



THE **S**HIFT
CHURCH

A Journey Through the Parables of Jesus

UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM

A LENT
SERIES GUIDE

2026

WEEK 1.

JESUS' HUMBLE SERVICE IS UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

WHAT IS LENT?

Historically, it is a forty day period (minus Sundays) of fasting. It has, at times, become a misguided effort to earn points with God. The idea is that we would take time and set aside some pleasures in our life in order to do a few things:

1. Plumb the depths of our own sin.
2. To really practice sacrificial discipleship.
3. It gives us a chance to think about the fleeting nature of life.

So, what are we asking you to do? Take the next 6 weeks, Monday-Friday and set aside one thing. We will have recommendations for fasting, and we would ask you to look at this like we do our giving. At The Shift we say that we give regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Applying this same idea to fasting is what we are asking you to consider. Prayerfully consider what it is that you are feeling led to fast and then worship through fasting with us.

ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER - NEAL

Our theme for Lent this year is "The Upside Down Kingdom. Just thinking about the incarnation of Jesus should be humbling for us all. Think of what Jesus gave up to simply live a human life. The perfect worship in heaven, the absence of sin and strife, and perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit. What Jesus took on was humanity. This seems wildly backwards or upside down for the King of glory to put himself out. Taking on humanity that does that meant never ceasing presence of sin and strife, the absence of perfect worship, and a barrier to the perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit. That is what Jesus did for us.

As we sacrifice a meal this week... Think of Jesus's humility and willingness to step into our experience.

TRUTH: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. **5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; **7** rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God's Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: FAVORITE FOOD/ENTIRE MEAL

This week as we focus on, trusting the Lord, what if we set aside our favorite food or even an entire meal? In its place instead we spend extra time in prayer and reading God's word. The difficulty of skipping a meal can be a reminder of God's goodness, and the reality of the fact that all we truly need is Him.

SERVE

As you fast from your favorite food or skip a meal this week, how can you provide a meal or buy a treat for someone else?

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Proverbs 3:5; Romans 8:28; Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 46:10; Romans 15:13

WEEK 2.

JESUS' SERVICE IS UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

WHAT IS LENT?

Historically, it is a forty day period (minus Sundays) of fasting. It has, at times, become a misguided effort to earn points with God. The idea is that we would take time and set aside some pleasures in our life in order to do a few things:

1. Plumb the depths of our own sin.
2. To really practice sacrificial discipleship.
3. It gives us a chance to think about the fleeting nature of life.

So, what are we asking you to do? Take the next 5 weeks, Monday-Friday and set aside one thing. We will have recommendations for fasting, and we would ask you to look at this like we do our giving. At The Shift we say that we give regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Applying this same idea to fasting is what we are asking you to consider. Prayerfully consider what it is that you are feeling led to fast and then worship through fasting with us.

ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER - BRYAN

As a default, we enter life and existence with a bent and desire to be served. From that moment in Genesis our sin nature often causes us to live as if it's our birthright to be served. We often live a life that demands us to be the center of it all. Yet the giver of life, the sustainer of it all, the one who is truly at the center, the one whom none of us would exist apart from him. That King who deserves and by his nature demands all devotion and service.

He shows us what we were made for when he lays down his perfect and holy right to be served. He who has right to our entire lives bows down and washes feet. He who belongs in a throne of glory embraces a cross He who deserves endless praise receives insult. The King of glory did all of this so he can serve us. He did this to make we who were rebels his own.

This week let's take a moment to think how we can lay down our rights and needs so we can share life in word and deed with some one else this week.

TRUTH: MATTHEW 20:28; LUKE 9:23

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

23 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God's Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: BEING SERVED

This week as we focus on, trusting the Lord, what if we set aside our favorite luxuries that serve us. This could be using less technology that serves us. This could be eating out or some other service that brings convenience. The point is to focus on the fact that Jesus completely put himself into humanity to serve us. This is something that not only displayed his humility, but also showed his desire to serve us.

SERVE

How can I serve someone this week that usually serves me? Maybe I take on some of the chores that my spouse usually takes care of? If you're a student, what if you served your parents this week? The main idea is simply figuring out a way to serve instead of being served.

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Proverbs 3:5; Romans 8:28; Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 46:10; Romans 15:13

WEEK 3.

PATIENCE WITH OTHERS IS UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

WHAT IS LENT?

Historically, it is a forty day period (minus Sundays) of fasting. It has, at times, become a misguided effort to earn points with God. The idea is that we would take time and set aside some pleasures in our life in order to do a few things:

1. Plumb the depths of our own sin.
2. To really practice sacrificial discipleship.
3. It gives us a chance to think about the fleeting nature of life.

