

Breaking the Chains:

A Family-Friendly Lenten Devotional

Like the ancient story of the Exodus, Lent is a journey from captivity to freedom. From Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday (not including Sundays, "mini-Easters" anticipating the big day!), the 40 days of Lent are set aside to help us increase the freedom in our lives. To tell the truth about ourselves and our world, to change our hearts and our ways, and to participate in God's work of breaking chains of injustice, apathy, violence, despair - even the chains of death itself!

"Breaking the Chains" is an engaging, family-friendly, creative Lenten resource, inviting all of us to let words of Scripture and daily practices of liberation be our guides through this mysterious season. Each day, break a link in the paper chain (purple links for the 40 days of Lent, and white links for the seven Sundays) and practice resurrection. Take part in God's chain-breaking, art-making, world-changing grace - all the way to the joyful freedom of Easter morning!

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- PDF File *BreakingTheChains.Printable.pdf*
- Adobe Acrobat (or another PDF viewer)
- Printer
- 6 Sheets of Lavender Paper (or Card Stock)
- 1 Sheet of Cream/White Paper (or Card Stock)
- Scissors
- Adhesive (glue stick, glue dots, stapler, or double-sided tape)

PRINTING AND ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Load 1 sheet of cream or white colored paper (or card stock) in your printer.
2. Download file and open in your PDF reader of choice (Acrobat Reader, Preview, etc.).
3. Open Print Dialog Box.
4. PRINT PAGE 2 ONLY (the "Sunday" strips), using "Fit to Page" (this way everything will print to your printer's specifications and not cut off any text or artwork!).
5. Load 6 sheets of letter-sized lavender paper (or card stock) in your printer.
6. PRINT PAGES 3-8 ONLY, using "Fit to Page" (this way everything will print to your printer's specifications and not cut off any text or artwork!).
7. Cut the 7 sheets into strips, following the dotted lines on each page.
8. Bend the first strip (Ash Wednesday) into a circle with the text on the inside (this will give every link a fun fortune cookie vibe!). Dab with glue (or staple or tape) to secure.
9. Thread the next strip through (1 - Thursday).
10. Bend into a circle shape and use a dot of glue (or staple or tape) to secure.
11. Repeat steps 9-10 until your chain is complete, using the cream/white-colored "Sunday strips" where they fit in, after every lavender "Saturday strip."

HOW TO CUSTOMIZE THE EDITABLE PAGE: A portion of the back page of the PDF file is editable. Before printing or sending digitally to your congregation, simply click the text box on this page to add your church name and any special events happening this Lenten season. For individual and family use, feel free to document your hopes and expectations for your Lenten journey.

If you have any questions, please email hilary@saltproject.org for help with printing and assembly!

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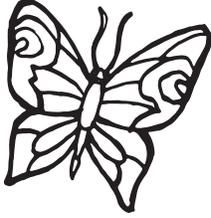


First Sunday of Lent

HOLD: One minute of silence (breathe in liberation, breathe out captivity)

READ: Deuteronomy 26:6-9

PRAY: Liberating God, open our eyes to the ways we hold your Earth and your people captive. Show us the places in our lives where we are doing harm, and then turn us around and set us free. Amen.

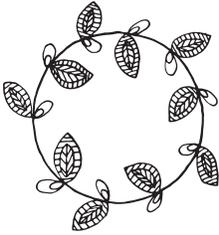


Second Sunday of Lent

HOLD: One and a half minutes of silence (breathe in love, breathe out apathy)

READ: Luke 13:34

PRAY: Mother God, gather us under your wings and teach us how to be your people. When we are lost, find us; when we are wrong, correct us; when we are bound by fear, free us. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Third Sunday of Lent

HOLD: Two minutes of silence (breathe in healing, breathe out hurt)

READ: Isaiah 55:2

PRAY: God of majesty, forgive us when we spend too much on ourselves, fill up on foods that do not satisfy, and tune out the cries of the vulnerable. Open us outward, toward you and our neighbors. Amen.

