



## Scripture and Prayer

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\* The Worship Sourcebook (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition): 547

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. By the fourth century the Western church had determined that the Lenten period of fasting and renewal should correspond to Christ's forty-day fast (Matt. 4:2), and, by counting forty days back from Easter (excluding Sundays, which remain "feast" days), arrived at the Wednesday seven weeks before Easter. For the church today, Lent has become a general time of penitence and renewal for all Christians. Thus Ash Wednesday became the day that marked the beginning of the Lenten renewal.

The aim of Ash Wednesday observance is threefold: to meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need of a savior; to renew our commitment to daily repentance in the Lenten season and in all of life; and to remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin. Ash Wednesday, then, is filled with gospel truth. It is a witness to the power and beauty of our union with Christ and to the daily dying and rising with Christ that this entails.

Ashes have a long history in biblical and church traditions. In Scripture ashes or dust symbolize frailty or death (Gen. 18:27), sadness or mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lam. 3:16), and repentance (Jon. 3:6). Some traditions also have considered ash a purifying or cleansing agent. All these images are caught up in the church's use of ashes as a symbol appropriate for Lent. In Christ's passion we see God's judgment on evil; in our penitence we express sorrow and repentance for our sins; in our rededication we show that we are purified and renewed. The ashes, which often are the burnt residue of the previous year's palms from Palm Sunday, are placed by the pastors in the shape of a cross on each person's hand or forehead as a reminder that that "you are dust and to dust you shall return" and that you now "Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ."

# I am dead in sin

*“You will return to the ground, since from it you were taken.  
Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.”*

Genesis 3:19

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## Invitation to be still:

Matthew 11:28–29 (NIV)

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

## Hear the Word of the Lord:

Psalms 32:3–7, 10 (NIV)

3 When I kept silent,

My bones wasted away

Through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night

Your hand was heavy on me;

My strength was sapped

As in the heat of summer.

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you

And did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, “I will confess

My transgressions to the LORD.”

And you forgave

The guilt of my sin.

6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you

While you may be found;

Surely the rising of the mighty waters

Will not reach them.

7 You are my hiding place;

You will protect me from trouble

And surround me with songs of deliverance.

10 Many are the woes of the wicked,  
But the LORD's unfailing love  
Surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Psalm 51:1–6 (NIV)

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
According to your unfailing love;  
According to your great compassion  
Blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity  
And cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
And done what is evil in your sight;  
So you are right in your verdict  
And justified when you judge.
- 5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
Sinful from the time my mother conceived  
me.
- 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the  
womb;  
You taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Joel 2:1–2, 12–13 (NIV)

- 1 Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
Sound the alarm on my holy hill.  
Let all who live in the land tremble,  
For the day of the LORD is coming.  
It is close at hand—

2 a day of darkness and gloom,  
A day of clouds and blackness.  
Like dawn spreading across the mountains  
A large and mighty army comes,  
Such as never was in ancient times  
Nor ever will be in ages to come.

12 “Even now,” declares the LORD,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
With fasting and weeping and mourning.”

13 Rend your heart  
And not your garments.  
Return to the LORD your God,  
For he is gracious and compassionate,  
Slow to anger and abounding in love,  
And he relents from sending calamity.

### Respond in Prayer and Silence:

Lord, our God, you are full of compassion.

As we enter this season of Lent, send your Spirit so that we may grow more and more aware of our need for a Savior, turn away from our sinful habits regularly and genuinely, resist temptations great and small, and remember with confidence that our Lord Jesus conquered sin and death.

Covenant God of love and mercy, we come to you at the beginning of these forty days, remembering how Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days in the wilderness. We remember how he steadfastly set his face toward Jerusalem, obedient in living and dying, even through death on a cross. We too would walk these next forty days in humble obedience, following our Savior, Jesus Christ, in our everyday lives at home, at work, and in your world.

Prepare us anew, we pray, to keep our hearts and minds fixed on Jesus, ready and willing from now on to live for him.

God of new birth, we praise you for being the giver of life and the victor over death, for the evidence of new life we see in creation...

*[moment of silent reflection before continuing]*

for our baptism, a sign of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection...

