



Lent *Readiness* Guide 2021

Ideas and Resources to Help You
Experience **Lent Another Way**

Written by Lenora Rand and cin salach

Introduction

After the kind of year 2020 has been, maybe we need to look at Lent 2021 a little differently.

In the past, for many churchy types of various kinds, the season of Lent, the 40-odd days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, has been thought of as a dedicated **time for self-reflection**, for “spiritual renewal.” However, to be honest, what that turned into more often than not, was more like **the spiritual equivalent of a fad diet**, a concerted effort to give up “bad habits” and a time for trying to figure out how to be more holy - **or at least look more “holy-ish.”**

But what if Lent could be a time that really helped you see more clearly **who you are and who you want to be?** What if it could help you see how to respond to your own pain and anger and fear, and to the deep hurt of the world? What if it could help you feel more seen...and less alone? **And find your way forward with some hope?**

That’s why we’ve put together some resources to help.

One of those resources is this **Lent-Readiness Guide.**

It’s designed to offer you some **simple, doable and mindful ideas to help you prepare to have a meaningful experience of Lent.**

Of course, for some of you, **Lent may be just a word you've heard people using and you've never been totally clear on what it's all about** except that it's supposed to make you feel more spiritual and seems to involve not eating meat on Fridays and giving up Facebook for a while?? Or sugar??? Or wine???? Or swear words?

For others of you, Lent may be **one of those practices that you tossed out when you walked out the doors of whatever church screwed you over** or rejected you for who you are, for how you express your identity, who you love, what you believe or can't believe, or for not toeing the party line in some way or another. (And by the way, we've been there too, and we're so sorry that happened to you.)

But what if practicing Lent could actually help you find a sense of grounded-ness when everything feels like it's swirling? What if it could help you live with more honesty and fearlessness and self-care in the midst of the hard personal stuff we humans each have to deal with on a daily basis? What if it could give you space to not only express your own longings and laments, but also to take in God's unrelenting love and grace?

This **Lent-Readiness Guide** was designed to give you some ideas about how that could happen.

Another resource we've created that might help is an e-course you can sign up for, called **Lent Another Way**. This course is designed to be an eye/mind/soul-opening way **to move through Lent and help you move closer to your own heart and the heart of the world**.

It includes inspiring reflections and short, simple writing prompts sent to your inbox each day from a diversity of voices. As well as the opportunity to share what you're writing and experiencing with others through a private Facebook group.

You can learn more about that and sign up [here](#).

Why Prepare For Lent?

Preparation for Lent is actually a long-standing tradition in the history of the church. You might have heard of this time of Lent prep referred to as **Shrovetide** - the official name for it on the Christian Liturgical Calendar. And one of the Shrovetide festivities you could even be familiar with is **Fat Tuesday** – which often involves a lot of Mardi Gras-type merrymaking and/or the eating of pancakes or special sinfully delicious donuts. ([Recipes available here!](#))

But whether you do the donuts or not...doing some specific things to prepare can be incredibly **useful in changing how you make your way through the Lenten season**. Especially if you want to have a different experience than you've had in the past.

This guide includes eight tips on how to get your mind, body and spirit into a Lent-ready place.

You may choose to try to do everything on this list. You might decide to try one or two of the suggestions. And honestly, for some of you, just **reading/skimming this guide may be all Lent Prep you can handle**. And that's totally fine.

Because **what you won't find in this guide are shoulds or shame**. We think Lent has had more than its share of those through the years. And none of us need any more of that, thank you very much.





Lent Readiness Ideas

1.

Don't give up. Or...do.

Some people like to “give up something for Lent.” Other people...not so much. In these days leading up to Ash Wednesday, you might want to spend some time thinking and journaling about whether you want to give something up or not, and if so what. Here are some questions that may be helpful. We especially hope that you can ask yourself these questions with (as author Geneen Roth has suggested) “curiosity and kindness.”

Questions to consider:

a)

If we do this “giving up” to bring us closer to God and to the truth of our own lives, is there anything in your life right now that’s doing the opposite of that, **taking you farther away from God and keeping you at a distance from yourself?**

b)

What are some things you’re surrounding yourself with on a daily basis, to keep you “cheered up” and distracted, or to help you feel worthy or cool? **Is there anything you’re using to dull the pain,** keep you too busy to think, making you feel overly “full”?

c)

Emily C. Heath writes: “Lent calls us to turn from the things that can never love us back.” Is there anything in your life now that you’re very attached to, that can’t love you back?

d)

What do you wish you had more space for in your life?
What do you wish you could take in more of?