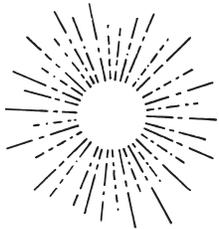


Fourth Sunday of Lent

HOLD: Two and a half minutes of silence (breathe in grace, breathe out doubt)

READ: Luke 15:31-32

PRAY: God who always seeks and always finds, thank you for showing us what love looks and feels like. Thank you for always watching the horizon and welcoming us back again and again and again. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Fifth Sunday of Lent

HOLD: Three minutes of silence (breathe in newness of life, breathe out "the former things")

READ: Isaiah 43:18-21

PRAY: God of new things, help us to see the dawn - even through the darkness. Help us to see your rivers - even in the desert. And help us to declare your praise - even when our mouths are full of ashes! In Jesus' name, Amen.

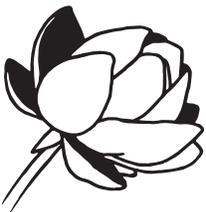


Palm Sunday

HOLD: Three and a half minutes of silence (breathe in hosanna, breathe out cynicism)

READ: Luke 19:28-40

PRAY: God of joy, even as we approach the cross, help us to delight in your triumphant, humble, glorious arrival into Jerusalem. Help us to hope, and to sing "Hosanna!" at the top of our lungs. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Easter Sunday

HOLD: Four minutes of silence (breathe in new life, breathe out despair)

READ: Luke 24:1-12

PRAY: God of Easter morning, open our hearts to your amazing grace. Roll the stone away and break all the chains, even today, even now! In the name of our risen Christ, Amen.

SING: "Amazing Grace"



Ash Wednesday

HOLD: Thirty seconds of silence (breathe in life, breathe out death)

READ: Matthew 6:19-21

PRAY: Loving God, this Lent, help us change our lives. Break the bonds of apathy, self-absorption, and despair. Free us for heavenly treasure - for where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. Amen.



Thursday

For centuries, three primary Lenten practices have been these: fasting, giving things away (including money!), and prayer. Today, find a quiet place to pray for someone you know who is having a hard time.



Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: Pick a subject or two (your neighborhood, springtime, etc.), and complete this sentence: "The best thing about [subject] is _____!" Gratitude and appreciation can help break the chains of negativity that hold us back.



Saturday

Be especially alert today to ways you can "be kind to one another and tender-hearted" (Ephesians 4:32). Make a special effort to thank the people working at your grocery store, your pharmacy, your school, or other places that might otherwise go unnoticed.



Monday

Color or draw a few pictures, and mail them to your local nursing home. Think of them as a gift to those in need of care, or as an appreciative "thank you" to the staff. "Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am God. I am the one who will sustain you and rescue you." + Isaiah 46:4



Tuesday

Learn to say "hello" in three different languages represented in your community. Break the chains of separation!



Wednesday

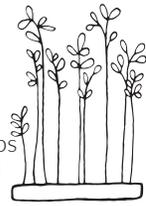
Do an internet search together to find organizations that serve refugees in your area. Find out what they need, how you can volunteer, and then make it happen! "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." + Matthew 25:35



8

Thursday

With family or friends, decide together on an organization to support financially. For the work of compassion and justice, no donation is too small - and giving helps open the heart of the giver, too! Break the chains of self-absorption and despair!



9

Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: If war, violence, or poverty forced you to leave your home, what would you take with you? Stand in solidarity with refugees around the world by sharing your answers on social media (use the hashtag: #WhatWouldYouTake).



10

Saturday

Reach out to someone who is by themselves, or seems lonely. Give them a call, send an email, or drop off a tiny bouquet of spring flowers. Break the chains of loneliness!



11

Monday

Start (or increase) a practice of composting this Lenten season. Composting is a great way to reduce household waste, and - voila! - turns it into something nourishing for creation.



12

Tuesday

Try this experiment: Say only kind and positive things all day today. Break the chains of bitterness, gossip, and negativity!



13

Wednesday

In the United States, there are almost 400,000 children under 18 in foster care. Donate to an organization that supports kids in the foster system in your area. "Religion that is pure...is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress." + James 1:27



14

Thursday

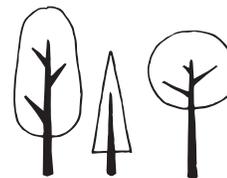
Do a household chore for a family member without them having to ask - or even without them knowing about it. Break the chains of toil and increase everyone's delight!



