

## Lenten Season 2026

The Session of Rincon Mountain Presbyterian Church is calling the congregation to participate in 40 days of Giving, Prayer and Fasting during the Lenten Season. Lent is the forty-day period on the Christian calendar between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Traditionally, this period has been used in the church to call believers to a greater level of devotion to God through prayer, repentance, giving and self-denial. This year Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18, and goes to Easter on April 5.

The purpose of any period of fasting and praying is not to fulfill a religious duty. No one should feel compelled by the Session to participate in this time of prayer and fasting. We believe, however, that renewed vigor in prayer and fasting is enhanced when we participate in it together. Believers grow in their faith and dependence on God when these disciplines are practiced. Lent is not a duty to be practiced 40 days out of the year but a catalyst for greater use of these disciplines throughout the entire year.

I'm sure you will notice that there are more than 40 days between February 18 and April 5. During Lent, Sundays are not counted in the 40 days. You do not fast on Sundays during Lent because they are feast days. On these days, as we do on Sundays throughout the year, we rejoice in the presence of the Lord and celebrate his resurrection.

During these 40 days you are encouraged to more fervent and urgent prayer, to fasting from food (for short intervals) or luxuries, and giving of yourself or your goods to those in need. Matthew 6:1-18 provides some of the best instruction on giving, prayer, and fasting in the Bible. Study and meditate upon these Scriptures in preparation for Lent.

Here is some additional instruction on Lent:

### Giving

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples regarding how to live as citizens of his kingdom while living in the midst of the world. He is particularly interested that we not live hypocritically but rather with integrity. In Matthew 6 Jesus instructs us in three areas of what we might call religious activity or discipline. His first priority, interestingly enough, is that of giving to the needy.

In Matthew 6:2-4 Jesus instructs us in this manner regarding giving to the needy:

[2] “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We learn from our Lord’s instruction in these words that giving to the needy is expected, “. . .when you give to the needy.” It is not a matter of if you should give to the needy but when you do, do it with the right heart and the right motives. That leads to the second point.

Giving to the needy is to be done in secret. Don’t let others know that you are giving to the needy. The only people that need to know are you and the person to whom you are giving assistance. If you blow your own horn when you give to the needy for the sake of public recognition you might receive public recognition—but that is all you’ll receive. God has so much more for you. How much greater is our reward when the Father of the universe, the Lord of all creation, rewards us than when we seek our own reward!

You might ask, “How do I know who the needy are? Who is ‘the needy?’” but then if you’re asking that question you’ve kind of missed the point. The focus of Jesus’ teaching is not on determining whether someone has need or not. The focus is on you understanding that all you have is His and that he wants you to participate in giving that is motivated out of charity (love).

Your motive for charitable giving is not out of duty to someone who is less fortunate than you but out of love for Jesus who gave himself fully and completely for you. Because you love him and because he loves you, you love others by giving to them.

Jesus’ instruction assumes that you are giving a tithe to the church. It assumes that you are giving sacrificially (offerings) to the church, to missions, and to other good Christian works. Charitable giving is giving beyond normal giving out of the excess you have been given.

In the 40 days of Lent, consider ways that God may be calling you to practice charitable giving. If you give online, you can select the “Deacon’s Fund” as one of the options for giving. If you still place your tithe in the offering plate in the sanctuary or if you send your tithe in, we can provide an envelope for directed giving to this fund. We encourage you to increase your charitable giving during

these 40 days. God may call you to give more to the Deacon's Fund. Maybe there is a neighbor or friend or organization in your neighborhood that would benefit from your charitable giving.

God is calling you to charitable giving. Wherever and whenever God calls you to charitable giving during Lent be creative, be enthusiastic, and be generous. Be ready to see fruit in your life as God rewards you for your giving. And be careful! Charitable giving can be habit forming!

### Prayer

In Matthew 6:7-13 Jesus instructs us regarding prayer.

Matthew 6:5–13

[5] “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

[7] “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [9] Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
[10] Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
[11] Give us this day our daily bread,  
[12] and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
[13] And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. (ESV)

As with the other disciplines, it is clear that Jesus expects his disciples to pray. And that makes sense. Clear, consistent and intimate communication is at the heart of

any healthy relationship. God speaks to us through his word and Spirit and we speak to him in prayer.

Our relationship with God is established through prayer (Psalm 40:1, 2; Romans 10:9, 10), strengthened through prayer (John 14:13, 14), and guarded by prayer (Philippians 4:6, 7). In prayer we declare our praises to God, we seek cleansing from sin through confession before God, we thank God for his provision and work, and we demonstrate our dependence on God for all he has in store for us out of his great riches.

