It has been duly noted that the Christian message is proclaimed upon two great miracles: the Incarnation and the Resurrection. Every year at Christmas, Christians around the world mark the day in which we celebrate the miracle of God becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ. And every year, we mark another day in which we celebrate the miracle of Jesus conquering death by His resurrection from the dead. (Of course the early church saw much significance in meeting every Sunday morning in honour of the new life in Christ made possible by His resurrection.)

Because these two miracles are so defining for the world, many Christian traditions across the board spend extra time contemplating, reflecting, and preparing to celebrate these days. Just like the season of Advent is a season of preparation to celebrate the Incarnation, so the season of Lent is a season of preparation to celebrate Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

What does “Lent” mean?

The name of the season, “Lent,” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten” which simply means “spring.” The season of Lent spans the 40 days prior to Easter (not counting the six Sundays of Lent) and is characterized by a special focus upon seeking God through repentance. Spring is a fitting illustration as we see the physical world awake from the deadness of winter to new life and beauty.

The season begins on Ash Wednesday which gets its name from the fact that in Scripture people would often put ashes on their heads as a sign of repentance. For example, the Prophet Daniel once said, “Then I turned my
face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:3). Ashes are also a reminder of our mortality: “All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return” (Ecclesiastes 3:20). So Ash Wednesday signals the start of a season of diligently seeking God’s face.

Why are we encouraging the season of Lent?

Martin Luther once said, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, ‘Repent’, He meant that the entire life of believers is to be one of repentance.” All of life is to be marked by a continual turning from sin and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the value of Lent is that it helps intensify the importance of this turning from death to life as we reflect on our own mortality and the reason why Jesus had to come and die for our sins.

Some people are suspicious of Lent because they have been around people who attempt to use Lent as a way to build up their own righteousness before God (instead of receiving it as a gift of God’s grace) or to be seen by others. Sometimes people boast, “I’m giving up coffee/ Facebook/ sugar for Lent”, but doesn’t this seem a bit trivial? After all, God doesn’t ask us to give up coffee, but rather to give Him our lives to Him.

Let’s be clear: observing Lent is a matter of freedom. It doesn’t make one more important or less important. It’s simply an opportunity—should you decide to take advantage of it—to concentrate on your relationship with God. Its design is to help you refocus upon God and to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can I benefit the most from the season of Lent?

There are some simple ways that you can make this season of Lent a valuable season in your life.

1. **Make it a priority to worship with fellow believers at New City Church.** On each of the six Sundays of Lent leading up to the celebration of Easter, we’ll be seeking to grow deeper in our relationship with God. Our Sunday morning studies in the Scriptures will give special attention to the theme of spiritual renewal in returning to God. On Sunday evenings, we’ll be watching and discussing RC Sproul’s life-changing video series, “The Holiness of God.”

2. **Use the season of Lent to read through the Gospel of Luke** (see the reading guide below). Luke is especially keen to help us see Jesus as one who came “to seek and save the lost” (19:10). Combine readings with a few selected psalms.

3. **Spend time pursuing fellowship with other believers.** Share stories about coming to faith in Christ. Share where you want to grow more as a believer. Share ways that you can pray for one another. Consider ways in which you can extend hospitality to others.

4. **You may want to spend some extra time in focused reading.** May we commend the following books?

   - “Seeking God’s Face: Praying with the Bible Through the Year”
   - “A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World” by Paul Miller
   - “When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy” by John Piper
   - “The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing” by C.J. Mahaney
   - “A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God’s Love” by Milton Vincent
   - “The Transforming Power of the Gospel” by Jerry Bridges

5. **Spend time in self-examination every day,** and perhaps journaling (if that would help focus your thoughts).

   - In what areas of my life have I shown hardness of heart towards God, or coldness of heart towards others?
   - Why do I get so defensive? Why can’t I take criticism better? Why do I live or die upon another’s approval of me?
   - How is my appetite for the Scriptures? Can I say with the Psalmist that God’s word is “more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold”?
   - In what ways do materialism and the desire for ‘new things’ have a stronghold in my life?
   - Why do I find it so hard to pray? Why do I only pray when I either feel guilty or have exhausted all my other options?
   - Who can I approach to give me honest feedback about the way others experience me? Do I even want this kind of feedback?
   - Is there someone to whom I need to extend forgiveness? Is there someone from whom I need to seek forgiveness?
   - Go to NewCityChurch.ca - Resources - Articles for some articles that can help you think through where you are in the Christian life.

**Final Thoughts**

Think of this season as a time of renewal and refocusing on your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Simply be intentional in seeking God’s face. Turn. Repent. Rest. Rejoice. Remember: the Lord Jesus came for us, and for our salvation.