Where the practices call for writing something down, have young children draw pictures instead.
- Ask open-ended questions. Statements beginning with "I wonder..." also invite young children into the stories. For example: "I wonder what it was like to wave palm branches on the day Jesus rode a donkey into the city."

### **Tips for Older Children and Teens**

- Offer choices. Give the book to them and let your children choose a practice or prayer.
- Ask them to lead. Children and teens may choose to do a practice in a different way with their own spin on it. Older children might prefer helping younger ones in the family with activities that feel too elementary for them.
- Invite feedback with open-ended questions. For example: "What do you think about this story?"

- Invite participation rather than requiring it.

## NOTES FOR MINISTRY LEADERS

I have the utmost respect for ministry leaders who are called to lead family ministries with children. One of the challenging parts of the job is balancing the needs of all people with whom you work: parents, children, families, volunteers, and coworkers. This resource is for families, but my hope is that ministry leaders will use it as well, modeling how these resources can benefit the families in your care. Here are some ways you can do that.

### **Give Parents a Place to Rest and Freedom from Perfection**

I don't know many parents who never question whether or not they're doing it right. In fact, most parents I know find themselves constantly questioning their parenting abilities. When it comes to nurturing children toward a healthy spirituality, the questions become even more daunting. Some parents wonder if they have enough knowledge to teach their children, preferring to leave that teaching to church educators and pastors. As a ministry leader, it's up to you to encourage the parents in your care and remind them that perfection is not the aim. God is pleased with our wholehearted attempts to share with our children the gifts we have been given. Perfection is not the goal. Help your parents laugh when things go amusingly astray and celebrate the smallest of successes.

## **Model That Less Is More**

If you gift this book to the families in your congregation, be sure to emphasize that there's an entire buffet of options here, and they needn't choose more than a few. You can act as curator and choose the practices you think work well with your congregation and ministry. You may want to choose a practice or two per week and highlight them for your congregation.

## **Teach These Practices as a Group, Then Practice at Home**

As a parent, there's something comforting and helpful in knowing that we're not alone as we try new things with our families. Use your influence as a ministry leader to teach families these practices and keep them accountable (in a fun way) to do them. Have a "prayer of the week" that you teach during your time together, then ask families to pray it together during the week. Do the same with the practices. You could even empower families to do the activities by getting materials ready and directing them to the appropriate page or practice.

## **Find Rest as a Ministry Leader**

Whenever I write for families, I have ministry leaders in mind as well. How can you use the practices in this book to make life easier for yourself? Perhaps one of the practices works well as a children's message or a devotional. Maybe it kickstarts your imagination and leads you to an activity you'd like to do with your families in a workshop or teaching moment. Rest is important for you, too.

## **Permissions**

By purchasing this book, your congregation is permitted to excerpt up to five prayers, practices, and lessons from this book in your church communications (newsletter, bulletin, etc.). When you do, please use the following attribution: “Excerpted from *Faithful Families for Lent, Easter, and Resurrection* by Traci Smith (Chalice Press: 2021, All Rights Reserved).”

## **Before the Season Begins: Set an Intention**

I think of this book as a travel guide or cookbook. Rather than choosing each activity in order and working through them, pick and choose what works for you. Though there are dozens of practices, prayers, and ideas in this book, you’re not expected to go through them all. I encourage you to quickly read through the book once, marking or noting the practices that appeal to you. Then, take a look at the ones you’ve marked. Is this a manageable number, or too many? Cull the list. I suggest no more than five to ten total practices or prayers for the season. You can write down your experience afterward and repeat the ones that worked well for you.

Before moving on to the rest of the book, it might be useful to take a moment and set an intention for what practices you are looking for. What kind of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection season are you trying to create for your family or congregation? Do you want to focus on prayer? service? fasting? Do you want this year to be simple and carefree, or do you have a bit of extra time to devote to something more in-depth or complicated? Do you need to

be on the lookout for practices and prayers that work well for little ones, or are you celebrating with people who are a bit older?

Before continuing into the book, or after you've skimmed through it once, take a moment and write down a sentence or two about your intention for the season. You can set an intention individually or as a family. Do this by completing one or more of these sentences:

- This year we (I) would like Lent, Easter, and Resurrection to be...
- I hope that at the end of this Lent, Easter, and Resurrection season we (I)...
- Maybe during this Lent, Easter, and Resurrection season we (I)...
- One question we'd (I'd) like to answer during this Lent, Easter, and Resurrection season is...

If you know where you want to go, you will have a better chance of getting there. Not every recipe you try from a cookbook becomes a family favorite; not every destination from the travel guide becomes the best part of the trip. Likewise, there will be some surprises (and maybe some disappointments) in these pages. Keep an attitude of openness and experimentation, and keep moving forward, trying things as you go. May it be a holy time for your family and congregation.