So, what are we asking you to do? Take the next 4 weeks, Monday-Friday and set aside one thing. We will have recommendations for fasting, and we would ask you to look at this like we do our giving. At The Shift we say that we give regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Applying this same idea to fasting is what we are asking you to consider. Prayerfully consider what it is that you are feeling led to fast and then worship through fasting with us.

ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER - ALLEN

This week's theme is patience, one of the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. In our day and age, patience has become one of the many virtues that are increasingly less sought after. I can't help but think this may be for several reasons: drive-thrus, the access of smart phones and high speed data/WiFi, less times of being bored and having quiet spaces, having more choices at our fingertips, and probably countless more. We have more time-saving devices, but seem to be short on time. We can isolate ourselves into vacuums of people that agree with us, so there is no need to be patient with those who see things differently. But, patience isn't a choice - it is part of the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, as followers of Jesus, patience - like love, joy, kindness, gentleness - will be grown and produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives. The question we must ask ourselves is, how is patience displayed in our lives? How have we grown in patience? How has the patience Jesus has shown us impacted how we are patient with others?

A lack of patience comes out in a variety of ways: blowing up at a co-worker, reacting harshly to a sibling or child, or being angry because a show or song had to buffer. When it comes to our own lives, we are often tempted to flee, fight, or idealize in response to difficult circumstances. What would it look like for us to press into patience? To fight passivity with intentional action. To be present, for the joyous and difficult circumstances. To replace what we are fasting from with sacred time with Jesus: a time for Him to form us, shape us, mold us, and prune us. Just as a gardener patiently tends to their plants to help them flourish, may we slow down, quit the rush, and allow our minds, hearts, and souls to be transformed by Jesus. As we practice things like Bible reading, praying, community, serving, and as we continue the forty day journey of Lent to the Cross - may we take the time and intention to see our needs and long for Jesus of Nazareth to liberate us from the binds of Satan, sin, and death.

TRUTH: MATTHEW 5:43-48

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God’s Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: SOCIAL MEDIA/NEWS APPS

This week as we focus on, trusting the Lord, what if we set aside our social media and News apps. Instead of Reading about and listening to all the different opinions and debates in our country and world. What if we spend a week praying for those that we disagree with. By prayer we mean praying that they would know the Lord or grow closer to Him. This week the challenge is to be more concerned with praying for those that we may disagree with than proving that we may be right.

SERVE

How can I practice patience with someone this week?

Do you have a neighbor, coworker, friend, or family member that you consistently disagree with? What if you perform some sort of act of kindness towards them while you pray for them this week? This will require patience, humility, and service. Jesus showed us these things in His incarnation. What if we practice them together this week?

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Proverbs 3:5; Romans 8:28; Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 46:10; Romans 15:13

WEEK 4.

COMING TO JESUS WITH OUR ANXIETY & FINDING REST IS UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

WHAT IS LENT?

Historically, it is a forty day period (minus Sundays) of fasting. It has, at times, become a misguided effort to earn points with God. The idea is that we would take time and set aside some pleasures in our life in order to do a few things:

1. Plumb the depths of our own sin.
2. To really practice sacrificial discipleship.
3. It gives us a chance to think about the fleeting nature of life.

So, what are we asking you to do? Take the next 3 weeks, Monday-Friday and set aside one thing. We will have recommendations for fasting, and we would ask you to look at this like we do our giving. At The Shift we say that we give regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Applying this same idea to fasting is what we are asking you to consider. Prayerfully consider what it is that you are feeling led to fast and then worship through fasting with us.

ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER - NEAL

Everyone of us deals with anxiety, some maybe more than others, but we all deal with it. The truth is there's so many different decisions, potential outcomes, and things that we truly care about. In my own life I have four other people that I care about so deeply that I often find myself worrying about how I am providing for them, caring for them, and being present in their lives. That's not to mention my job, my extended family, and all of the other things that are going on in my life.

You know what I mean, you feel it too. Maybe some of the details are different, but you got things that you're stressed about. When I used to read the passage below I would feel like Jesus was getting onto me for being anxious. I had a friend that really encouraged me to read that passage a different way. He encouraged me to read it like "when I start feeling anxious, bring it to Jesus" or hear Jesus say "instead of ringing your hands talk to me and remember my goodness". If we stop and think about God's past faithfulness, it gets really hard to worry about the future.

The Bible literally tells us to begin our interactions with God with praise and thanksgiving. Why? It aligns our mind and heart with the truth.... He's good and He is God of everything. That's why we can bring our cares to him and rest.

TRUTH: MATTHEW 6:25-33

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God’s Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: MUSIC

As we practice finding rest and casting our cares upon Jesus, what if we spent more time in prayer and less time with music? For some this may look like listening to no music and spending more time in prayer and Bible study. For others this may look like fasting from certain kinds of music and spending that time in prayer and listening to praise music.

