



A Burning in the Heart

For Ash Wednesday

Fire is merciless.

When fire burns paper, wood, refuse; nothing is left but ashes. A gray, powder or fragile flake is all we see from whatever disintegrated. The resulting ashes can be used to enhance soil, make lye for soap, and keep bugs away in the garden. But they will never become what they were.

Perhaps that is why Ash Wednesday is our entrance into a season of preparation to review and apply the truths of the cross and resurrection. We need a burning in our hearts that will reduce to ash what does not lead us to Christlikeness.

At best it's an object lesson. We wear the sign of the burning away of our sin with the mark of the cross in ashes. It humbles us to smear the ashes on our foreheads. How else should we approach the message of the cross and resurrection but with humility?

Humbled, we are ready to listen. More than anything, these forty days to Easter are days of listening. Whatever we do to keep them, we must listen. We listen for instruction, warning, counsel, review, direction. If we go into Lent asking ourselves what we must do, we have the wrong order. We start with what *God* says we must do.

Lent should be a time to allow God to take us where only His evaluation counts. There are four components that help us. Still, we are not in charge of them. We respond to God's nudging from idea to participation. Let's review them:

1. Give up something.

This is not about self-deprivation. This is about soul-cleaning. We ask ourselves, *What can we do without so that God has more of us.* Fasting is an old practice, rooted deeply in the Old Testament.

Today, many spiritual leaders counsel us to go beyond food when we fast. Fast complaining, blaming, impatience, argumentativeness, sarcasm, busyness, entitlement, insecurity, premature perspective, worry, judgment, spiritual spectatorship, and so many other pesky attitudes and persuasions that set us at odds with how God would have us live.

2. Confess and Repent

We all need to go under the microscope of God. We need to let go of excuses that “we did the best we could” or “we’ll do better next time.” We need to take responsibility for actions, words, perspectives, self-talk that is at odds with God’s standards and desires for us. True confession—owning what we did before God—isn’t about putting ourselves down. It’s about soul-cleaning. Confession humbles us. Repentance puts us on our feet again going the right direction.

3. Pray

Engaging in any spiritual activity without prayer is an exercise in futility. Without God’s analysis and correction, we are only perpetuating self-help. Pray more but not at one time. Pray one-word prayers: Come, help, forgive. They are often more powerful than stringing too many words together. Short prayers you can easily repeat through the day: “Lord, have mercy.” “Open my eyes.” “Lead me.” They are statements of faith that God is listening and they encourage you to wait for what He says or does.

4. Serve

What happens on the inside must come out somehow. We don’t get to sit back and revel in our spiritual experiences. That’s narcissistic. Instead, God deploys us into places where “the harvest is plenty but the workers are few.” Maybe God wants you to serve your family’s spiritual needs better. Maybe He is directing you to create relationships with neighbors and be ready for something God knows they will need from you. Maybe it’s a good time to connect with a ministry at church or a charity in your community. Remember, “faith without works is dead.” Spiritual openness and growth without investing it where God needs you, is self-serving.

These forty days are critical if we are to learn what the cross and resurrection should mean in our lives. Each week, I’ll supply a reflection on some aspect of Jesus’ life and journey to the cross. There will be a daily scripture, reflection questions, and other suggested ways to engage your heart in this journey.

Jesus gave all for us on the cross. Can we do less for him?

Sharing the journey with you!

Debbie



Lent--Week 1: Prepare

Consider fasting your expectations about this journey to Lent and give God full control of what you do and how you do it.

Thursday: Come

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest . . . Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. NLT

Imagine Jesus standing in front of you with this invitation for this journey. How will you answer this invitation every day?

Friday: Fast

Isaiah 58:3 Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. NLT

If you give God your heart for this journey, what might you fast (do without) that will bring spiritual renewal or growth?

Saturday: Confess

Proverbs 28:13 People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. NLT

If confession is how God begins His heart-cleaning, what could confession free you from?

Sunday: Worship

Psalms 28:5 My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me . . . And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming." TLB

As you enter worship, enter as if called to an important meeting you can't afford to miss.

Monday: Pray

Hebrews 4:14, 16 Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. . . . let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help. The Message

Pray for mercy and that you will recognize it as God's help and first answer to any prayer.

Tuesday: Serve

Galatians 5:13 You have been given freedom . . . to love and serve each other. TLB

Since you are freed to serve, where is God leading you to serve?



Lent--Week 2: Repent

Fast excuses for anything past or present that God points out. Repent and live cleaned of self-recrimination which is usually UN-forgiving.

Thursday: Praying “We”

Consider reading the whole prayer found in Daniel 9:4-19 throughout this week.

Daniel 9:5-6a But **we** have sinned and done wrong. **We** have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. **We** have refused to listen . . .

Are you willing to pray the “we” prayer? What does God show you because you do?

Friday: Seeking God’s Face

Psalms 105:4 Look to the Lord and his strength; **seek his face** always.

What does it mean to seek God’s face? Dare we keep looking to His grief and what He sees?

Saturday: Wanting More than IF

2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people who are called by my name will **humble themselves** and pray and **seek my face** and **turn** from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

What does it mean to humble yourself during this season? How do you need to “turn” so that you “hear” God better?

Sunday: Seeing Jesus

Mark 9:4, 8 Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus. . . Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and **they saw only Jesus** with them.

*What do you need to stop seeing or thinking about so that you see **only Jesus** today in worship?*

Monday: Keep Searching

Psalms 63 1 O God, you are my God; I **earnestly search** for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you.