### **Before the Season Begins: Create a Sacred Space**

Think of a place that is sacred or holy to you. What makes it sacred? Perhaps you're imagining a place in nature where you feel connected to the creative power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe there is a home you grew up in or visited where you felt loved or valued. Some people connect to a sacred place of worship, such as a sanctuary or cathedral.

Taking time to create a sacred space at home can serve as a focal point for your Lenten and Easter practice. Let this book live there, along with anything else you're using from the book. Create the sacred space as a gift to the other members of your household, or create it together. Here are three simple ways to create a sacred space, depending on the amount of time, space, and energy you can devote to it. I encourage you to use materials you have on hand rather than purchasing new ones. Here are some different ways to organize your sacred space.

- **Table Space:** Clear off a side table, nightstand, or buffet, or put up a small table. Cover the table with a purple cloth at the beginning of Lent, then change it to white on Easter morning. Rotate symbols of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection on the table. (Use chapters 3 and 9 for symbol ideas.) Place your prayer requests or candles on the table along with other sacred materials you used during Lent, Easter, and Resurrection.
- **Closet Space:** Clear out a closet or corner of a room. Hang up Christmas lights or place a lamp on a table. Add cushions, a comfy chair, or blankets to sit on. This sort of sacred space is meant to be a space to go to for quiet prayer or meditation, so put activities in the space for this purpose. Some ideas include a finger labyrinth, prayer book or beads, and headphones.
- **Shoobox Space:** For those without much space to set aside, find a small box—such as a shoobox or lunchbox—



and put a few sacred items inside. For example, start with a votive candle and a small notebook and pen. As the season unfolds, add to your box. Take it out when you're ready to spend holy time together as a family, or take turns spending time with it individually.

## **A Prayer for a Sacred Space**

Thank you, God, for this space to use as we travel through the seasons of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection. May it be special to us. May we return to it often and say thank you for being in this space with us, as you always are everywhere with us.

## **Before the Season Begins: Make a Family Journal for the Season**

When I was in college, there was a small prayer chapel in the lower level of my dorm. It was a simple space with a pew and small table set aside for private prayer. On the pew was a journal where people could write their prayers or thoughts. The collaborative nature of the book made it truly special. It didn't belong to just one person. Instead, each person added to it. Over time, it became a true treasure, and part of my prayer time became flipping through the prayer journal to see what others had offered to God in their prayers.

To make a journal for the season of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection, start with a simple notebook or journal. Each member of the family can add to the cover by pasting images from magazines (or their own created art) as a collage. Throughout the season of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection, take turns creating pages inside. The pages

might contain written prayers, doodles, notes from any of the projects found in this book, photos, or other memories from the season.

Let the journal unfold with the season. Try not to put too many rules or parameters on what it must be or what it will become. For inspiration, do an internet search on “art journal” or “smash book.”

You might divide the journal into three sections at the beginning: one for Lent, one for Holy Week and Easter, and one for Resurrection. Or you might let it unfold with the season.

It’s fun to flip through the journal and take note of what you’ve learned and created.



## Chapter 1: Beginning the Season

This chapter contains a handful of practices that are meant to orient your entire Lenten practice. They are designed to be practiced slowly and deliberately, a little each day. I recommend picking only one of the practices in this chapter to guide you through the whole season so you can give it your full focus and attention. You might experiment with a different practice each year and rotate through them, or you might find one you like and keep it year to year.

### **Count the Days with a Lenten Paper Chain**

Using a paper chain to count the days is a fun and easy way to mark time. Though Christians typically think of Lent as 40 days long, those 40 days do not include Sundays. Adding in the Sundays (but not including Easter Sunday), Lent is 46 days long beginning with Ash Wednesday. To use a paper chain counting down Lent, either make 40 links and don't remove a link on Sundays, or make 46 links and remove one each day. The advantage of using a 46-link chain is that you are consistent with your daily practice. The advantage of a 40-link chain is that it mirrors the 40 days Jesus was in the wilderness. You can make your chain out of purple paper, the traditional color of Lent.

Alternatively, instead of using your paper chain to count down to Easter by removing a link each day, do the reverse and create a paper chain that grows each day from Ash Wednesday to Easter. If you do a paper chain that grows, you could consider writing a memory from the day on each link and watch your memories grow.



## **A Journey of Transformation: Witnessing Growth**

One way to think of the spiritual process of Lent is as a journey. Sometimes the journey is as important (or more so) than the destination. Our Lenten journey is often one of personal transformation. Perhaps we're working toward becoming more grateful or more kind. Perhaps we want to pray more. Whatever our spiritual goals are, they are a process.