15

Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: What's your all-time favorite memory (or one of your top five)?



16

Saturday

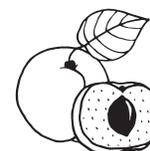
Do the Popcorn Prayer! Pop some microwave popcorn and have everyone shout out something they are grateful for when they hear a kernel pop.



17

Monday

This week or this Lent (or longer!), try eating less meat, eggs, and/or dairy products. Animal agriculture, and factory farming in particular, is hard on animals (especially female animals) and hard on the Earth, too. Remember, God's mercy is "over all God has made." + Psalm 145:9



18

Tuesday

Give someone in your household a hug - "just because." Break the chains of isolation!



19

Wednesday

Today and for the rest of the week, avoid processed food as much as possible - food "which does not satisfy" (Isa 55:2). The gifts of the Earth are the gifts of God!



20

Thursday

Try an online game night with someone you don't know very well. Break the chains of loneliness!



21

Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: What are the most serious problems the world is facing today? What do you think you could do to help solve them?



22

Saturday

Write (or find) a poem - simple or complicated, long or short - for someone you love.



23

Monday

Pick a day this week to decorate the inside of your mailbox, or outside of your mail slot, to bring a smile to your mail carrier's face. Help make "sorrow and sighing flee away..." + Isaiah 25:10



24

Tuesday

Record a video love letter and send it to someone who needs it (a voicemail works, too). Break the chains of indifference!



25

Wednesday

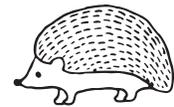
For the rest of Lent, try sharing and borrowing as much as possible, instead of buying more stuff. Get back to your early Christian roots, when the disciples held "all things in common!" + Acts 2:44



26

Thursday

"Pay It Backward!" The next time you're at a toll booth or in a drive-through, pay for the person behind you. Kindness feels different when it's from a stranger - and when it's a surprise! So find a surprising way to be kind this week.



27

Friday

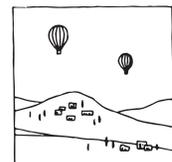
CONVERSATION STARTER: Do you believe everyone deserves forgiveness, no matter what? If so, why? If not, why not?



28

Saturday

Show support to an artist you love! Buy what they make, send them a donation, or drop them a note of thanks and admiration.



29

Monday

Try growing flowers from seeds this week: in cups on your window sill, in your yard, or in a public space or abandoned lot. Break the chains of misery, and help “the earth laugh with flowers.” + Ralph Waldo Emerson



30

Tuesday

The next time you're in line, let someone go in front of you. Break the chains of stress and frustration! “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” + Micah 6:8



31

Wednesday

For the remainder of Lent, commit to becoming even more plastic free: reusable shopping bags; glass, metal, or ceramic water bottles and coffee mugs; and skip straws altogether! Break the chains of damage and disregard for creation!



32

Thursday

Select three local businesses you love (and who could use some support!), and write each of them a positive online review. Break the chains of toil and discouragement!



33

Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: What's your idea of a perfect day? Where would you go, what would you do, and who would you do it with?



34

Saturday

Write a handwritten note to someone today, letting them know how much you appreciate them. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” + Luke 10:27



35

Monday

Pray for someone you don't like, or someone you're estranged from. Challenge yourself: Is a step toward reconciliation possible? Break the chains of resentment!



36

Tuesday

Write down three things you're grateful for today - and share them with a friend. Then write and share three ways you hope for resurrection in your life this week.



37

Wednesday

Make plans to virtually visit an organization doing good work in your community - and find out how you can get involved. Break the chains of apathy! "I am among you as one who serves." + Luke 22:27



38

Thursday

Unplug: Try an intentional "technology fast" today. Break the chains of distraction! Share a meal with someone you love (in person or online), and remember together the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the eve of his death. + Luke 22:7-27



39

Friday

CONVERSATION STARTER: What would you most like people to remember you for after you die? What would you like written on your tombstone?



40

Holy Saturday

Plan a visit to a cemetery and tidy up an overgrown headstone. Let the whole world see that God is still with us, even in death. "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." + Matthew 28:20



Special Events this Season