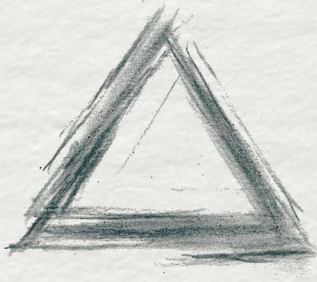




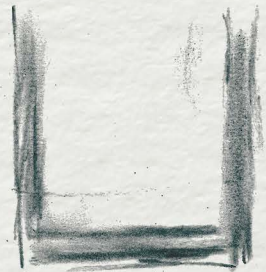
ASH WEDNESDAY



SIMPLICITY



PRAYER



RELEASE

INTRODUCTION

At Woodland, we've observed our special Ash Wednesday service for six years. In the past, we typically celebrated with a simple meal and an interactive service, but since we're not holding services in the building quite yet, we thought we'd bring Ash Wednesday to you.

If you participated in our Ash Wednesday Drive-Thru event, you already have an activity box. Feel free to open that up and check it out. If you couldn't make it or you're not local, don't worry, you can still participate! We've created a list of resources for you here: [whchurch.org/lent-2021](https://www.whchurch.org/lent-2021).

Ash Wednesday, officially known as the Day of Ashes, marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter. On this day, many believers receive ashes in the shape of the cross on their forehead. We'll get to that activity later.

This booklet is meant to help us, as individuals and families, to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice with intentional questions, meaningful activities and weekly devotions.

Before you get started, you may want to create an environment that is conducive for contemplation. We suggest lighting some candles, dimming the lights and getting rid of distractions. We've also curated a **Spotify playlist** to help set the mood. If you have children, they can also participate in the activities and color in the companion coloring book.

We estimate your at-home Ash Wednesday service will take one hour to complete, but feel free to go at whatever pace works best for you. When you're finished, you can continue reflecting weekly with Lenten devotions at the end of the booklet.

Let's begin by quieting our hearts and minds with prayer.

Spirit of God, who led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray,

Lead us as we enter this time of Lent.

Give us courage to examine our hearts with honesty;

Give us strength to deal with what we find;

Give us love to forgive ourselves and each other,

So that, in peace and joy, we may celebrate at Easter

The death and resurrection of Jesus

And all that it means for each of us.

Amen.

SIMPLICITY

During Lent, we will focus on how to simplify our lives to make space for fellowship with God and others as well as making the most of the opportunities to put love into action by sharing our earthly treasures.

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Matthew 6:21 (NLT)

Our treasures come in many forms—money, time, talent, possessions—to name a few. None of these are bad or evil, but the way the world sees them versus Jesus’ perspective is quite different. The world values building up our treasures for ourselves first, while Jesus teaches something else. We all have moments or seasons where these treasures take more of our focus and attention, even becoming precious enough to monopolize our mind and heart without us even realizing it.

What do you treasure and is it getting in the way of your love for others?

How has the ways of the world crept into your views and values?

Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give happily to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven—it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well.
1 Timothy 6:18-19 (LB)

We all have something to offer to Jesus and the family of God. It could be money, time, talent, possessions or friendship—Jesus invites us to give freely of everything we have and all that we are. Then we are storing up a treasure of right-relatedness that reflects Jesus’ agape love: sacrificial, unconditional, other orientated. other orientated.

Simplicity is the process of reframing our time, our talents, our money, and our stuff to be things entrusted to further God’s Kingdom; not just to benefit ourselves but to enrich the lives of others. It is the chance to reframe our concept of treasure to be life-giving instead of life-draining, to be other-focused instead of self-focused and to be filled with joy regardless of our circumstances.

Accepting the invitation to freely give of our earthly treasures—what we have and what we are—is two-fold: giving “up to” God and finding a way to be generous with our lives by giving “outward” to others.

PART 1: “UP TO” GOD

Learning occurs when we experience something different. Lent provides a momentary pause in our busy lives where we can choose to do something different with our: Time-Talents-Money-Possessions: to create space at our core for fellowship with God.