How earnest is your daily search to see where God is working in your life and in your world? The more you earnestly search, the more you will see.

Tuesday: Be Encouraged

Psalms 69:32 The humble will see their God at work and be glad. Let all who seek God’s help **be encouraged**.

*Where are you encouraged because of what God **is** doing? A God-encouraged heart sees more.*



Lent--Week 3: Pray

Fast the sounds and voices that take you away from God's whispers. Or fast the unnecessary activities or tasks that steal time you could use to pray.

Thursday: Refuting *If*

Matthew 4:3 The tempter came to [Jesus] and said, "***If*** you are the Son of God

*Where have you allowed the tempter to taunt you with if's? Review God's character where there are no if's, only **I am** and **I will**.*

Friday: Watch Out!

Matthew 26:42 Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give into temptation. For the spirit is willing but the body is weak!

How can prayer, set-aside-time or on-the-go prayer, keep you focused on Who God says He is?

Saturday: Longing

Psalms 84:2 My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

What will help you yearn for God more than for what you want Him to do for you? Pray there until you know it is God Himself Who satisfies completely.

Sunday: Clean

Psalms 24:3b Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Bring your hands and heart to God today. Ask Him to clean them from any activities or attitudes that do not produce His purity.

Monday: What We Need Most

Hebrews 4:16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

What mercy and grace waits for you from God's unlimited resources? Be bold to ask and ready to receive.

Tuesday: Filled!

Romans 15:13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Joy and peace are gifts of God, not gifts of circumstances. Pray until you "overflow with confident hope" because of whatever God **will do** over what you think He should do.*



Lent--Week 4: Clean

Consider fasting emotional clutter. Fast negative thoughts about yourself and any tendency to nurse old wounds.

Thursday: Turn it Over

Mark 11:15a, 16, NLT Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling . . . he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a marketplace

What would Jesus overturn in your heart? What recurring self-doubt? What pushy voice? Let him show you where the “marketplace” has a table in your heart.

Friday: Clean Heart

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

How does a cleaned heart make renewing a right spirit about godly goals and standards possible? How have you wanted renewal without the cleaning?

Saturday: Get Rid of It

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Where is there anger or harsh words between you and someone else. Forgive what hurt you and give kindness back. This is heart-cleaning, too.

Sunday: Heart Surgery

Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

Is your heart “tender, responsive” to God? Let Him remove the “stony, stubborn” parts so it can be. Worship is a good place for this to happen.

Monday: Clean Inside

Luke 11:39 You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness!

Where have you spent more time looking good on the outside instead of letting God clean you on the inside? This is about priority, not about putting yourself down or ignoring appearance.

Tuesday: Keep Ready

2 Timothy 2:20a-21 If you keep yourself pure . . . Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

What is the connection between a clean heart and readiness for ministry? How will you continue to address this connection?



Lent--Week 5: Rest

Consider fasting a push toward busyness. Fast the unreachable goal to “get it all done.” That’s where you will find more time for God.

Thursday: Soul-rest

Matthew 11:29b-30 Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.

Where are you carrying part of a burden Jesus wants to share—the unknowns, the why’s, the fears?

Friday: Salvation Rest

Isaiah 30:15b In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.

What do you need to repent of (turn away from) to experience rest in God’s affirmation of who you are?

Saturday: Sheltered Rest

Psalms 91:1 Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

If God wants to “shelter” you from what robs soul-rest, will you let Him? How?

Sunday: Sabbath Rest

Hebrews 4:9-10 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

Will you accept a Sabbath-rest? Can you make it rest for worry, from push, from insecurity or anything that is a rest-thief?

Monday: Prepared Rest

Psalms 23:2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

Where is God pointing you to “green meadows” and “peaceful streams?” Will you let Him lead you there for soul-rest?

Tuesday: A Reason to Rest

Psalms 116:3 Let my soul be at rest again, for the LORD has been good to me.

No matter the work you must do today, is your soul at rest? Rehearse the goodness of God and rest there.



Lent--Week 6: To See

Consider fasting the blinders that prevent you from seeing other people's wounds, fear, hardships, confusion, or ignorance until you see your own and ask for healing.

Thursday: Seeing My Blindness

Mark 10:51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

What blinds you? Fear? Worry? Doubt? Loss? Denial? Can you let Jesus heal you there?.

Maundy Thursday: Seeing My Dirt

John 13:8 Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"
Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

What attitude, perspective, dream or life pursuit needs cleaning? Submit to His washing.

Good Friday: Seeing the Cross

Mark 15:39 When the Roman officer who stood facing him **saw** how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

See Jesus on the cross. See the torturous death. See God weeping over this cost for our redemption. How will you live because Christ did this for you?

Dark Saturday: Seeing in the Dark

Luke 23:44b, 45a And darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. The light from the sun was gone.

Consider sitting in complete darkness for 5 minutes. Contemplate the darkness we would have without Jesus. Thank him for taking on our darkness that day. Thank him for continuing to deal with darkness!

Easter Sunday: Seeing the Empty Tomb

Mathew 28:5-6 Then the angel spoke to the women. . . "He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen.

I Corinthians 15:54b Death has been swallowed up in victory.

See the empty tomb. Is there anything you face that resurrection power does not address?

Easter Monday: Seeing My Resurrection

Romans 6:3-4 Have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Have you forgotten? Review your life story as a resurrection story. Renew your desire to live a resurrected life.