Help make this connection more concrete by growing something during Lent. When we grow something, we can see the concept of journey or transformation more clearly. Start your growing project by saying, "The Lenten season can be a time where we grow and change. All living things grow and change. Let's look at how these seeds (or plants) grow over time." You could choose to be informal about it, or you could keep a detailed diary in which you observe and write down the progress each day.

Here are some growing experiments that work well during Lent:

- Grow a bean sprout from a dried bean. This can be done in a wet paper towel or in a paper cup. Do an internet search for specific directions.
- Grow wheatgrass. Many ministry leaders have told me how easy this is, as wheatgrass survives a bit of inattention and grows well during this time of year. Wheatgrass is also called "cat grass" and is available for purchase in all-in-one kits with directions included.

- Grow mustard seeds in pots or in the garden. Follow the directions on the back of the seed packet.
- Grow amaryllis bulbs. Amaryllis bulbs grow and flower in about the same amount of time as the Lenten season. Part of the trick, though, is finding a bulb to plant. I have had good luck getting these during post-Christmas clearance sales and saving them until Lent.

Though it's nice to set yourself up for success by researching the seeds you'll use and caring for them to the best of your ability, consider the spiritual lesson if your seeds *don't* grow as well as you hoped (or at all). There are lessons to be learned in both the successes and the failures, so be open to whatever the experience brings you.



## **A Journey of Transformation: Smoothing Rough Edges**

Rock tumbling is another great metaphor for transformation and growth. The rocks start out very rough and dull; slowly, through time and with lots of water and grit, they become smooth and shiny. If you're new to rock tumbling, do a quick internet search to learn the basics.

Rock tumbling can be done at home or in a larger group at church or school. You'll need a rock tumbler and the associated grits, along with the rocks. Each kit has its own directions and timeline, but many take about six weeks, the same time period as Lent. Invest in a rock tumbler and do this exercise every year during Lent, or try it once and pass your tumbler on to another family. Watch the rocks change and transform, and think about how your own life goes through a similar process.

## **Lenten Word-a-Day**

A Lenten word-a-day calendar can add focus to your Lenten practice, as each day will have one word to explore. Lenten word-a-day calendars have become popular in recent years. This version is my adaptation of this practice. Take whatever calendar you already use (wall hanging, planner, or digital) and write one of the words below into each day's square. Put the first word on Ash Wednesday and the last word on Easter Sunday and fill the rest in between. Or you can simply write the words down on a piece of paper and cross one off each day. If you miss a day, pick up where you left off.

There are many ways to use your word-a-day each day of Lent:

- Draw a picture (or take a picture) of something that the word brings to mind.
- Write a journal entry using the word as a prompt.
- Use the word as a conversation starter for your household.
- Find a way to “do” the word: drink a cool glass of water for “water,” or roll around in the yard for “tumble.”
- Any combination of the above!





<i>Day 1: Dust</i>	<i>Day 17: Earth</i>	<i>Day 33: Wonder</i>
<i>Day 2: Grow</i>	<i>Day 18: Towel</i>	<i>Day 34: Jesus</i>
<i>Day 3: Tumble</i>	<i>Day 19: Sunshine</i>	<i>Day 35: Travel</i>
<i>Day 4: Friend</i>	<i>Day 20: Rest</i>	<i>Day 36: Listen</i>
<i>Day 5: Peace</i>	<i>Day 21: Neighbor</i>	<i>Day 37: Still</i>
<i>Day 6: Soil</i>	<i>Day 22: Candle</i>	<i>Day 38: Root</i>
<i>Day 7: Water</i>	<i>Day 23: Thrive</i>	<i>Day 39: Quiet</i>
<i>Day 8: Air</i>	<i>Day 24: Rain</i>	<i>Day 40: Spirit</i>
<i>Day 9: Transform</i>	<i>Day 25: Wait</i>	<i>Day 41: Beauty</i>
<i>Day 10: Pray</i>	<i>Day 26: Human</i>	<i>Day 42: Tree</i>
<i>Day 11: Rock</i>	<i>Day 27: Cloud</i>	<i>Day 43: Thankful</i>
<i>Day 12: Rainbow</i>	<i>Day 28: Family</i>	<i>Day 44: Angel</i>
<i>Day 13: Create</i>	<i>Day 29: Free</i>	<i>Day 45: Shadow</i>
<i>Day 14: Release</i>	<i>Day 30: Light</i>	<i>Day 46: Silence</i>
<i>Day 15: Fly</i>	<i>Day 31: Journey</i>	<i>Day 47: Resurrection</i>
<i>Day 16: Butterfly</i>	<i>Day 32: Flower</i>	

## A Prayer for the Beginning of a Journey

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As we begin the season of Lent, we look forward to going on a spiritual journey. May the time we spend in prayer, service, and reflection bring us closer to God and closer to one another. May we stay focused on our Lenten practice and have patience when we make mistakes or lose our way. Amen.

