

CELEBRATING LENT



Story by Paige Slighter / Pictures by Erik Swenson

Logan was beyond excited when his mom told him a boy his age, Jamal, would be moving in next door. Logan loved all five of his sisters, but none of them quite knew the art of monster truck racing, sword fighting and bug collecting.

When Jamal and his family finally arrived in a big moving truck, Logan was the first one to offer his help. As he carried Jamal's pet frog, Goober, up the stairs to his room, he knew they were going to be best friends.





From that moment on, they were always together. They rode the same bus, went to the same school and shared all the same classes. After school, they played outside together, ate dinner together and had sleepovers at each other's houses. They even went to church together.

That was part of the reason, Jamal's family moved in next door. His dad had been hired as the new pastor of Logan's church. Logan liked Pastor Rashon a lot because he was really good at answering questions, and Logan had a lot of questions. Not once did Jamal's dad get angry with him, like his sisters did when he asked, "Why, what and how?" Pastor Rashon always listened carefully and responded thoughtfully. In the end, he'd give a big smile and say, "Good thinking kid!"

WHAT IS LENT?

Logan really liked having dinner at Jamal's house because the food was so good and they had special dinner talks. After they prayed for the meal, each family member shared a positive thing about their day, and they always included Logan, too.

One night Pastor Rashon shared that his favorite part of the day was preparing a special service for Ash Wednesday, the official beginning of Lent. As Logan passed the macaroni and cheese, he asked, "Is that when you wear ashes on your head and give up chocolate?"

Pastor Rashon gave a big smile and said, "Yes, Logan, the mark of the cross with ashes on your forehead is a reminder of Jesus' death and great sacrifice for us. And yes, some people decide to give up sweets, like chocolate, for the 40 days leading up to Easter."

Jamal had questions too, "Dad, why do we have to give something up?"

Pastor Rashon answered, "Do you guys remember when Jesus was tested in the wilderness and he did not eat or drink for 40 days? By giving something up, we are drawing closer to him and remembering all that he did because of his great love for us."

Jamal's mom, Candice said, "Well, it's a good thing Lent doesn't start today because I made my famous brownies for dessert!" Logan and Jamal hurried to finish their dinner.



SIMPLICITY

As they each sprayed mountains of whipped cream on their warm brownies, Pastor Rashon shared more about Lent. He asked, “Can you guys guess what I’m giving up for Lent? I’ll give you a hint, it’s something I really like.”

Jamal and Logan answered at the same time, “Brownies!”

Pastor Rashon laughed and said, “Don’t get me wrong, I do love my wife’s brownies. They’re a special treat, but we don’t eat them every day. So, it wouldn’t be too much of a sacrifice for me to give them up.”

Jamal answered again, “How about coffee? You drink it every day.”

Pastor Rashon said, “You know me too well, I’m a huge fan of coffee. But I think I’ll keep it because it’s something I look forward to during my morning prayer and Bible study. Lent is actually pretty similar to my morning routine, it’s a special time to connect with God. The more time we get with him, the better! That’s why I’m giving up watching sports.”

Jamal was shocked, “No, not sports!”

Pastor Rashon said, “When we give something up, we are creating space to do something else with our time, talents and belongings. So, instead of watching sports, I’m going to volunteer at the YMCA and play sports with some kids who really need love, support and joy.”

Scraping the last bit of brownie from his bowl, Logan spoke up, “I do homework every day. Can I give that up?”