2.

Claim some Holy Ground

We live in world with screens everywhere, to-do lists that are way too long and demands that pile up on us like laundry on that exercise bike we bought and never used. But what if Lent was here to give you more space? More time? More energy? An opportunity to just breathe or pray or do absolutely nothing. **To simply sit with ourselves, be present, take off our shoes and feel the holy ground under our feet.**

We believe that's exactly what Lent is for and we've found that having certain physical objects around during this time can help to focus and reflect.

As you get ready for Lent this year, you may want to set up a corner of a room as your altar/meditation area and fill it with some things that have meaning for you. Or you may want to gather some things into a box or bag that you can take out each day to create a portable altar.

Here are some objects that you might gather to help you create your own holy ground.

Candle

Any candle will do, though you may want to find one in purple (the color of the season) or in a scent that you particularly like. The act of lighting a candle is simple but profound. **Lighting one as a ritual act each day can help us move out of our practical thinky-thinky-ness** into the more intuitive, spiritually-awake side of our brains.



2.

Claim some Holy Ground

(con't)

Stones

The 40 day journey of Lent was inspired by Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness and by the Israelites 40 years in the desert. In both these narratives, stones play a crucial part. Jesus was tempted to turn a stone into bread, Moses struck a rock to get water, and we can only imagine how many stones the people of Israel tripped over along the way. You might want to include a rock in your Lent practice, and also a washable marker. (You can buy rocks at craft stores in various sizes or you may want to walk in your neighborhood or in a nature preserve and collect one.) **Then, each day during Lent you could simply write a word on the stone of what's getting in your way, or that you keep tripping over.**

Sand

What if you included a small container of sand in your sacred space and daily meditations? (Also something available at craft and home decor stores.) Each day during Lent you could place your hands in the sand and remember that you're on a journey too. **Letting it sift through your fingers it could remind you of how shifting sand is a part of life.** Let each grain of sand remind you that you're a small piece of the whole.

Cross

For many of us, this has been a symbol of faith that's been used to beat us up, make us feel unworthy. A symbol that's been used to keep people out rather than invite them in. **What if this Lent you brought a cross onto your holy ground with a prayer that God might show you new ways to see it.** You may want to try to find a cross different from the ones you grew up around, like the one pictured below from the fair trade Artisan Coop, [La Semilla de Dios](#) in El Salvador, that reflects a vision of God's love for all the world.



2.

Claim some Holy Ground

(con't)

Music

There is power in music. Stanford University has conducted numerous studies over the past 10 years that have scientifically validated what most of us have already experienced... **music makes a difference in how we feel, and think, and can open us up to God and each other in ways little else can.** So during this pre-Lenten time, you could find songs to listen to each day of Lent. You could make your own playlist, or you may want to check out this one we've made on Spotify with a number of songs that reflect the themes of the season on it.

Find the playlist here: bit.do/lentanotherwaymusic

Instead of a playlist, **you may want to choose just one song, and rather than only listening to it, you might want to learn it and sing it every day.** One you might consider is this Agnus Dei or Lamb of God, by [The Many](#). The Agnus Dei has been sung for centuries in many church traditions. In our version, we've tried to bring a fresh perspective on the old text, with lyrics that talk about a God who so loves the world and everyone of us: "Lamb of God. With love poured out you suffer with the world." It's set to an easily singable and memorable tune and you can find a video of it [here](#). You can also find the sheet music for it [here](#).

Lamb of God

A song for Lent

3.

Give Yourself a (15 Minute) Break.

Let's just agree that we are all too busy to add one more thing to our plates. And doing stuff for Lent, whether that's reading something every day, or trying to pray or meditate or journal more often, or whatever could seem like that One. More. Thing. How can we find the time without spending 40 days in resentment?

Keep it short.

What if you started now working on re-framing "lengthy obligation" into "restorative gift"? Instead of thinking "I have to find a block of time to do devotions/prayer/you-name-it today," **what if we could say, "I deserve to take 15 minutes for myself today,** 15 minutes that will help me feel more connected to myself and to God and to the world God loves."

Because **15 minutes isn't that much. It feels possible. It doesn't feel greedy.** Like something you could ask a friend for, without feeling guilty... Imagine you were going to see a friend and running late you say, "I just need 15 minutes, is that OK?" and imagine how that friend would respond. They would likely say, "No problem sweetie, I'll see you when you get here. **Take your time.**" So in these days before Lent, think about what 15 minutes you could give yourself in your day and then try to imagine being that kind of friend to yourself.

