

Lent and Easter 2026

Let go, and be open.

Small Group Resource Pack

A space to grow together this Lent

Lent is a season of invitation. It begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts for 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter. As the days lengthen and the earth begins to stir, we're invited to loosen our grip on what holds us back – habits, assumptions, fears – and open ourselves to the renewing presence of God. This journey isn't always easy, but it's rich with possibility. And it's better shared with travelling companions.

This small group resource is designed to facilitate a journey through Lent together: one that is peaceful, reflective and real. It's a place of gentle connection, where new insights can take root and grow.

These sessions are for anyone who wants to grow as a disciple of Jesus alongside others. The content is rooted in the Lent and Holy Week lectionary shaped by simple, thoughtful conversation. All that's needed from you is a willingness to listen, share and make space for others.

We'll provide all the content: a short video to get things started, plus simple questions to help your group reflect together. There are no 'right answers': view it as an opportunity for people to share their experiences, questions and insights.

Hosting a group

You don't need to be an expert theologian to lead – but you do need to be a good host.

That means:

- creating a welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels 'seen' and valued.
- sticking to time (start and finish when you say you will).
- helping everyone contribute equally.
- being gentle and kind with people's stories and emotions. Remind everyone to respect the confidentiality of the conversations, with the usual exception for safeguarding disclosures.
- encouraging guests to connect with each other, not just with you.

When you create a welcoming space, it's often the little things that make the biggest difference: a vase of spring flowers on the table and the offer of a cup of tea and a cake. Such small gestures say, 'You're welcome here'. You might ask guests to contribute snacks or help with setting up. Also be sure to check for any dietary needs.

Group size and setup

Groups of six to ten people work well. With fewer people, you may miss out on a variety of perspectives; with more, it's harder to create a sense of intimacy and trust. If you have more than ten people, think about dividing into smaller groups.

Ask everyone to silence their phones (unless needed for emergencies) so you can be fully present to one another.

Using the resource

Each session includes a short video exploring the Bible passage. Use this as a springboard for your own conversation. The accompanying questions are designed to prompt discussion – not to test knowledge. Use what's helpful, skip what isn't, and let the Holy Spirit guide your conversation.

As you journey through Lent together, may these sessions help you notice signs of God's presence, like green shoots breaking through the soil, preparing your hearts for the joy of Easter.

Spiritual practice

Each week, we'll suggest a simple spiritual practice to try out between sessions. These are gentle everyday ways to explore the theme more deeply through reflection, creativity or action. You don't need to do them perfectly; just give them a go and see what happens. And the next time you meet, take a few minutes to share what you noticed, what surprised you, or what challenged you.

Lent 1

Let go of idols, make room for God

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Rice cakes or plain crackers (or if your group meets on Shrove Tuesday, pancakes would be an excellent alternative!)

Invite people to reflect silently on the simplicity of the snack. What does it feel like to strip things back? What might God be inviting them to let go of this Lent?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

God of the wilderness,
as we begin this journey of Lent, help us to travel lightly.
Strip away what distracts us, and draw us closer to your heart.
May we find you not only in comfort, but in quiet and simplicity.
Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read Matthew 4:1–11 and this summary:

Jesus is led into the wilderness, where he faces three temptations: to satisfy hunger, to test God's protection and to seize power. Each time he chooses trust in God over self-reliance or spectacle. This passage invites us to name the things we're tempted to rely on instead of God – and to let them go. Lent begins with a call to travel lightly and to trust deeply.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1. What 'idols' can you think of – visible or hidden – that we are tempted to trust more than God (eg success, control, approval, comfort)?
2. How do the temptations Jesus faced mirror the pressures we experience in our own lives?
3. What helps you stay grounded in God's truth when you feel tested or tempted?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Explain that each week during Lent, we'll offer a simple spiritual practice to try out between sessions. They are designed to help people explore the week's theme in their everyday lives, through reflection, creativity or small acts of attention. You don't need to do them perfectly or every day. Just give them a go, and see what you notice.

Next week, we'll reflect on how it went: what surprised you, challenged you, or helped you connect with God in a new way.

'True and false' journal

Keep a small notebook or notes app where you record two things each day:

- One false message you noticed (eg 'I have to be perfect to be loved').
- One true message from God (eg 'You are my beloved').

End each entry in your journal with a short prayer: "God, help me let go of the false and hold fast to what is true."