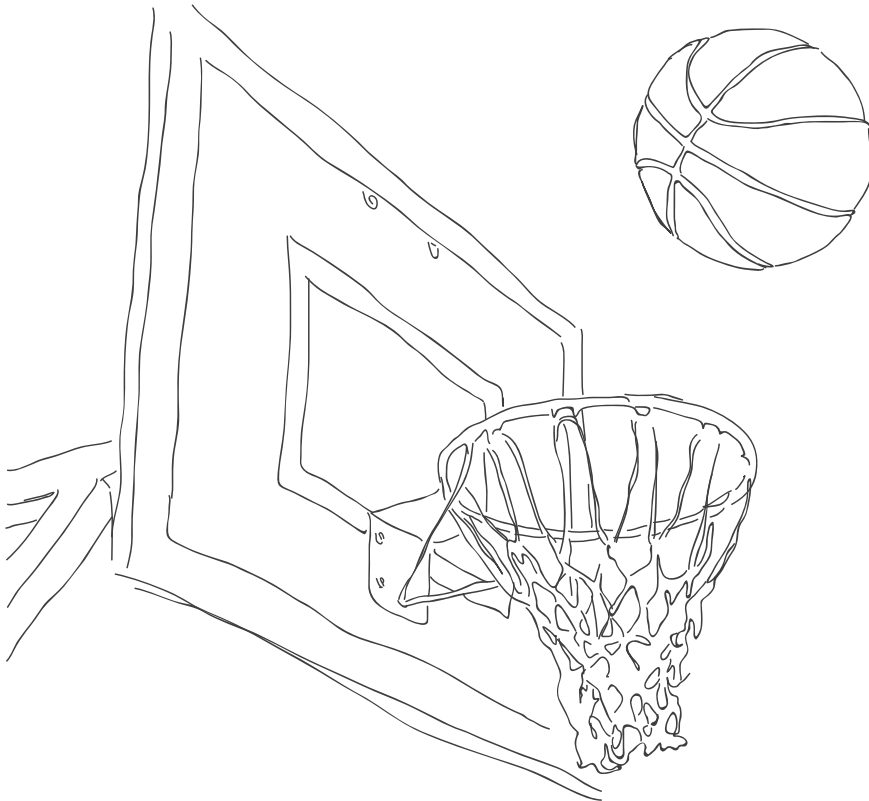
Jamal’s family laughed. “Nice try Logan,” Pastor Rashon said, “Think of it this way. Jesus said wherever our treasure is, there the desires of our heart will be also. What is something you