4.

Get a Journal - For Prayers, Poems, Laments, Questions

The act of writing is similar to making music. It changes the brain. Changes our thoughts. Might even change the outcome. So you might want to commit to a daily practice of writing during the 40 days of Lent. **In this time of preparation for the season, you might want to buy a simple notebook or beautiful journal.** And remember, what you write or how much isn't really the point. The important part is simply doing it every day. And 10 to 15 minutes is enough. *(And, hint, hint: if you'd appreciate having a daily writing prompt, you may want to sign up for our Lent Another Way e-course.)*

5.

Explore New Ways to Pray

However you pray, or whatever you think about praying, the 40 days of Lent may be an opportunity to try something new. **Use this time before Lent to read up on some different ways to pray.** You might want to learn more about Breath Prayer, for example, where you choose a meaningful word or phrase to say with each breath in and each one out. You might want to explore the practice of walking prayer. Or contemplative prayer or centering prayer.

One option you might want to consider, instead of giving up social media for Lent, imagine your social media feeds as a list of prayer requests: Your friend who's just struggling during this pandemic, or one who's just posted about the immigrant crisis or someone who's marching in a Black Lives Matter protest. - pray for them and for the concerns they've posted about. That acquaintance at work who's having a birthday, **speak a few words of blessing over them.** That distant relative who posts some ridiculous thing that makes you furious, pray for them and for your relationship with them.

6.

Mark Yourself with Oil

Physical touch creates ripples of healing in us. This Lent you might consider a practice where you choose an **essential oil and at the beginning of each day, create a symbol somewhere on your body with it.** Draw a circle to represent a prayer for wholeness. An arrow to represent a prayer for direction. A heart to represent a prayer for big love. A cross to represent God's embrace of you. You could mark yourself with a different symbol each day. Whatever essential oil you are drawn to will be just fine, but we have found Sandalwood to be particularly powerful. It is the oil of Sacred Devotion and has been used since ancient times for its **ability to calm the mind, still the heart and prepare the spirit to commune with God.** Look for essential oils at your favorite health food store or you can easily order online. One we highly recommend: doterra.com. *(If you have any questions, cin's an experienced essential oil user and happy to answer them as best she can - just email her at oneofmany@pluralguild.com)*

7.

Be in Solidarity with the Suffering

One of the key pillars of the practice of Lent in many church traditions has been almsgiving. This is not a word we use all that often anymore - usually we talk about “giving to charity” or “acts of compassion.”

But **one of the things that’s powerful about the word “almsgiving” is that it brings a picture to mind**, an image of a person who’s hurting, who’s suffering, who’s in need...holding out a cup or bowl, asking for your help.

What if, along with writing out a check or collecting change for a charity this Lent, you found an empty bowl or cup or jar you could place on your dining table or kitchen counter or nightstand. Or with any home altar kind of space you may have created.

And then **you could look at that bowl in silence for 30 seconds every morning asking God to open your eyes** so you could see who’s holding out an empty bowl to you today and who needs you to be standing in solidarity with them in their suffering.

Who knows where that might take you - perhaps to giving money to an important cause, or to making a call to your Congress person, to walking in a protest march or to serving lunch at a local soup kitchen or to volunteering for a national LGBTQ+ teen suicide prevention hotline.

To prepare for this, you could look for a bowl you already have. Or you may want to order one from a fair trade store.





Don't Go It Alone

You might want to find an individual or a small group to walk through Lent with you. Over the next couple weeks, you could talk with some folks you know, share this guide with them and **suggest getting together once a week or so via Zoom on by phone**. And of course, if it's safe, to do that by meeting on a regular basis for coffee or for a walk. Or for a backyard chat. However you do it, this can simply be a time to check in and if you like, to reflect on what you're reading and thinking about and experiencing. And if you're doing some writing, maybe even to share some of that as well.

You can also journey with us.

Join us for our Lent Another Way e-course

and each day of Lent you'll get a note in your inbox from us, with a reading curated from the suggested lectionary scriptures, as well as a reflection from a diverse group of spiritual writers/poets/thinkers/mystics/activists. **And then a prompt to gently guide you** in your own reflection or writing.

When you sign up for the e-course, you'll also get invited to **a private Facebook group** for others taking the course and all through Lent you can share your own writing there if you like.

You can learn more and sign up [here](#).