Why it helps:

This practice helps us discern the difference between the world's messages and God's voice. It trains us to reject the idols of performance, perfectionism and fear, and embrace our true selves in God.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

Clay 'idol' and heart swap

You'll need:

- Air-dry clay
- Wooden boards or reusable mats or newspaper

Instructions:

1. Use air-dry clay to shape small 'idols' (eg coins, phones, trophies).
2. Create a heart shape to represent God's love.
3. Invite participants to symbolically put down their idol, and take up a heart instead.
4. Invite participants to hold the clay heart they made. In silence, reflect on what it represents: God's love, presence or truth. Say together quietly (or silently): "God, help me hold onto what is real. Amen."

Lent 2

Let go of form, embrace the spirit

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Air-filled foods such as marshmallows, puffed rice cakes, or meringues

Hand these out and invite people to reflect silently on the lightness and texture of the snack. Air gives it shape, but it's invisible. What does it mean to be shaped by something unseen? How might the Spirit be moving in your life?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

Spirit of life,
you move where you will – unseen, unexpected and free.
Help us to loosen our grip on what is fixed and familiar,
and open ourselves to your breath of transformation.
May we be light, open and ready to be moved by you.

Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read John 3:1–17 and this summary:

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, full of questions. Jesus speaks of being born from above – not physically, but spiritually – through the movement of the Spirit. This passage invites us to loosen our grip on certainty and control and to be open to the mystery of God's transforming presence.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group

1. Where in your faith life do you feel stuck in 'form' – going through the motions without sensing the Spirit?
2. What does it mean to trust the wind of the Spirit – to be open to movement, mystery and surprise?
3. Why do you think Nicodemus went to see Jesus at night? Could the timing have a deeper meaning?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Before we introduce this week's practice, take a moment to reflect on last week's. You were invited to keep a 'true and false' journal. What did you notice as you tried it out? Was anything surprising, challenging or encouraging?

Openness to the unexpected

This week, set aside time each day to be open to unexpected moments.

Begin with a moment of quiet openness. You might say: "Spirit of life, move freely. Help me notice what matters." Or simply pause, breathe and invite a sense of awareness and presence.

Whether you're at home, at work, online, or in conversation, stay attentive to surprising encounters: a message, a moment of beauty, a person who crosses your path. Let go of control and allow the Spirit to guide your attention.

Why it helps:

This practice mirrors Jesus' invitation to Nicodemus: stepping into mystery, trusting the Spirit's movement, and embracing the possibility of surprise. It helps us loosen our grip on structure and become more attentive to the Spirit's presence in the everyday.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

Wind mobiles

You'll need:

- Paper, card
- Hole punch, scissors, pens
- Twigs, string, wool

Instructions:

1. Make paper shapes (eg doves, spirals, clouds) and tie them to the twigs or string to create mobiles.
2. Hang them up to catch the breeze, symbolising openness to the Spirit.
3. Stand near them and watch them move. Invite the group to sit in silence and notice the movement of air. Then ask: "Where do you feel the Spirit stirring?" Participants can respond aloud or simply sit with the question.

Week before Sunday 8 March 2026

Lent 3 Let go of scarcity, embrace abundance

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Fresh fruit slices (eg oranges, apples), grapes, and spring salad

Invite people to reflect silently on the foods' freshness and colour. What signs of abundance do you notice in your own life or surroundings?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

God of overflowing grace,

thank you for the gifts that surround us.

Help us to see beyond what we lack, and trust in your generous love.

May we live with open hands and grateful hearts.

Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read John 4:5–42 and this summary:

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and offers her 'living water' – a source of life that never runs dry. Her encounter with Jesus transforms her and she becomes a witness to his grace. This passage invites us to move from scarcity to abundance, trusting that God's love is overflowing and available to all.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1. Where in your life do you feel stuck in a mindset of 'scarcity' – emotionally, spiritually or practically?
2. How does Jesus' offer of 'living water' challenge the idea that we must work hard to earn God's presence or grace?
3. How might you, like the woman at the well, leave behind something that once defined you and step into a new identity rooted in abundance?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Last week, you were invited to stay open to unexpected moments and signs of the Spirit. What did you notice? Were there any surprises or shifts in perspective?

Spring photos

This week, take time each day to go outside – even just for a few minutes.

- Look for signs of spring: daffodils, buds on trees, lambs in the fields, birds, or longer daylight hours.
- Take a photo of something that catches your attention as a sign of life and abundance.
- At the end of the week, look back over your photos. What do they reveal about God's generosity? What surprised you? What lifted your spirit?