really treasure? And, are you willing to give it up to God?”

Jamal and Logan looked at each other and answered, “Video games.”

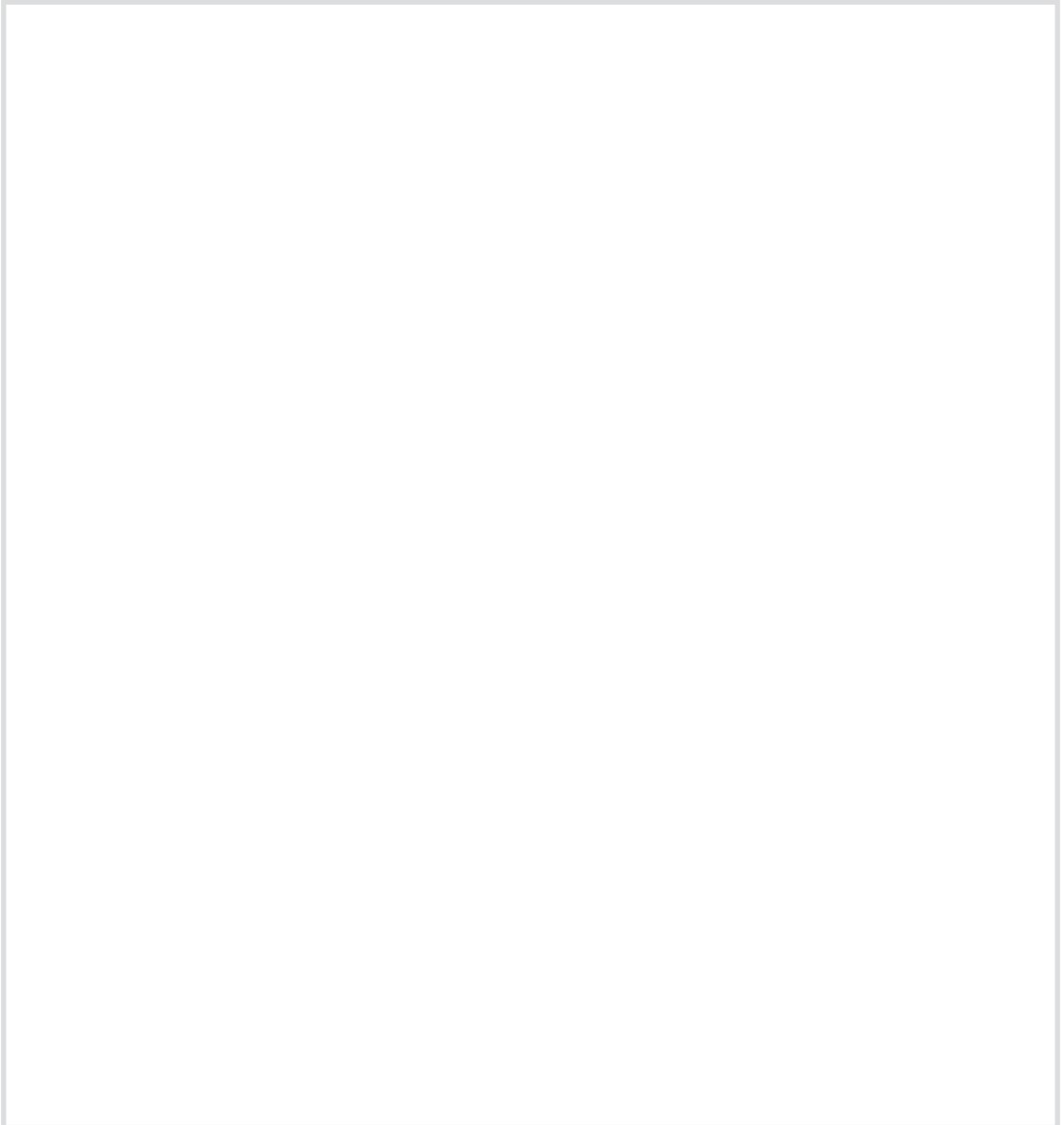
Pastor Rashon asked, “So, what do you think you’ll do instead?”

