



## Lent Isaiah 58

Eric Cepin  
Feb. 15, 2026

We have been in a series on Titus, a letter Paul wrote to Titus to help him establish churches on the island of Crete. The theme of the book is to build a ROOTED community in the midst of culture. Today we will take a short break to prepare for Ash Wednesday and Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter (not including Sundays which are days of celebration). We want to process the impact of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

You might see people this Wednesday with ashes on their foreheads: they are saying they are beginning a fast, a reorientation, towards the resurrection of Jesus.



Ash  
Wednesday

We follow the church calendar which has things to disciple you, to reorient you. We take this calendar seriously. However, Lent is not in the Bible so let's learn what it is historically. I want to inspire you to participate with this community in lent this year.

### What is Lent? Historic Roots

- Early Christians fasted before Easter; length varied.
- By the 4th century, a forty-day season
- Connected to baptismal preparation and communal renewal.

We know the early church fasted before Easter from early letters written. When Easter was finally protected by the Roman government, it was officially preceded by a 40-day fast.

Most people got baptized on Christmas or Easter so naturally part of this fast was to pray for the people who will be baptized and proclaim their fast. On Easter, people came twice: once in the morning to celebrate Easter and then in the evening to be baptized.

### What is Lent? Historic Roots

- **The Significance of 40 in Scripture:**
  - Israel in the wilderness – Deut. 8:2–3
  - Moses on Sinai - Exodus 34:28
  - Elijah's journey - 1 Kings 19:4–8
  - Jesus in the desert - Matthew 4:1–11

Forty is a key number in the Bible, as seen in these examples. The passage in the NT is Jesus in the desert, fasting for 40 days and facing the enemy before beginning his ministry. The church therefore sees this fast as preparing to go forth.

### What is Lent? Biblical Shape

Joel 2:12-13 "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me **with all your heart**, with **fasting and weeping and mourning**." 13 Rend your **heart** and **not** your **garments**. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Joel talks about fasting in his book. You are not just getting a mark on your forehead: what is important is not going through the motions but an internal look at the deception in your own heart.

### What is Lent? Biblical Shape

Matthew 4:1-2 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 **After fasting forty days and forty nights**, he was hungry.

Fasting creates a vulnerable space, a need to have an honest relationship with God.

### What is Lent? Biblical Shape

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in **view of God's mercy**, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – **his good, pleasing and perfect will**.

Fasting is a relational practice: you are being invited to NOT do something which creates time to meditate on the mercies of God. Moreover, it causes you to see how you have conformed to the world and need to repent. This is the overarching theme: **offering ourselves for transformation**.

### What is Lent? Theologically

1. A season of preparation for resurrection.
2. Confession before celebration.
3. Remembering mortality (Genesis 3:19).
4. Communal transformation

This is 40 days of fasting for the resurrection. (In my childhood, Easter was not preceded by Lent.)

Confession always comes first: I acknowledge what is going on with me and in the world before I celebrate the empty tomb. This is a reminder of our mortality and our inability to save ourselves.

Lent is a **communal transformation**: we don't do it alone. It's not just for personal examination: When we talk to one another, we can ask each other about our plans for the space that our fasting creates. When we get our Lenten meditation books this Wednesday, we read these knowing that others are also doing it on the same day together

If you want a relationship with anyone, you are a fasting person. In a marriage, for example, you have to fast your desires and control in order to get to know someone. Parenting is another form of fasting: you give up tons of time and money to get to know your children so that they might flourish. Biblically, we are saying through fasting that we want to get to know Jesus better.

There are four reasons for fasting as seen in these following passages.

### What is fasting? The OT

- Moses fasting on the Mountain (Exodus 34). **Intercession**
- David fasting for his son (2 Samuel 12). **Grief**
- Prophetic correction Isaiah 58 (justice over performance). **Renewal**

are heavy with grief. We ask for comfort.

3. **Renewal**: a true fast is returning to God and standing for the oppressed and marginalized, for those who don't have. We ask the question in different spheres, from my contacts to the outward world: What is God asking me to do?

### What is fasting? Jesus

**Mark 2:18-20** 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were **fasting**. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are **fasting**, but yours are not?" 19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. (**Longing**)

### What is fasting? The Early Church

**Acts 13:2-3** 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

**Acts 14:23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, **with prayer and fasting**, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

### Why Participate?

1. Recentering
2. Forming
3. Nurturing
4. Propelling

however, has disciplines in place to form us and one of these is Lent, 40 days of being formed, being disciplined. If you miss a day, you just start the next day. You don't give up. This is also formed in our community: God speaks through all of us and that's why engaging with one another is so important so we can hear him.

1. **Intercession**: we have the opportunity to fast and intercede for our families and our church and our community and world for God's judgment and deliverance.

2. **Grief**: We now live outside of the garden in the world. David had a deep grief when he fasted for his son: we are also invited into deep grief. We don't like to be sad but, if you are honest, when you look around, our hearts

4. **Longing**: Fasting is about acknowledging that Jesus promises to return but it hasn't happened yet. Fasting nurtures this longing: when I want to offer love to my wife, I fast my own selfishness so I can open myself to her. You feel this intensely and long for what hasn't happened yet.

Prayer and fasting are connected to **decision making** in your life and in the community. This is really a pattern that we should have year-round: decisions can be made in community with fasting and prayer. This opens our ears to the Holy Spirit and then we can see more clearly. The early church modeled this.

Here are four reasons to participate in Lent:

1. **Recentering**: I'm always doing things and can easily get distracted by my own agenda in my job, my relationships, my time, etc. Jesus recenters me, re-oriens me.

2. **Forming**: Disciplines are difficult in our fast-moving culture. Just look at many podcasts that tell you how to be more self-disciplined. The church,

3. **Nurturing**: Good relationships involve fasting. You have to fast being disrespectful, selfish, etc. You are required to put something aside to thrive in relationships.
4. **Propelling**; Most of the time, God wants to propel us into new, vulnerable, and often risky places. God removes my old self and develops my new self. It might propel you into new places of involvement or relationships within this community or beyond. These are risky!

My encouragement is to come on Wednesday, pick up your meditation journal, decide on something to fast from (if this is new, choose something small). Choose something that propels you into extra time for a godly pursuit: 10 minutes extra to read and pray and meditate. It should be both internal and outward.