

Philippians 4:8-9 gives us instructions on how to do that.

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me-- everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. - Philippians 4:8-9 NLT

The opposite of fixing our thoughts on these things would be fixing them on their opposites. Where do we see or hear things that are lies, dishonorable, wrong, impure, ugly and shameful? How can you order your days to silence those voices? How can you remove yourself from situations that leave you angry or agitated? Where are the sources of the thoughts we should be feasting on?

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NLT

In Christ we are God's new creation. Where have you seen evidence of new creation? Glimpses of God's kingdom?

The good news is that through Jesus, God brought us back to Himself, and we can share that good news with everyone, let them know," God wants you to come back to Him. He's waiting for you."

WRAP-UP

Lent is a season of realignment—examining where our thoughts, habits, and desires have drifted out of alignment with God and intentionally correcting course. Sin and other distractions can distort our thinking and slow our spiritual growth, so we are invited to identify what is pulling us off track and remove it. Through prayer, fasting, lament, and repentance, we allow God to reshape our minds and restore our focus. As we realign our hearts with His truth and hope, He renews us, fills us with peace, and leads us into the fullness of new life in Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! - 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

Challenge – *If you want to incorporate the practices of lament and/or repentance, begin by reading through psalms 13, 42, 94, 10, and 51.*

Realignment Lent at New Life

INTRODUCTION

This week, as we enter the season of Lent at New Life, we will pause from our regular rhythms of study in the gospel of Mark to consider what this season represents and how we can realign our lives to reflect God's heart, Jesus' ways and to live into the "New Creation" of a Life in Christ. Just like our cars become misaligned from the rough roads and potholes they hit, we can become "misaligned" when we travel the bumpy roads of life. But God has shown us the way to be straightened out and get back on track in our spiritual journey.

Ice Breaker

What are some of the bumps in the road you've hit in the last year?

Key Passages

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. - Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Strip Away

As we read in our key verse, there are things that weigh us down and trip us up in life. Hebrews 12:1 says that sin especially (but not exclusively) slows us down and trips us up. Sometimes we can miss the symptoms that warn us that we are going out of alignment. These include easily drifting off course, experiencing pain, and recognizing that sin has twisted some area of your life or thinking.

What would be an example of these symptoms (e.g. drifting, pain and twisted)? What besides sin might cause them?

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice--the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. - Romans 12:1-2 NLT

Most people equate Lent with giving up something. Lent isn't about giving things up for 40 days, it is about making real change in our lives and offering ourselves fully to God. First, we need to identify what's pulling us away from His path and then strip it away entirely.

Romans 12:2 tells us that God will transform us and change the way we think, but we must stop copying the behavior and customs of the world. How has your life and practices aligned more with old creation than new creation? (Greed, fear, racism, anger, sloth, scarcity) What has been tripping you up lately? Is this something you need to strip away for a season or forever? If you recognize something that needs to change, ask God for help to correct the way you think about it so that you might begin to behave differently.

One tangible way to redeem our desires and retrain our appetites is the practice of fasting. Prayer and fasting during Lent prepares us to enjoy the greatest feast of all, Easter. It is not intended as a 6-week inconvenience to please God, nor is it a testing ground for our willpower, and it's certainly not a spiritual rationale to lose a few pounds. Jesus modeled 40 days of prayer and fasting following His baptism as He prepared for His mission and ministry to begin. Setting aside the demands of the body to focus on the needs of the soul recognizes that our communion with God is even more necessary to life than food is. And as you listen intently, God will speak to you.

If you plan to fast during Lent, ask God what He wants to accomplish in you through this practice. Take a good look at your motives for fasting and embrace the opportunity it gives you to draw near to God and enjoy time with Him alone.

2. Lament and Repent

During Lent we spend time reflecting on our own sins and those of the fallen world we live in. Lent is a season of Godly sorrow that leads us to repentance. Recognizing our fallenness helps us to appreciate how Jesus came to our rescue and meets our deepest need. But as we shine the light on the brokenness that surrounds us, we may want to turn away rather than face the pain it causes us. But God has given us a

songbook containing laments; the Psalms. Psalms of lament are an expression of our Godly sorrow. Some, like Ps 42, are a personal expression of sorrow.

*5 Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again--my Savior and 6 my God! Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you--even from distant Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar. 7 I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me. 8 But each day the LORD pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life.
- Psalm 42:5-8 NLT*

In Ps 42 the Psalmist is speaking to himself. What does he encourage himself to find as the remedy to his sorrow?

Notice the psalmist's determination to hold on to God as he struggles with his sadness and discouragement. It reads like a tennis match- I'm discouraged and sad / I will hope in God, I am discouraged / I will remember you (God), I hear the raging seas / but the Lord pours out love and gives life. These verses remind us that God gives us space to wrestle with our discouragement. He knows our pain because he too has experienced the pain of this broken world.

In Psalm 51 David recognizes his own rebellion and repents.

1...Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. 2 Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. 3 For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. ... 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. ... 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God. - Psalm 51:1-3, 10, 17 NLT

As we recognize our own sin Satan will accuse and condemn us, hoping we will run and hide from God. But as we read Ps 51, where do you see hope and a reason to draw near to God?

David didn't let his sins (like murder and adultery) keep him from God. If we can learn anything from his life, we should learn that no sin is greater than God's love and we never need to fear approaching Him with a broken, repentant heart.

3. Refuel

After doing the hard work of stripping away our sin, lamenting and repenting we can find ourselves spiritually depleted. God doesn't want to leave us empty, He wants to fill us with His peace.