On the next page, you'll also find a sample of one of the emails.

LENT *Another Way*

A SELF-GUIDED PRACTICE OF CREATIVE REFLECTION FOR THE SEASON OF LENT. A WAY TO EXAMINE WHO YOU ARE AND WHO YOU WANT TO BE...AND FIND A NEW WAY FORWARD.

LENT

Another Way

Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

A READING

from the Revised Common Lectionary for Today

Joel 2:12 -13

*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts,
with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow.*

*Return to God, for he is merciful and compassionate,
very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. (CEB)*

A REFLECTION

from Lenora Rand

Gotta admit, the ashes I'm best acquainted with come from cigarettes. I smoked for years, mostly secretly and in great shame, except for when I was with another smoker and had slightly less shame. When I started talking to my therapist about quitting, he kept asking me, "What's the worst thing that will happen if you do?" After he kept pushing and pushing, I finally said, through huge heaving sobs, "I'll turn into a big blubbering idiot. **I won't be able to stop crying.**"



One of the things I've started to finally see more clearly, from the forced isolation of Covid, is that just because we're in the same physical space with others, it doesn't necessarily guarantee we'll be **present in the way the prophet Joel talks about it. With all our hearts.** With our deep hurts and longings and fears and failures. With our empty places revealed. With our whole big blubbering idiot selves.

And that's become clearer to me because over the last year, I've seen how honest and *fully-present* presence with others can happen on Zoom, in two-word texts or through the comments on Facebook. Who would



Additional Resources

Why "bo" Lent?

A prayer poem from cin salach

Hope is suspended in Lent. Shadowed by sorry. By dying. But it allows me to enter into Christ's death, so that I may also enter into his life. This Lent, holy and silent and dreadful. This Lent, holy and full and sheltered. Where truth chases me into the arms of Christ. Where truth chases me until I find it.

She experienced abuse in all its forms.
(The shape of love is hope.)
She became wounded so deep,
(The shape of love is hope.)
she almost lost faith in humanity.
(The shape of love is hope.)
She almost lost faith in her creator.
(The shape of love is hope.)

In such an absence of light she saw God face to face.
And finally the time came when all that she could be was
Love, Love, Love.

Love that loves us just as we are.
At our core.
In our skin.

A whole person.
A person whole.

Amen.

(from the poem "Jesus wept." *What more can be said about love?* by cin salach)