When we become preoccupied with ourselves our core becomes clogged.

This clog keeps us from fully experiencing deep intimacy with Jesus and being able to view the world through the lens of his love. This is the ultimate treasure and worth any effort we can put forth to reclaim it as central to our life, relationships, work, free time and every aspect of who we are and what we do.

You are invited to choose to give something “up to” God for the next 40 days of Lent to create space in your heart for fellowship with Jesus—connecting to the ultimate source of LOVE.

- Prayerfully reflect on what you want to give up to God: circle something from the list or write your own. This is an act of commitment to offer something sacrificially for God.

- Next, commit to spend more time with God in place of what you have given up. Write down when and how often you will do this over the next 40 days of Lent.

PART 2: OUTWARD TO OTHERS

You are invited to find a way to sacrifice for others and stop holding onto earthly treasures such as wealth, achievement, stuff, popularity, entertainment, busyness or independence. Giving up something or giving of yourself (time, friendship, service) reflects the agape love of Christ and resets your mind, heart, focus and energy on a heavenly treasure. You may find yourself shifting from a mindset of scarcity to one of unlimited generosity.

Giving generously is not as easy as it sounds! So many things can get in the way of living generously. To the degree that we hold on to wealth, achievement, popularity or independence, we are holding back from giving to God and others.

Close your eyes and clench your fist, imagining holding onto greed, fear, idolatry or selfishness. What earthly treasures are you finding difficult to let go?

Now, hold your fist as tightly as you can for 30 seconds, silently repeating to yourself, "All I have is Yours, all I have is Yours."

As you release your grip and open your eyes, envision letting go of those earthly treasures to God.

In the space below, write a statement or two about what you imagined grasping in your fist and how it gets in the way of generosity. How did it feel to open your hand?

REFLECTION

SIMPLICITY ACTIVITY

We encourage you to make a bracelet as a reminder of your commitment to reinvest your entire being into a heavenly treasure mindset and lifestyle. Let it continue to remind you of what you are freely giving “up to” God and what you are giving freely of your earthly treasures.

Whenever you look upon your bracelet or your coin picture, take a moment to pause and reflect upon your commitments. This bead or coin will stand as a symbol of your desire to keep God at the center of your life instead of earthly treasures.

Giving generously can begin with letting go and moving into action by seeking God’s leading on what you can share from your life and abundance with others.

What is something that you can share or give to help others of your: time–possessions–money–talents.
Write your commitment below.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

Activity Box: Bracelet Supplies

- You’ll find a metal bead with a cord in your bag. Run the cord through the bead and tie it to your wrist.

Other options: any type of string, yarn, beads, charms

- You could even tie a knot in a piece of string or yarn in place of a bead.
- You could take a picture of a coin and set it as your background photo on your phone or computer.

FOR THE LENTEN SEASON

Throughout the next several weeks leading up to Easter, be mindful of the things in your life that regularly get in the way of your ability to give time, money, friendship, talents and love to others.

You are invited to repeat the prayer, “All I have is yours,” daily throughout the Lenten season.

As you continue to give to God and others over the coming weeks, use the space below to note any changes you see in your attitude towards giving.

RELEASE

During Lent, we will focus on releasing anything that negatively fills our life and interferes with our relationship with Jesus and others through confession and forgiveness.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Philippians 2:3 (NLT)

Each of us struggles with a desire that leans more towards selfishness than Christ's example of sacrificial love, continually falling short of God's desire that we love each other well. We often find ourselves being hostile or hurtful in our words and actions, even putting ourselves before others more than we would like to admit.

We may be reluctant to extend forgiveness to others who have wronged us. Withholding forgiveness sometimes feels good at first, but it ends up making us miserable. How can we refuse to forgive others when Jesus so generously and freely forgives us?

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8 (NIV)

When we first began a relationship with Christ, our life changed dramatically. We became reconciled to

God. He restored our relationship with him, taking our broken old self and replacing it with a new creation that reflects his love: a selfless, others-focused and unconditional love.

Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation. The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence. God has done all this. He has restored our relationship with him through Christ and has given us this ministry of restoring relationships." 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (NIV)

In order to release negativity, we must reflect on the different ways we are affected by sin—especially when it impacts our relationships with others and with Jesus. All of us sin and are sinned against. Let us release our burdens and embrace our new identity in Christ Jesus.

CONFESSION

To confess our sin is to admit the ways we hurt people, create division and fail to be loving. We also create separation between ourselves and God when we ignore or take advantage of God's loving presence. This separation affects our relationships with others and distorts our perceptions of God and ourselves.

But God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure. 1 John 1:9 (NIRV)

Confession allows us to face God more fully as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Confession opens the door to forgiveness, freedom and reconciliation. It restores the intimacy we have in our relationship with God directly. Confession is a key part of being rightly-related (righteous) to God and to others.

Consider the ways you have been unloving: selfish, dishonest, hurtful, proud, greedy, spiteful or mean.

Reflect on any hardness in your heart that makes you unteachable or invulnerable to the helpful influence of others.

- **What habits or parts of your lifestyle are counter to God's love?**

- **What pulls you away from staying connected to God fully?**

- **What actions/behaviors are consistently affecting your relationship with God or others?**

Confess that sin to God

RELEASE ACTIVITY

We invite you to write a name, word, phrase, or simple drawing down to represent your confession.

Writing down your confession is another way to take responsibility for your actions, but we do not need to carry it around like a burden. Jesus invites us to bring our confession and repentance to him, knowing that he forgives generously and completely. Embrace reconciliation, restoration and the new creation God has made you to be.

FORGIVENESS

If you do not judge other people, then you will not be judged. If you do not find others guilty, then you will not be found guilty. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Luke 6:37 (NIRV)

To forgive a wrong against us, whether it be extended towards a friend, family member or stranger, is to imitate what Christ has done for us. To offer forgiveness is one of the most tangible ways we can live out obedience and faithfulness. When we forgive others, we imitate God's desire to restore and reconcile relationships. He restored our relationship with him, and he calls us to reconcile and restore relationships in our life as well.

- Consider a grudge or bitterness you are holding against someone who has wronged you.
- Consider any unforgiveness you might be harboring in your heart and why.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Activity Box: Dissolving Paper

- You'll find a piece of dissolvable paper in your bag. Write your confession on that. You'll also want to prepare a bowl or cup of water.

Other options: washable markers and any type of paper, any type of writing utensil

- If you use washable markers, what you wrote will disappear when you get it wet .
- You could throw away your confession, erase it or cross it out as a symbol of release.

- Reflect on how this unforgiveness might be affecting you and your relationships.
- Resolve to extend forgiveness and release this burden.
- Seek God's help to forgive others or to restore any broken relationships in your life.

We invite you take another piece of paper to write a name, word, phrase or simple drawing to represent this choice to forgive.

Once you have written down a confession and forgiveness, we invite you to place both pieces of paper in a bowl of water where it will disappear, representing the forgiveness of Christ. (Note: you may have to stir the paper)

If you are doing this activity with someone you trust, consider sharing what you have released to build spiritual connection and accountability.

FOR THE LENTEN SEASON

God invites and encourages regular practices of confession and forgiveness. Begin this Lenten season by acknowledging the things the Spirit brought to mind tonight and write them here.

What next steps will you take:

- Is there someone with whom you need to reconcile?**

- What action steps will you take to reconcile with that person?**

- Are there habits or patterns in your life that need to change?**

- Is there someone you can invite into your struggles to help with accountability and prayer?**

PRAYER ACTIVITY

We invite you to write or draw a word, phrase or image that represents your prayer for your heart, mind, soul and strength. This can be on a heart sticky note or any kind of paper.

What has God put on your heart tonight regarding your: Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength?

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Activity Box: Prayer Supplies

- You'll find square and heart sticky notes.

Other options: any type of paper, any type of writing utensil

- If you use washable markers, what you wrote will disappear when you get it wet .
- You could throw away your confession, erase it or cross it out as a symbol of release.