Prayer is expected of Jesus' followers. Jesus goes on to instruct his disciples that the prayer he expects is to be done in secret. That doesn't mean we shouldn't pray in public. It does mean that our public prayers are to be done as humbly and carefully as those done in secret. The discipline of prayer is best learned on our knees in the private places where we can let our hearts sing praise to God, weep over our sin, shout thanks to God for his goodness and faithfulness and cry out to God for help, provision and deliverance. Having practiced fervent prayer in private we will pray in public with greater confidence and conviction.

In all our prayers, both public and private, Jesus teaches us that we are not to 'heap up empty phrases'. We are to keep our prayers simple, clear, and direct. Repetition of phrases occurs often in the prayers of those who pray to other gods. They repeat mantras in hopes of gaining the attention of their god. The prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 are examples of this kind of repetitious prayer. There is nothing wrong with lengthy prayers—Jesus himself prayed for extended periods of time. There is something wrong with empty prayers. St. Augustine made an appropriate distinction between much speaking in prayer and much prayer.

After telling his disciples that he expects them to pray—"when you pray"—Jesus teaches them how to pray. He begins by warning them of two ways not to pray—to call attention to oneself and to pray repetitiously. Then he gives them what has become known as The Lord's Prayer. Jesus would not have promoted the blind repetition of this prayer as some have but rather he gave it as a model for us. In short, it shows us the one to whom we pray, our dependence on His power and his provision, and the glory of his kingdom.

Prayer is a discipline that is learned. Practice it. And during times of fasting, let the pains you feel from your fast prompt you to more frequent and more fervent prayer. When prayer is combined with fasting it is often with a particular petition in mind, i.e. for greater personal zeal against sin and for the things of God, for the salvation of unsaved family members, and for revival in our city, state, or nation.

As the time of focused giving, prayer and fasting approaches, pray about what people or issues upon which God might focus your prayers.

## Fasting

In Matthew 6 while giving his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples about giving and prayer and he teaches them about fasting.

[16] “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [17] But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, [18] that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

He makes these important notes: 1) fasting, like charitable giving and prayer, is expected. He says “When you fast...” not “If you fast...”. He also teaches, 2) that fasting is a discipline that, when practiced by a disciple, should not necessarily be evident to others. Jesus says that we should do it in secret. His primary emphasis in saying this is that it not be done for personal reward—especially public attention or recognition. His concern is that we not steal glory from God by attracting attention to ourselves. This would, indeed be hypocritical: making public our act of devotion to God in order take attention away from God. Finally, 3) Jesus teaches that our fasting done in secret produces fruit or reward. He says, “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Fasting is perhaps best defined as ‘the absenting of something from your life in order to add something to your life’. The things from which you might fast vary from all kinds of food to certain kinds of food or beverages to electronic devices. What is most often added during a period of fasting is prayer.

What will you give up in order to add in more prayer? Ask the Holy Spirit to use the absence of that thing or those things to prompt you to more prayer, more time in the Bible, and more growth in your life than you’ve ever known before. Remember, don’t fast just because you need to lose a few pounds. Fast because God is calling you to greater devotion to him and less dependence on things that satisfy the flesh.

Here are some final reminders about fasting:

- 1) **Fasting is not dieting.** Don't fast in order to lose weight. The heart behind fasting is that it would turn your focus upon your dependence upon God—not on your need to lose a few pounds.
- 2) **Fasting can affect your health.** Fasting from food may not be healthy for you. If you have serious health conditions consult your doctor before participating in a fast from food. Always stay hydrated while you fast. Fasting from water is never mentioned in the Bible.
- 3) **What you fast from ought to cause you some discomfort or pain.** Fasting from something that you won't miss probably won't require much discipline and probably won't prompt much change in your life. Use the pain you feel from your fast to prompt you to prayer.
- 4) **Fasting is almost always connected with prayer in the Bible.** Just as fasting reminds of our dependence on God, prayer expresses our dependence on God. The two go together. Add more prayer into your life during Lent.

In conclusion, as you consider practicing giving, fasting and praying during Lent you might consider trying to make your efforts in the three disciplines align. Here are some examples of what I mean:

- If you choose to fast from all food one day a week during the 6 weeks you might consider spending focused time on those days in prayer for the hungry in Tucson. In addition, you might consider giving what you didn't spend on food those days to the local food bank or toward a world hunger organization.
- If you fast from social media for the 40 days you might consider praying for those who have limited social interaction, those are shut-in due to illness or disability, and spend some time during the 40 days visiting those from our church who are shut-in.