Suggested Daily Lectionary Readings for Lent

- **Wednesday, February 17, 2021:** [Ash Wednesday](#)
- **Thursday, February 18, 2021:** [Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:1-14; 1 John 1:3-10](#)
- **Friday, February 19, 2021:** [Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a; 2 Timothy 4:1-5](#)
- **Saturday, February 20, 2021:** [Psalm 25:1-10; Psalm 32; Matthew 9:2-13](#)
- **Sunday, February 21, 2021:** [First Sunday in Lent](#)
- **Monday, February 22, 2021:** [Psalm 77; Job 4:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10](#)
- **Tuesday, February 23, 2021:** [Psalm 77; Job 5:8-27; 1 Peter 3:8-18a](#)
- **Wednesday, February 24, 2021:** [Psalm 77; Proverbs 30:1-9; Matthew 4:1-11](#)
- **Thursday, February 25, 2021:** [Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18; Romans 3:21-31](#)
- **Friday, February 26, 2021:** [Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:1-6; Romans 4:1-12](#)
- **Saturday, February 27, 2021:** [Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30](#)
- **Sunday, February 28, 2021:** [Second Sunday in Lent](#)
- **Monday, March 1, 2021:** [Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 21:1-7; Hebrews 1:8-12](#)
- **Tuesday, March 2, 2021:** [Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19](#)
- **Wednesday, March 3, 2021:** [Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Jeremiah 30:12-22; John 12:36-43](#)
- **Thursday, March 4, 2021:** [Psalm 19; Exodus 19:1-9a; 1 Peter 2:4-10](#)
- **Friday, March 5, 2021:** [Psalm 19; Exodus 19:9b-15; Acts 7:30-40](#)
- **Saturday, March 6, 2021:** [Psalm 19; Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8](#)
- **Sunday, March 7, 2021:** [Third Sunday in Lent](#)
- **Monday, March 8, 2021:** [Psalm 84; 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:10-23](#)
- **Tuesday, March 9, 2021:** [Psalm 84; 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19; Hebrews 9:23-28](#)
- **Wednesday, March 10, 2021:** [Psalm 84; Ezra 6:1-16; Mark 11:15-19](#)
- **Thursday, March 11, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Genesis 9:8-17; Ephesians 1:3-6](#)
- **Friday, March 12, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Daniel 12:5-13; Ephesians 1:7-14](#)
- **Saturday, March 13, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Numbers 20:22-29; John 3:1-13](#)
- **Sunday, March 14, 2021:** [Fourth Sunday in Lent](#)
- **Monday, March 15, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-16; Exodus 15:22-27; Hebrews 3:1-6](#)
- **Tuesday, March 16, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13](#)
- **Wednesday, March 17, 2021:** [Psalm 107:1-16; Isaiah 60:15-22; John 8:12-20](#)
- **Thursday, March 18, 2021:** [Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 30:15-18; Hebrews 4:1-13](#)
- **Friday, March 19, 2021:** [Psalm 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-5:4](#)
- **Saturday, March 20, 2021:** [Psalm 51:1-12; Habakkuk 3:2-13; John 12:1-11](#)
- **Sunday, March 21, 2021:** [Fifth Sunday in Lent](#)
- **Monday, March 22, 2021:** [Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 43:8-13; 2 Corinthians 3:4-11](#)
- **Tuesday, March 23, 2021:** [Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 44:1-8; Acts 2:14-24](#)
- **Wednesday, March 24, 2021:** [Psalm 119:9-16; Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23; John 12:34-50](#)
- **Thursday, March 25, 2021:** [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Philippians 2:1-11](#)
- **Friday, March 26, 2021:** [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:1-9; Philippians 2:12-18](#)
- **Saturday, March 27, 2021:** [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:10-16; Mark 10:32-34, 46-52](#)
- **Sunday, March 28, 2021:** [Liturgy of the Palms, Liturgy of the Passion](#)
- **Monday, March 29, 2021:** [Monday of Holy Week](#)
- **Tuesday, March 30, 2021:** [Tuesday of Holy Week](#)
- **Wednesday, March 31, 2021:** [Wednesday of Holy Week](#)
- **Thursday, April 1, 2021:** [Maundy Thursday](#)
- **Friday, April 2, 2021:** [Good Friday](#)
- **Saturday, April 3, 2021:** [Holy Saturday](#)
- **Sunday, April 4, 2021:** [Resurrection of the Lord](#)

Some Reading Suggestions

Many people like to do some intentional reading during Lent. Some like to **read and meditate on the daily scriptures suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary**. Or you might want to look for a book of Lenten devotionals to help direct your reflection during the Lenten season.

However, a different approach might be to **read poetry each day during Lent**. So right now, you could research and find a poetry book that will inspire and challenge you. We are big fans of Padraig O'Tuama. You'll find a selection of his poems at <http://www.padraigotuama.com>

Or you might want to pick up a copy of this collection:
Letters to the Future: Black Women/Radical Writing,
edited by Erica Hunt and Dawn Lundy Martin.

We also really appreciate *A Booklet of Uncommon Prayer* by Kenji Kuramitsu, a collection of prayer poems that engages contemplatively with the aching world we live in and helps us imagine how we might pray into and through the complexities and pain toward hope, holy action and redemption.

Or during Lent this year, you might want to read a non-fiction **book that will help you grapple with some of the most crucial issues of the day**.

A few to consider:

Caste: The Origins of our Discontent by Isabel Wilkerson
*Be Antiracist: A Journal for Awareness,
Reflection, and Action* by Ibram X. Kendi:

*The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything
We See, Hope For, and Believe* by Richard Rohr

*Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest
Denomination in the US* by Lenny Duncan

*The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion Is
Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* by Brian D. McLaren

About the Guide

This Lent-Readiness Guide was created and written by Lenora Rand and cin salach and published by The Plural Guild

The Plural Guild is a Chicago-based creative collaboration of writers, musicians, visual and spoken word artists, activists, pastors and theologians. The Plural Guild name is meant to evoke the richly diverse and plural world we live in – a world where God continues to become known to us, shaped and expressed in many cultures, traditions, languages, experiences and ways of being in the world. And in the Plural Guild, we believe music, art, poetry, liturgy, and ritual have the power to inspire us, heal our world and help us connect with God and others. So we **create and curate music, liturgy, media, events and experiences for people of faith and doubt who long for a more loving, just and generous world.**

Find out more at PluralGuild.com

There are many other Lent resources available from The Plural Guild, featuring the music of our house band, The Many. You can learn more at the PluralGuild website and at TheManyAreHere.com.