Why it helps:

This practice helps shift our focus from what feels lacking to what is already growing. Spring is a natural metaphor for abundance. It's not flashy or excessive, but quiet, steady and full of promise. By paying attention to the world around us, we train our hearts to notice God's provision and presence, even in small things.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

'God's abundance overflows' cups

You'll need:

- Paper cups or small terracotta pots
- Washable markers
- Jug of water and large bowl or basin

Instructions:

1. Decorate a reusable paper cup or small plant pot with words or images of blessings you've received.
2. Pour water into your cup until it overflows into a shared bowl, symbolising how personal abundance can bless others.
3. Gather around the shared bowl where water overflowed. Invite each person to dip a finger into the water and make a small mark on their hand or paper. Say together: "Let your grace overflow in me. Amen."

Lent 4 Let go of appearances, and embrace what's inside

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Individually wrapped Babybel cheese (or similar). For those who can't eat dairy, you could offer wrapped alternatives such as mini packs of dried fruit, nuts, or vegan cheese portions.

As you unwrap your snack, notice how the outside hides what's inside. It might look plain or ordinary at first, but there's something nourishing within. Where in life do we judge by appearances?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

God who sees the heart,
teach us to look with compassion, not assumption.
Help us to honour the dignity in every person, including ourselves.
May we be people of grace, welcome and understanding.

Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read John 9:1–41 and this summary:

Jesus heals a man born blind, challenging assumptions about sin and worthiness. As the man's sight is restored, his spiritual insight grows too, while others remain stuck in judgement. This passage invites us to see with compassion, and to recognise the dignity in every person, including ourselves.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1. Where in our lives are we tempted to judge others by outward appearance – status, behaviour, background – rather than looking for the image of God within them?
2. How does Jesus' response to the man born blind challenge our assumptions about who is 'worthy' or 'holy'?
3. When have you felt overlooked, dismissed or misunderstood and what helped you feel truly seen and valued? How might that experience shape the way you recognise dignity in others?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Last week's practice was to look for signs of spring and abundance. What caught your attention? Did anything shift in how you saw God's generosity?

Dignity spotting

Spend some time each day noticing and affirming the dignity of someone you might usually overlook, or be judgemental towards. For example, you could:

- Have a brief conversation with someone you usually pass by.
- Write a note of encouragement or thanks to someone whose work is often unseen.
- Spend a moment in silent prayer for someone you find difficult to understand.

Why it helps:

This practice gently retrains our attention. It moves us from surface-level judgements to deeper recognition of the image of God in others. It invites us to 'see with the heart', as God does.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

Mirror frames of dignity

You'll need:

- Cardboard
- Mirrors (or foil)
- Scissors, pens, stickers, fabric scraps

Instructions:

1. Make cardboard frames around small mirrors or pieces of foil.
2. Decorate the cardboard frames with affirming words and symbols (using the stickers and pieces of fabric).
3. Invite participants to hold their framed mirror and look into it.
4. Reflect on seeing others (and ourselves) as God sees us.
5. In silence, reflect on the words and symbols. Then say quietly: "God, help me see myself – and others – as you do. Amen."

Week before Sunday 22 March 2026

Lent 5 Let go of despair, embrace 'respair'

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Seeds or nuts (symbolising hidden life and restoration)

Invite people to reflect silently on the idea of restoration. What in your life might be ready to come back to life?

This week's Bible readings speak to times when life feels hopeless and show us that God offers real hope – hope that is strong and deeply rooted in God's life-giving presence.

Language expert Susie Dent points out that English often leans towards negative words. She notes that some positive words have almost disappeared. One example is the word linked to 'despair'. Its opposite is rare, but it exists:

"...one English word surely stands above all others from the corners of the dictionary. I mention it all the time, because I'm determined to bring it back. Or bring it anywhere in fact, for it never really enjoyed more than a day in the sun. 'Respair' has just one record next to it in the Oxford English Dictionary, from 1525, but its definition is sublime. Respair is fresh hope; a recovery from despair."¹

One person reads this prayer aloud:

God of restoration,
breathe life into what feels broken or forgotten.
Help us to trust in your power to renew and revive.
May hope rise again in us, fresh and fierce.
Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read John 11:1–45 and this summary:

Jesus hears that his friend Lazarus has died. He weeps with those who mourn, and then calls Lazarus out of the tomb. Life returns where death seemed final. This passage invites us to trust that God is still breathing life into what feels broken or lost – and to hold onto hope, even in despair.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1 Susie Dent, From despair to cacklefart – the joy of reclaiming long-lost positive words
theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/26/respair-cacklefart-positive-words-english-language

1. Where in your life or community do you feel like you're standing in a valley of dry bones: places that feel lifeless, stuck or forgotten?
2. When have you experienced a sense of 'respair' or hope returning after a time of despair? What helped you recognise it?
3. What does it mean to 'speak life' – to be someone who helps others breathe again, hope again, live again?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Last week, you were invited to affirm the dignity of someone you might usually overlook. What did that experience stir in you? Did it change how you saw others – or yourself?

