

Why You Should Begin the Lenten Journey

On Wednesday, we join the larger church in imposing ashes that signal our repentance, frailty and mortality.

This season in the Christian year is all about realism and renewal as we bring our lives before God for examination and deepened relationship.

Welcoming a holy Lent is an ancient practice, and in the more recent years Baptists have embraced this season as congregations and individuals.

The prophet Joel invites each to return to God with “all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12).

Psalm 51, the best known of the penitential psalms, entreats, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundance mercy blot out my transgressions.”

Paying attention to the rhythms of our lives is the most essential practice.

- Locate where we feel consolation or disconsolation, as Ignatius would suggest.
- Confess our sins and trust God to cleanse us.
- Change destructive habits.
- Move toward those with whom we need reconciliation in humility and grace.
- Learn to forgive ourselves as we receive God’s sustaining mercy.

The season of Lent lasts for 40 days, as did Jesus’ sojourn in the wilderness. The harsh landscape of wilderness allows a stripping away to the truest identity; radical dependence upon God exists there, and the fierce challenges remake the heart.

As Abba Anthony, early desert monastic, said, the last battle is not of eye and ear, but of the heart. To whom will we entrust our deepest self?

Lent prods us out of our complacency and demands a review of our lives through

the lens of mercy.

The season is not meant to mortify us utterly; that is not God's way. Rather, these days hold promise for a more examined faith and a more holistic love of God and neighbor.

Let's make the journey with gratitude and anticipation.

Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on Marshall's [blog](#), Trinitarian Soundings. It is used with permission.