Logan asked, “Can we join you at the YMCA?”

Pastor Rashon answered, “Of course!”



How about you? Is there something you could give up until Easter that would remind you to spend more time with Jesus? Perhaps it's watching TV, playing video games or eating candy. Or maybe you want to do something special to help others. Take some time now to think about what that thing might be and then draw a picture below of what you could give up for Lent.



RELEASE

As they all helped clean up the kitchen and put away the dishes, Logan started to explain a fight he had earlier with his oldest sister, Amanda. He said, “I just don’t understand why sisters have to be so annoying! I just needed a piece of paper and she got super mad at me for being in her room.”

Jamal’s mom asked, “Do you think maybe she was upset because you didn’t ask her first?”

Logan answered, “Her door was wide open, and I didn’t think she would be mad about a piece of paper.”

Candice replied, “Maybe it really wasn’t about the paper, but more about her personal space.”

Logan said, “Yeah, she really doesn’t like it when I go in her room.”

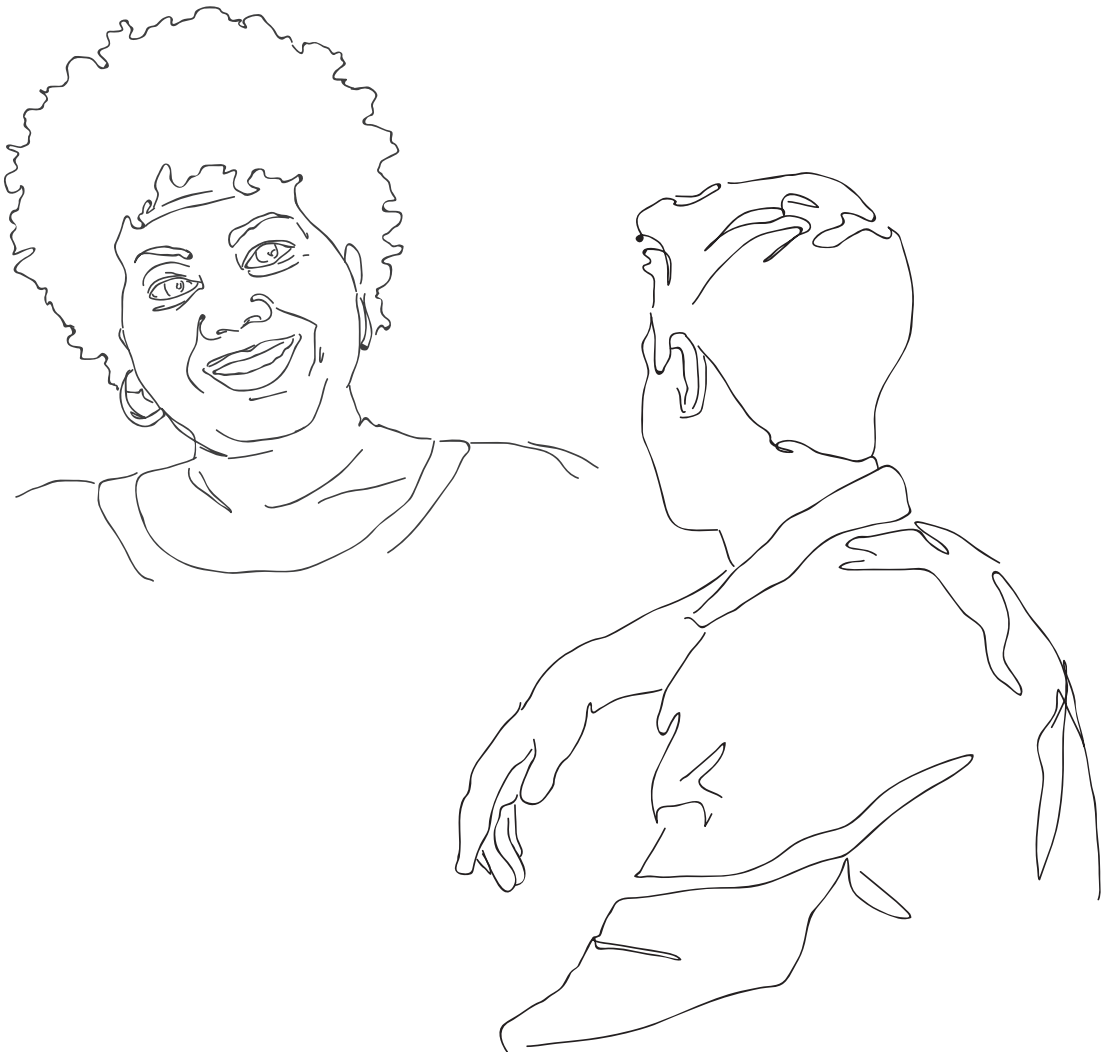
Pastor Rashon said, “You know what? This ties in really well with another part of Lent. When we hold onto negative things, it’s hard for us to love others. Sometimes we get upset and say or do hurtful things. It can become really hard for us to forgive because we are holding onto anger. Jesus calls us to let go of all that hurt and choose to love. It’s not an easy thing to do and a lot of times it doesn’t happen overnight, but Jesus made it possible. He forgave us of all of our sins with his death on the cross. During Lent, Jesus invites us to think of people in our lives who might have hurt us and people we might have hurt. Then he promises to give us the peace and healing we need.”

After thinking about it, Logan said, “I should probably tell Amanda I’m sorry.”

“That’s a really great place to start,” Candice said. “What are other ways you can show God’s love to your sister in the future?”