Consider what Jesus' teaches us about how to love with our whole self, to love our self, and to love others.

Ask God to show you how you can more fully participate in this kind of love.

- **What is negatively affecting your life, the life of loved ones, or your place of influence?**
- **How can prayer help you to grow closer with God?**
- **What worries, fears or other issues do you want to bring before God?**
- **What does God want you to be, do or change?**

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

- 1 John 4:16 (NLT)

As we put our trust in his love, we can love Jesus completely, love ourselves fully and love others intentionally.

Jesus highlights the power of love when lived out with every aspect of our being. A life lived full of love is an act of worship and obedience to Christ.

The love that will transform the world is the love that reflects God's love for Jesus and Jesus' love for us. Unconditional, self-sacrificial, other-oriented love.

PART 2: PRAISE

To celebrate God's victories, is to give testimony to and magnify God so all can see. Thankfulness is an act of worship that changes our perspective and reminds us that God is faithful. Giving praise is an act of love that enables us to focus on the true identity of God, which then helps us to also focus on the positives in others.

We invite you to write or draw a word, phrase or image that represents your praise or gratitude on a sticky note or any kind of paper. Then stick that note up somewhere that will be a constant reminder to praise God daily.

What are you grateful to God for providing in your life?

- **How has God defeated sin in your life?**

- **How has God's love shone through your life—your actions, attitudes, words and testimony?**

- **How has God's love impacted your life?**

- **Who are you thankful for in your life? Be sure to tell others that you are thankful for them and any specifics you can share as well.**

- **How can you practice gratefulness and thankfulness over the next 40 days of Lent?**

FOR THE LENTEN SEASON

Whatever your prayer life looked like before now; you are invited to practice prayer differently in the coming weeks. Consider these ideas and choose one or more to implement into your life:

Remembering what you wrote on the prayer paper, commit to praying for love to permeate every part of your life.

- **Reflect on the people in your life: how can your love for them become more selfless and sacrificial?**

- **Confess the things that distract you from or obstruct love rather than encouraging it.**

- **Identify a person or people group that is difficult for you to love and pray for them a few times a week from now until Easter.**

- **Pray for a different pastor or ministry area of Woodland Hills each week.**

ASH ACTIVITY

We hope these reflections and activities were helpful for your Ash Wednesday experience. Though Lent can seem like a solemn time, there is also the joy of anticipation as well as freedom and grace. As C.S. Lewis says, “There is a kind of happiness and wonder that makes you serious.”

Before we move on to our Lenten devotionals, we do have one final Ash Wednesday activity to complete: receiving the ashes. Whether you have ashes or not, you can still participate. You can always use other items you have around your household: flour, oil, water.

Putting the cross on our forehead is a symbolic act:

- It’s a reminder of Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection. His sacrifice marks us all with love, mercy and grace.
- The ashes are a reminder of our citizenship. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God and Jesus calls us to follow in His footsteps of sacrificial love—to live fully present to those around us, taking on the heart of a servant.
- They are also a humbling reminder that we were formed from dust. And to dust we will return. Our time on this earth is limited and the choices we make matter. Each day is truly a gift and an awesome opportunity to partner with Jesus.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

Activity Box: Ashes

- You’ll find a vial of ashes. They need to be mixed with some type of oil before applied to the forehead.

Other options: flour, oil, water.

If you are using ashes, you’ll need mix them with some oil from home. The key is using just enough oil so it’s slightly runny, not too chunky or liquidy.

Make the mark of the cross on your forehead. If you’re an individual making the mark on yourself, you can say, “From dust I have come and to dust I will return.” If you’re making the mark for someone else, you can say, “From dust you’ve come and to dust you’ll return.”

CONCLUSION

Here's a prayer to conclude the Ash Wednesday experience.

Jesus, as we embark on this Lenten journey, be close to us.

Holy Spirit help us to lean on your wisdom and give us your strength to overcome darkness.

