



Making Lent an Opportunity!

Leader's Guide

Bible Study

Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2a)

(Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, and copies of this study for attendees.)

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:3–8).

In The Presence Of God

Sleepless nights can create a whole gamut of feelings and emotions. They may be the result of cares and concerns of the day, multiple aches and pains in the body hindering a comfortable resting position, or struggling with the circumstances we have yet to face. It is seldom because we are overwhelmed with the realization that, no matter the causes, we remain in the presence of God. Wrapping a blanket around our heads in frustration is so much easier than wrapping our hearts and souls around with the promises of God through His Word.

During the passionate season of Lent there is a way to change all that. Rather than giving up something for Lent, we can strive to take our eyes off ourselves and redirect the eyes of our hearts on the service we can do for Christ. Rather than “giving up” something for Lent, perhaps “giving to” others for Him is the answer. It may not change our sleepless nights, but it will prepare our minds to praise Him as long as we live, to be satisfied with the rich Spiritual food He has to offer, and to sing for joy under the cover of His wings. In these moments, we are in the presence of God.

Preparing Our Hearts For Service

Opening Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, as we focus on You and Your calling for us in our lives of service, help us to think first about the tremendous sacrifice Your dear Son paid for us. Observing His love, may we turn our thoughts from self to You and Your kingdom's work and rest in the knowledge that Your love covers all our mistakes because of Jesus' sacrifice. Prepare our hearts and our spirits through Your Word, and may it move us to action for You. In Jesus' name, and for His sake, we ask this. Amen.

Opening our thoughts toward God and His Lenten direction for our lives, let us examine some steps that by the power of the Holy Spirit can guide us toward Him. As we do so, may God lead us so we can better serve Him with gladness, not only during Lent but also throughout the weeks and months to come.

We often labor intently and even intensely for physical and mental things. The pursuit of spiritual things, however, is often set aside or strived for only if time allows. Yet one of the true beauties of a godly life is spending time with the Source of all true spiritual things. Let us discover the benefits of searching the Scriptures for the love God desires to reveal and supply to us.

First – Spiritual Steps

What do these verses have to say about where our focus should be and the blessings God provides?

- 2 Corinthians 4:18 Look not to worldly things for answers, but to those that are eternal.
- Ephesians 1:17–20 God gives us wisdom and knowledge of Him and richly blesses all believers with the certain hope of eternal life.
- Colossians 3:1–3 Seek the things that are from above.
- Hebrews 12:2 Look to Jesus, our Savior and King.

When Christ is our focus, we trust Him to provide wisdom for our decisions and direction in life. The Holy Spirit daily reminds us that our lives are hidden in Him. In other words, He IS our life! Through His Spirit, we have the eyes of our hearts (our spirits) enlightened, and we discover the abundant riches of His grace. The spiritual treasures we receive in and through Him become a priority as He enables us to fix our hearts and minds on Him, first and foremost.

Second – Relationship Steps

To what does God want us to devote ourselves?

- Colossians 4:2 God wants us to devote ourselves to prayer with thankful hearts.
- Ephesians 6:16–17 Take up faith and God’s Word to fight Satan.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Keep on praying.
- Colossians 3:16 Be in God’s Word and share it.

It is in and through the study of God’s Word that the Holy Spirit reveals His hidden secrets (1 Corinthians 2:9–12). Granting us more and more insight of who He is, a relationship is formed – one He has designed since our Baptism and one in which He forgives our sins and strengthens us through the Lord’s Supper. And as we *continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving* (Colossians 4:2), His Spirit strengthens our relationship with Him and gives us a heart:

- to follow God’s will passionately.
- to be open to opportunities to serve Him and others.
- to prayerfully develop and carry out ways to serve Him.

How have you seen evidence of this in your life? _____

Third – Steps Toward Service

For whom does God want you to live?

- Romans 12:3–8: God wants us to work together with others, using the gifts He has given us.
- 2 Corinthians 5:14–15: We live for Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7). And because you have been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God (Colossians 2:12), resolve within yourself that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

After All These Come Opportunities!

Opportunities cross our paths every day, whether we are residing in our homes alone, among the hustle and bustle of the work place, or in the community. The opportunities may be that of saying to a clerk, “Have a blessed day!” or “How can I pray for you today?” In a meeting with friends for lunch, we can be a good listener and an encourager. With pen in hand, we can write a note to someone who is lonely or encountering a stay in the hospital. The field of opportunities is wide open and in need of fulfilling.

Ideas To Consider

Take note of the where, when, and how.

- Where can I serve? What is available at home, at church, or in the community? Answers will be unique for each individual.
- When are the best times to serve? What works best for me and those whom I plan to serve? Answers will be unique for each individual.
- How can I serve better? What am I physically able to do without excuse? Answers will be unique for each individual.

(Remember, get rid of excuses – God is always ready to empower you. Consider Moses’ excuses and God’s responses as you read the following: Exodus 3:11–14, 4:1–17.)

Moses gave five different excuses why he couldn’t do the work God had called and prepared for him to do. For every excuse, God responded with a reason He could.

<u>Moses</u>	<u>God</u>
(3:11–12) Who am I that I should go?	I will be with you.
(3:13–14) What if I go and they ask Your name?	I AM WHO I AM...I AM sent you.
(4:1–9) What if they don’t believe me?	I will give you three signs.
(4:10–12) I am slow of speech and tongue.	I will help you speak.
(4:13–17) Please send someone else.	Aaron and I will help you.