The 'respair shop'

This week, embrace your inner Bagpuss!

- Choose one thing that's broken, messy or neglected: a torn item of clothing, a cluttered drawer, a squeaky hinge, a forgotten corner of your home.
- Take time to fix it, clean it, or bring it back to life. As you do, reflect on these questions: What in me might also need repair? What hope could be restored through this act?
- You don't need to do it perfectly. The point is care, attention and the belief that restoration is possible – even in small things.
- If possible, bring your 'respaired' objects to the group next week to show.

Why it helps:

Repairing something physical can be a gentle way to reconnect with the possibility of emotional or spiritual healing. It's a hands-on reminder that brokenness is not the end of the story, and that hope, like repair-work, begins with noticing and tending.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

Blossoms of hope

You'll need:

- Fabric scraps
- Twigs or card
- Pens and glue or string

Instructions:

1. Use strips of fabric (eg old sheets or bandages) and twist and shape them into simple flower forms.
2. Attach the flowers to twigs or stems made out of recycled card.
3. Write words of hope or life on each leaf or petal.
4. Invite each person to hold their flower and silently name something they hope will be restored. Say: "God, breathe life into what feels lost. Amen."

Keep the flowers to display as a 'garden of resurrection' around the cross on Easter Sunday.

Week before Sunday 29 March 2026

Approaching

Palm Sunday

Let go of violence, embrace gentleness

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Hearts of palm (served sliced or in a simple salad)

Invite people to reflect silently on the name and texture of the snack. 'Heart of palm' evokes both tenderness and strength. What does it mean to lead with gentleness? Where in your life are you being invited to respond with peace instead of power?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

Gentle Jesus,
you entered the city not with force, but with love.
Teach us to lead with compassion, to speak with kindness,
and to choose peace even when the world demands power.
May our hearts be soft and strong, like yours.

Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read Matthew 21:1–11 and this summary:

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey, fulfilling prophecy and offering a vision of peace. The crowd shouts "Hosanna!" It means 'save us we pray' and is a cry for salvation, not conquest. This passage invites us to let go of power and control and to follow Jesus in the way of gentleness, humility and love.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1. How does Jesus' choice to enter Jerusalem on a donkey challenge our assumptions about leadership and power?
2. What does gentleness look like in your life, and where is it hardest to practise?
3. What do you most want to be saved from in your life right now?

Spiritual practice (5 minutes)

Last week's practice was the 'repair shop' – restoring something broken or neglected. What did you choose to repair, and what does it say about your own journey of hope?

Teddy bear 24/7

This week, carry something soft with you wherever you go: a teddy bear, or a piece of fabric. Let it be a physical reminder to choose gentleness in your interactions. When you feel stressed, rushed, or tempted to react sharply, touch the object and pause. Ask: "How can I respond with gentleness, like Jesus did?"

Why it helps:

Doing something like this engages our senses and helps us stay grounded. Carrying something soft is a gentle nudge towards compassion, patience and peace – especially in moments when we feel pulled towards control or frustration.

Craft activity (30 minutes)

Donkey puppets

You'll need:

- Card
- Wooden sticks or pegs
- Scissors, pens, glue

Instructions:

1. Draw donkey faces on pieces of card.
2. Fix the faces to the sticks or pegs to make simple puppets.
3. Decorate with gentle colours and simple prayers.
4. Holding the puppets gently, invite participants to imagine walking beside Jesus into Jerusalem.
5. Ask "What does it mean to follow the way of peace?" Participants can respond with a word, gesture or silence.

Week before Sunday 5 April 2026

Holy Week

Let go of fear, embrace joy

Welcome (10 minutes)

Snack idea: Bread rolls or flatbread, referencing the Last Supper

Invite people to reflect silently on the shared nature of bread. Jesus broke bread with his friends even in the shadow of death. What does it mean to share joy in the midst of fear?