Lord, thank you that Easter is arriving! Death has no power, no victory, because of Jesus!

Help us appreciate both the importance and the joy of this season in our hearts and as we move through the next several weeks.

Help us to bear the good fruit of your Spirit.

Thank you that the ashes on our forehead do not symbolize our ultimate reality.

We might have been formed from the dust, but our bodies, our spirits, ourselves, await beautiful redemption and the restoration of all things.

Amen.

Now we look forward to celebrating the rest of Lent with continued reflection and meaningful action.

DEVOTIONALS

SIMPLICITY, RELEASE & PRAYER BETWEEN NOW & EASTER

Traditionally, Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is also a time of self-examination and reflection. A time set aside to examine where we are in our relationship with God.

Similar to Jesus' journey in the wilderness, we are confronted with temptation. But we know denying things that separate us from God allow us to grow in our relationship with him. During Lent, we are intentionally separating ourselves from our old life, and embracing new life through Jesus' death and resurrection at Easter. We are also making resolutions and committing to change our lives in an effort to be more like Christ. Let's look at Matthew 4:1-11.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The devil didn't stop there and continued to test Jesus' strength in his physical weakness. He took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

"If you are the Son of God throw yourself down.

For it is written 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

But Jesus was not moved.

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

But the devil still wasn't done.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

But Jesus was disciplined and unmoved.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil attempted to sabotage Jesus over and over again. He wanted to disrupt Jesus' reliance upon God. Instead, Jesus chose to rely on God fully and dealt with temptation, doubt and misconceptions by using God's Word. The truth of Scripture reminded him of his purpose and of who he served. Being right-related with God strengthened his resolve.

LENT WEEK 2

FEBRUARY 24

READ: 1 John 4:16

And so, we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (NIV)

REFLECT

- **How are you relying on God's love this week?**

- **How have you seen God's love in your life?**

- **What can you do to ensure that you are living fully in God's love?**

- **What are some ways you can show Christlike love to coworkers, acquaintances, classmates or even strangers?**

KINDNESS CHAIN ACTIVITY

We invite you to count down the days until Easter with acts of kindness.

1. You'll need 38 strips of paper with acts of kindness on them. If you're brainstorming your own and you can't think of enough, you can either repeat or use some of our ideas.
2. Circle the two ends of each paper strip together and tape, staple or glue.
3. For the next strip, place it inside of the first circle, then repeat.
4. Do this for all the remaining strips to create a paper chain filled with acts of kindness.

Each morning remove one of the strips from your chain and complete the act of kindness listed.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Activity Box: Kindness Chain

- You'll find colored paper chain pages.

Other options: any type of paper, any type of writing utensil

- Feel free to use our Kindness Chain PDF on [whchurch.org/lent-2021](https://www.whchurch.org/lent-2021).
- Cut out 38 strips of paper and write your own acts of kindness.

LENT WEEK 3

MARCH 3

READ: John 14:23

*Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."
(NIV)*

REFLECT

- **What does Jesus mean when he says, "obey my teaching?"**

- **What does "obeying" Jesus look like in your life?**

- **Spending intentional time reading God's Word is a great way to start a new habit during Lent. You can start by reading a chapter a day in the book of Luke.**

- **Take a few minutes and invite Jesus to come and spend time with you. What did you experience after trying this?**

HYGIENE PRODUCTS ACTIVITY

We invite you to collect personal hygiene products for the WHC food shelf, or a homeless shelter in your area.

Buy or collect new unopened travel or full-size personal hygiene items.

Here's a suggested list:

Shampoo, toothpaste, body wash/soap, toothbrushes, diapers (size 3, 4 or 5), baby wipes, deodorant, feminine products, hand sanitizer. chapstick / lip balm, shaving gel, laundry soap, toilet paper

Take a moment to pray for the people that will receive these products to be filled with the fullness of God's love and peace.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Activity Box: Hygiene Supplies

- You'll find a paper bag with a hygiene list attached.

Other options: use a plastic or a paper bag to gather new and unused hygiene products or for a local homeless shelter.