Excuses are easy to come by. Pray that when opportunities come, we may be less like Moses and more like Christ in His willingness to do the Father’s will.

Make lists to stretch your thoughts by writing a word or phrase that begins with the letters of the alphabet or choose 10 to 15 possibilities of service and list according to priority.

After all this is done, determine steps that lead to gratitude.

- Create a “Blessing Jar” throughout Lent. You may discover that you want the activity to continue after Lent.

- Keep a record book of descriptive words that highlight God's grace and goodness. Think about what these words mean in your life and how it can change your thinking of who God is.
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. Look for God's blessings, large and small. Use these ideas as a springboard for new opportunities, even if it's as simple as writing a note of gratitude for the loving service of others.
- To grow in your attitude of gratitude, read Psalm 145. As you read through it, make a list of the words that express the extravagant love and generosity of God. Take time to offer prayers that reflect a thankful heart.
Examples are great, unsearchable, mighty acts, glorious splendor, wondrous works, awesome deeds, greatness, abundant goodness, gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, good to all, merciful, faithful, kind, near to all, hears our cries, saves and preserves.
- Other verses to consider:
Zephaniah 3:17; 2 Corinthians 9:10–12; James 1:5; 1 John 3:1.

The Three R's

Let Lent be a time of reconciliation, renewal, and redirection. As you do, trust Christ to follow through with the plans He lays upon your heart.

Read Ephesians 3:16–19 to discover the incredible desires of Christ for us as we pursue the three R's.

In all your studies and growth, may your greatest desire be to know of Christ's love more and more. Don't seek solutions or answers; seek Christ. He will provide the answers in His way and time.

Be Reconciled

What do these verses say about God's reconciliation?

- Romans 5:10–11: Jesus' death for our sins brought us back to God.
- 1 John 4:9–10: Out of His great love for us sinners, God sent His Son Jesus to pay the price we owed for our sins. Jesus' actions on our behalf brought us back to God.

Be Renewed

What do these verses say about how God renews us to serve Him?

- Isaiah 40:30–31: God promises to renew our strength as we serve Him.
- Romans 12:2: The Holy Spirit works in us to turn our hearts and minds to God and grants us discernment to know God's will for us.
- 2 Corinthians 4:16: Every day God renews us to serve Him.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: Jesus gives us a new, eternal life.
- Colossians 3:10: In Baptism, we put on Christ.

- Titus 3:5–6: Daily, the Holy Spirit renews us by grace as we live in the current and on-going power of our Baptism.

Be Redirected

What do these verses say about how God redirects us to serve Him?

- 2 Corinthians 5:18–20a: God gives us the ministry of reconciliation so that we, as ambassadors for Christ, tell others that salvation is found in Christ alone.
- Colossians 3:12–15: By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, and loving hearts.
- Hebrews 13:20–21: God equips us and works in us to do His will.
- 1 Peter 2:9: God has chosen us to tell others of His saving love in Christ Jesus.

Just as God's love, grace, and mercy are granted in immeasurable abundance, we can pray that these treasures from Him can be easily shared and revealed through Him to others. When our eyes are opened to the needs of others, the focus on self finds a release. God may even lead us to discover that, despite our own personal struggles and our overly-satisfied contentment from personal accomplishments, His blessings of peace and joy abound when serving the needs of others.

Living In His Eternal Life Today

God provides opportunities to serve Him and others to grow our faith. God works through service opportunities to teach us more of Christ and His love.

- Philippians 3:7–9 – Consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ; gain and know Christ first – for He is eternal life.
- Philippians 3:12–14 – Press on toward the goal which is Christ who is eternal life, now and forever.
- John 17:3 – This is eternal life; that we may know Christ.
- John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son **has** eternal life!

John 17:3 and 3:36 both clarify that we already possess the blessings of eternal life today. While its final fulfillment will not occur until we die and are raised to life in heaven with Christ, we still share in all the treasures of that life because we, as baptized children, are in Him and He in us. His eternal, spiritual blessings are beyond comprehension and are part of our inheritance. (That knowledge takes us back to the steps that guide us toward Him on page 1 of this study. Cherish it! Embrace it!)

Knowing Jesus is the greatest gift we are given and often the most noticeable during Lent. We confess His tremendous sacrifice on the cross and the power of the resurrection granted to us through Him. Every day we can also acknowledge that we experience eternal life because we are in Him and He is in us. Swallowed in His grace and covered and quieted with His love, Jesus promises to be with us, to guide us, and to lead us into service for Him. Jesus has reconciled us to God. Our greatest gift in return is to share it with others. Embrace this Lenten

season with joy and offer Him a thankful heart for living His life for us and for forever granting us true eternal life. That's the best Lenten offering we can present to Him!

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, we adore You and praise You for the incredible price you paid on the cross and for the eternal life we receive through Your resurrection from the dead. We pray that You would now give us an extra measure of Your Spirit during this season of Lent as you open our eyes to the abundant acts of love we can do for others each day. May our service be our gift to You as we honor You for who You are. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20–21).

Closing Hymn: (Select one of the following) “Christ, the Life of All Living” LSB 420, TLH 151, LW 94; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” LSB 426, TLH 175, LW 115; “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” LSB 427, TLH 354, LW 101.

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