One person reads this prayer aloud:

Jesus,
you shared bread with your friends, even as shadows gathered.
In this week of waiting and wondering,
help us to trust that love is still at work.
As we break bread together,
may we remember your presence in sorrow and in silence,
and hold onto the promise that joy will come.

Amen.

Bible (5 minutes)

Read Matthew 26:17–30 and this summary:

Jesus shares a final meal with his disciples. He blesses the bread and wine, speaks of betrayal, and offers words of covenant and hope. Even as sorrow and uncertainty gather, he chooses to be present, generous and faithful.

This passage invites us to stay with the mixed feelings of Holy Week – to make space for grief, trust and quiet hope all at once. It means not rushing past the hard parts, but holding them alongside the promise of love. As we break bread together, we remember that love is still at work, even when life feels uncertain or shadowed.

Discussion (25 minutes)

Use these questions to help everyone join in, even if they're not used to Bible study. Keep things informal and open. Rephrase or skip questions as needed for the group.

1. What stands out to you about Jesus' presence at the table, knowing what's about to happen?
2. How does his choice to share a meal – including with someone who will betray him – shape your understanding of grace and community?

3. The disciples respond with sorrow and confusion. Have you ever experienced a moment where love and loss were closely intertwined? What helped you keep going without shutting down or running away from those feelings?

Spiritual practice (10 minutes)

Last week, you were invited to carry something soft as a reminder 'to choose gentleness'. Did carrying softness help you act with kindness? Where did you notice a shift? How did that practice shape your interactions or responses?

Holy Week journal

Each day of Holy Week, take a few minutes to read a section from Matthew's Gospel. And then think back to the different spiritual practices that you have explored in this Lent series.

Monday

Matthew 21:12–16

Jesus disrupts the Temple, making space for something deeper.

Think back to week two's practice of noticing unexpected moments and signs of the Holy Spirit. Imagine you were following this discipline and happened to be present in the Temple when Jesus entered and turned over the tables. Do you think you would see his disruptive action as a surprising work of God, challenging the established fixed form of religion and opening the way to something different?

Tuesday

Matthew 21:18–22

Jesus curses the barren fig tree and speaks of faith that bears fruit.

Think back to week three's practice of noticing signs of spring and abundance. Imagine you were following this discipline and walked past the fig tree just before Jesus arrived. Would you have seen its barrenness as a warning against scarcity thinking? How might Jesus' words challenge you to trust in unseen abundance from God, even when things look lifeless?

Wednesday

Matthew 26:14–16

Judas makes a decision for which others will judge him – but what led him there?

Think back to week four's practice of affirming dignity in those we might overlook or misjudge. Imagine you were present when Judas approached the chief priests. Would you have seen only betrayal, or would you have wondered what pain or confusion led him there? How does this moment invite you to look deeper before judging?

Thursday

Matthew 26:26–30

Jesus shares bread and wine, offering hope in the face of betrayal.

Think back to week five's 'repair shop' practice – repairing something broken or neglected. Imagine you were at the table with Jesus, holding a cup in your hands. Would you have seen this meal as a quiet act of restoration? What does this moment have to say about the possibility of hope even when things feel fragile?

Friday

Matthew 27:27–31

Jesus endures cruelty without retaliation.

Think back to the Palm Sunday practice of carrying something soft – a teddy bear or piece of fabric. Imagine you were in the crowd, holding that object as Jesus was mocked and beaten. How might holding that symbol of gentleness and kindness feel at that moment?

Saturday

Matthew 27:57–61

Jesus' body is laid in the tomb. Silence and waiting begin.

Think back to week one's 'true and false' journal practice. Imagine you were one of the women watching the tomb being sealed. What false messages might have crept in about endings, failure or absence? What truths might still be waiting to rise, quietly, in the silence?

Craft activity (30 minutes)

'Joy in waiting' bunting

You'll need:

- Triangle or flag shapes cut from fabric scraps or recycled card
- Scissors, needles and thread, glue

Instructions:

1. Create bunting and decorate each piece with gentle words or symbols that reflect quiet hope – such as peace, promise, healing, light or 'respair'.
2. On the back of each flag, invite participants to write a short prayer or describe something they're longing for as they wait for Easter.
3. Hang the bunting in your worship space as a sign of preparation and trust.
4. Stand near the bunting. Invite each person to touch one flag and silently pray for the hope or longing written there. Say together: "God, hold our hopes gently. Prepare us for joy. Amen."

On Easter Sunday, you might invite everyone to add new flags with joyful colours and resurrection symbols, completing the bunting as a celebration of new life.

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