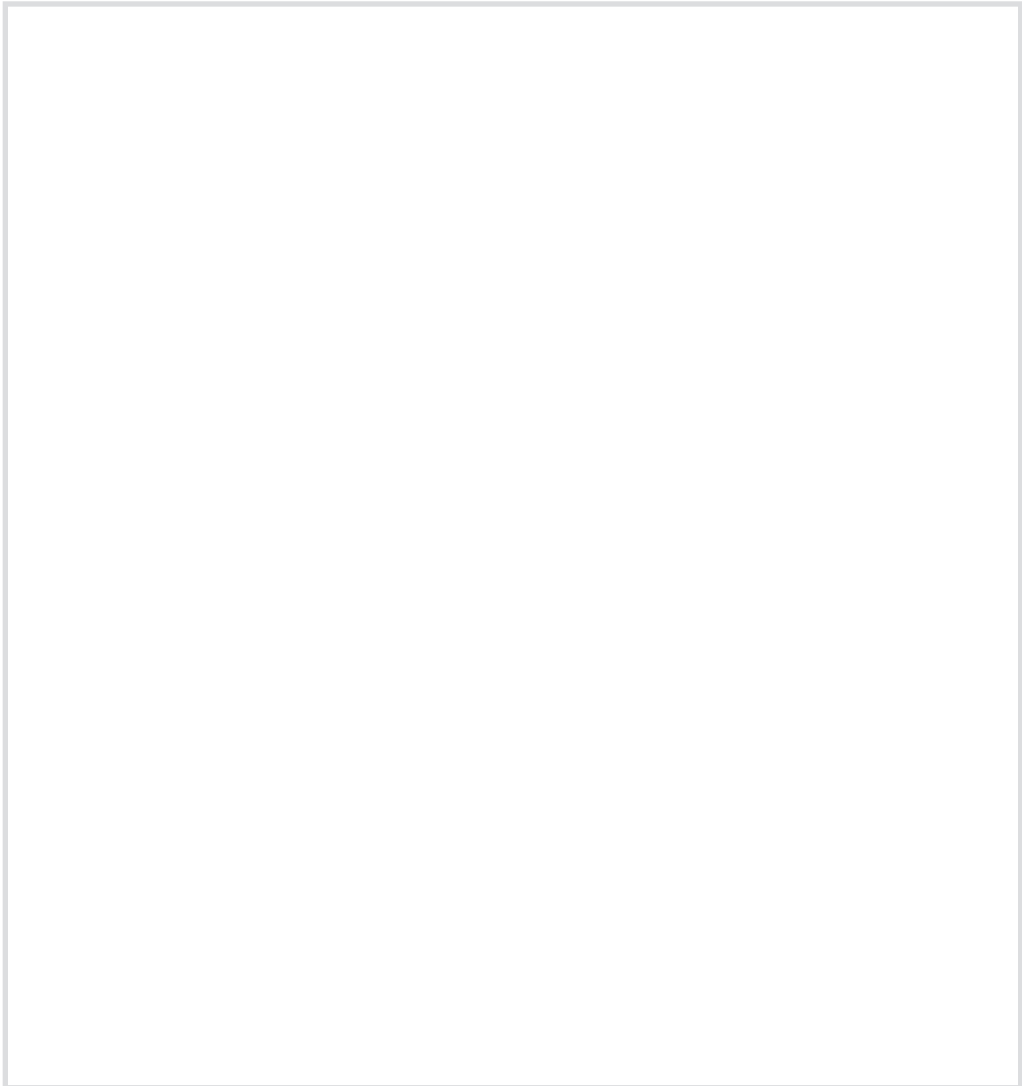
“I could ask her first before going into her room,” Logan said.

“Good thinking kid!” Candice said with a smile.



Take a few minutes to think about things you might need to ask God to forgive in your life. Maybe you've said angry words to a parent or brother or sister lately. Or it could be you took something that wasn't yours. Or perhaps you have anger in your heart toward someone else for something they did to hurt you.

Ask God to forgive you and ask him to help you forgive others. Below, draw a picture of what it might look like to let go of anger and love.



PRAYER

After they had put away all the dishes, they moved into the living room with mugs of hot cocoa. Logan and Jamal worked on their homework, Pastor Rashon continued to work on his sermon and Candice was making a paper chain.

Logan asked, “What’s that for?”

Jamal’s mom replied, “It’s a calendar for Lent. Each link of the chain represents a day leading up to Easter and an activity to do. See, this link says, “Today I am praying for... And then you fill in the blank. When we pray, we are connecting directly to God who is love. We can tell him everything. What would you pray for?”

Logan answered, “I think I would pray for my grandma who is sick in the hospital. My mom says she’s doing better now, but she can’t go home yet.”

Pastor Rashon said, “Ok, let’s pray. Dear God, please continue to heal Logan’s grandma. We are so thankful that you are by her side and we celebrate your love in her life. Amen.”

“Amen,” they all repeated.



PRAISE

“Did you know praise is a huge part of talking to God too?” Pastor Rashon said.
“When we say thank you to God, we are reminded of his great love for us. And this love pours out onto others too!”

Jamal asked, “You know what I’m thankful for?”

Logan responded, “Hot cocoa?”

“No silly. I’m thankful for you, my best friend,” Jamal responded.

Pastor Rashon raised his mug in the air, “Cheers to friendship!”

Everyone raised their glass and took a big sip feeling warm and grateful.



Take a moment to think about what you'd like to talk about with God. You can talk to him about anything. Are you worried about something? Do you need help with something? Do you know someone else who needs help? Who or what comes to your mind? Draw a picture or two below of people or things in this world you want to pray for – you can include yourself if you want.