### **A Prayer for Focus During Lent**

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There are so many ways to spend our time this Lent.

Some feel energizing.

Some feel distracting.

Some are exciting.

Some are boring.

Help us to still our minds and bodies so that when we choose how to spend our precious time, we choose the things that make life brighter. Amen

### **A Prayer for Patience**

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We wait with patience to learn what new things God might teach us in this season. Sometimes patience means waiting. Sometimes patience means listening. Sometimes patience means asking questions. God, please help us understand what patience means this season. Amen.



**As We Look for God's Presence**  
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God, as we begin the season of Lent, Easter, and Resurrection, help us look for your presence...

in prayer,  
in our spiritual practice,  
in nature,  
in one another.

Bless our days, that we may grow in faith, hope, and love. Amen.





## Chapter 2: Pancake Tuesday and Ash Wednesday

### **Pancake Tuesday**

Also known as Shrove Tuesday or Fat Tuesday (Mardi Gras), Pancake Tuesday is the day before Lent begins. The tradition began around A.D. 600 when Christians would give up all meat and animal products during Lent, so they used up their eggs, butter, and milk by making pancakes the day before. Christians have carried the tradition forward by having Pancake Tuesdays.

The word “shrove” in “Shrove Tuesday” refers to the absolution of sins and repentance. I tend toward leaving repentance out of the discussion on this day, trusting that the next day, Ash Wednesday, will provide plenty of opportunity to talk about the more somber aspects of the season.

I also avoid talking about gorging or overindulgence on Pancake Tuesday. As we'll discuss much more in chapter five, it is important to frame fasting and restrictions in a healthy way for children, and the idea that Pancake Tuesday is for stuffing ourselves to the point of discomfort is not a tradition I condone.

In other words: Let pancakes be pancakes, and don't overthink it! Pancake Tuesday can be as simple as that. Eat pancakes for dinner on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. This simple tradition helps to mark the season of Lent in a warm and simple way. Cook up your favorite pancake recipe and enjoy.

## **Understanding Ash Wednesday and Celebrating at Home**

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent. It is the Wednesday exactly 46 days before Easter Sunday. Ash Wednesday gets its name from a ritual in which a priest or pastor dips their finger in ashes and draws them on the foreheads of congregation members saying, "Repent and believe the good news of the gospel" or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The ashes are traditionally made by burning the palm branches from the previous year's Palm Sunday. This ritual marks the beginning of Lent and is a powerful reminder that life is fleeting, that each day is precious and valuable. The ashes are also a symbol of repentance, or turning away from sin.

In this chapter, we'll explore several practices and prayers for Ash Wednesday at home. It can feel heavy and somber to remind children of their eventual deaths (which is, after all, the heart of what Ash Wednesday teaches). One



Ash Wednesday many years ago, I was offering ashes to a group outside my regular worshipping congregation. Adults came forward and lifted up their hair as I said the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” One young mother, after receiving her ashes, bent down and picked up her baby from the stroller. She held the baby up to me and said, “Ashes for my daughter, too, please.” I had rarely placed ashes on a baby before, so this moment struck me in a new way. Tears came to my eyes as I smudged ashes on the baby’s tiny forehead and said, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

In thinking about that moment, and in considering how to handle Ash Wednesday with young children, I’ve come to embrace the value of this somber day even for the youngest among us. When we speak about the fragility of life and our eventual death in plain terms, with frank language, we do our children a great service. Rather than treating death as taboo or off-limits, we open the door to conversation and a rich spiritual practice wherein death, though certainly tragic and sad most of the time, is a normal and expected part of life.

## We Come from Dust

In the book of Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, we read, “Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). In Hebrew, the original language of the book of Genesis, there is a very close link between the word ‘āḏām, meaning “man” or “human being,” and ʾāḏāmâ, “ground.” The *adam* was made from the *adama*: the human from the ground.

The image of God breathing into the dirt and creating humanity is a powerful one. What makes us different from a ceramic jar is God’s breath in us, that close and intimate link between us and God. At the end of our lives, as our breath or spirit returns to God, our bodies will turn to dust again, either through cremation or decomposition into earth. On Ash Wednesday, you can remember this link at home by replacing ashes with dirt.

Take a small scoop of dirt from the ground and place it in a dish. Let each person in your family squish it around with their fingers. Read Genesis 2:7 and explain the connection between the word “ground” and the word “human.” Explain, in simple language, that all people return to the earth after they die. Then, if you like, make a cross shape on the back of your hand and say, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Amen.”