SERVE

How can I serve someone this week?

What are tangible ways that we can possibly step into someone’s anxiety with love and truth this week?

There may be a tangible thing that someone is afraid they won’t have or a need that may not be met?

Maybe a friend or family member is in need of a listening ear?

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6-7; John 14:27; Psalm 55:22; Joshua 1:9; Hebrews 13:6

WEEK 5.

ANTICIPATING THE KINGDOM TO COME IS UPSIDE-DOWN LIVING.

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So, what are we asking you to do? Take the next 2 weeks, Monday-Friday and set aside one thing. We will have recommendations for fasting, and we would ask you to look at this like we do our giving. At The Shift we say that we give regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Applying this same idea to fasting is what we are asking you to consider. Prayerfully consider what it is that you are feeling led to fast and then worship through fasting with us.

ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER – MARK

The Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) all tell us that before Jesus began his ministry, he spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and being tempted by the enemy. Luke writes, “He ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.” No doubt!

Lent reminds us of those forty days. It turns our desire for instant gratification upside-down as we anticipate the miracle of Easter. It’s hard to wait. Just ask any small child who’s looking forward to Christmas morning. Or ask any driver caught at the train crossing on Queen Avenue at 5 in the afternoon. No one *likes* to wait. Especially when we have somewhere to be, something to do.

We want things *right now*. We want fast food. We want same-day delivery from Amazon. We don’t see the purpose of waiting. But when we allow God to use waiting to shape our lives, we discover that what we assume to be important really isn’t. The things that are of value are worth waiting for. Worth preparing ourselves for. Worth sacrificing for. Lent is about waiting for God’s timing instead of demanding our own. It’s about living in a way that the world around us considers crazy—or even upside-down.

TRUTH: 2 PETER: 3:11-14

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God's Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: INSTANT GRATIFICATION

What is something that you consistently, perhaps obsessively, want and want it now? Maybe it's drive-through coffee? Maybe it's a snack? It could be the favorite fast-food drive-through that you go to for comfort. You know what your favorite instant gratification fix is. What can you set aside this week to consider what you've been given in Christ?

SERVE

What if you help someone finish a task or accomplish a goal in a much quicker fashion than they thought they could ever accomplish it? While you practice delayed gratification, what if you help someone else experience a win sooner than they thought possible? This could take many forms. Ask the Lord for clarity and opportunity to help someone else accomplish a goal this week.

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Psalm 130:5; Romans 5:1-21; James 1:12; Psalm 130:5, Romans 8:2; 1Peter 1:3-4

WEEK 6.

FORGIVENESS IS UPSIDE-DOWN LIVING

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ENCOURAGEMENT: ELDER - MARK

“I forgive you.”

Forgiving someone who has wronged us is often difficult. It is sometimes costly. For God, it meant the terrible death of his Son on a Roman cross. The only basis for God to forgive my sin is the cross of Christ. Only by that act can the divine, holy God show me his mercy and grace.

We don't often think about it this way, but for there to be forgiveness, there has to have been sin. If I've never done anything wrong against you, you have no need to forgive me. But in truth, we all have sinned against others—and against God—far more than we care to admit. And when someone tells me, “I forgive you,” I need to admit that I have sinned and need that forgiveness. I need to confess my sin and turn away from it.

1 John 1:9 tells us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Because God in Christ has forgiven me, as Paul writes in Ephesians 4, I must forgive others. The wrongs that anyone commits against me can never match the sin that we all have committed against God. God has shown us forgiveness, and because of that, we are to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted.” We are to “forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.” A community marked by forgiveness is one that displays Christ to the world. May we be such a community.

TRUTH: EPHESIANS 4:31-32

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

REFLECTION

Question 1 - What do we see about God's Character?

Question 2 - What do we see about ourselves?

Question 3 - What is a practical application this week?

WEEKLY FAST: MEAT

Throughout church history, the week leading up to Easter, especially Good Friday, was a time of meatless meals, or at least very simple ones. Partly, this is to think about the broken body of Jesus, offered to forgive our sins. What if we either fasted from meat entirely or our favorite meat and purposely thought about the broken body of Jesus this week?

SERVE

What if you gave a debt this week? What if you reached out to someone with whom you have been at odds and forgave them? Forgiveness does not equal trust. Forgiveness is not sweeping something under the rug. Forgiveness is deciding that you know you no longer want to punish them or harbor anger against them in your heart. Maybe this situation is so dysfunctional that you don't feel safe talking to them. In that case, bring this bitterness and anger to the Lord and pray for this person that you are at odds with.

SUPPLEMENTAL PASSAGES TO CONSIDER THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

Matthew 6:14; Colossians 3:13; Luke 6:37; Romans 5:6-10