*[moment of silent reflection before continuing]*

for the promise of the coming kingdom...

*[moment of silent reflection before continuing]*

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. In this season of repentance, restore to us the joy of our salvation and strengthen us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy, in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Receive the Blessing of the Lord:

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

# I am alive in Christ

*“Consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ  
Jesus.”*

Romans 6:11

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## Invitation to be still:

Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted  
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

## Hear the Word of the Lord:

Matthew 4:1–11 (NIV)

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “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.’”

7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Galatians 5:16–26 (NIV)

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Colossians 3:1–14 (NIV)

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.



9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

### Respond in Prayer and Silence:

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May the ashes remind us of our mortality and penitence and teach us again that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Merciful God, we come to you today realizing that we are not how you want us to be. In your love you created us; yet we often live in fear and insecurity. Give us courage as we wrestle with events of our own past: at times we wrestle with guilt for actions we have done, and at times we wrestle with shame for actions done to us. Lift the burden they place on our shoulders. Help us set aside our guilt, shame, fear, and insecurity and enter a season of healing. As we pray today, help us become attentive people, that we may see you plainly. As we wear the mark of ashes, rekindle the sign of hope within our eyes.

*[moment of silent reflection before continuing]*

Covenant God of love and mercy, we come to you at the beginning of these forty days, remembering how Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days in the wilderness. We remember how he steadfastly set his face toward Jerusalem, obedient in living and dying, even through death on a cross. We too would walk these next forty days in humble obedience, following our Savior, Jesus Christ, in our everyday lives at home, at work, and in your world. Prepare us anew, we pray, to keep our hearts and minds fixed on Jesus, ready and willing from now on to live for him.

### Receive the Blessing of the Lord:

Titus 2:14 (NIV)

Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

# I am being renewed from death to life

*“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

John 12:24

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## Invitation to be still:

Psalm 51:10 (NIV)

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Often the season of Lent is marked as a time when Christians are supposed to “give up” something for forty days as an act of devotion to God. The act of giving something up for Lent is an acknowledgement before God that our selfish desires must die in order for the transforming sanctification of our hearts to take place. In other words, the Christian life is one of dying and rising.

## Hear the Word of the Lord:

John 12:23–28 (NIV)

23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

Matthew 16:24–26 (NIV)

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Psalms 24:3–6 (NIV)

3 Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

Who does not trust in an idol

Or swear by a false god.

5 They will receive blessing from the LORD

And vindication from God their Savior.

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,

Who seek your face, God of Jacob.,

Heidelberg Catechism 88-90

Genuine repentance involves two things:

the dying-away of the old self and the coming-to-life of the new.

The dying-away of the old self is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it. The coming-to-life of the new self is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.

Respond in Prayer and Silence:

*(prayer based in Psalm 139)*

1 You have searched me, LORD,

And you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise;

You perceive my thoughts from afar.

3 You discern my going out and my lying down;

You are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue  
You, LORD, know it completely.

5 You hem me in behind and before,  
And you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
Too lofty for me to attain.

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
If I settle on the far side of the sea,  
10 even there your hand will guide me,  
Your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me  
And the light become night around me,"  
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
The night will shine like the day,  
For darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being;  
You knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
Your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you  
When I was made in the secret place,  
When I was woven together in the depths of  
the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
All the days ordained for me were written in  
your book  
Before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!

18 Were I to count them,  
They would outnumber the grains of sand—  
When I awake, I am still with you.  
23 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

### Receive the Blessing of the Lord:

Psalm 103 (NIV)

1 Praise the LORD, my soul;  
All my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
2 Praise the LORD, my soul,  
And forget not all his benefits—  
3 who forgives all your sins  
And heals all your diseases,  
4 who redeems your life from the pit  
And crowns you with love and compassion,  
5 who satisfies your desires with good things  
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.  
6 The LORD works righteousness  
And justice for all the oppressed.  
7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
His deeds to the people of Israel:  
8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
Slow to anger, abounding in love.  
9 He will not always accuse,  
Nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
Or repay us according to our iniquities.  
11 For as high as the heavens are above the  
earth,  
So great is his love for those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,  
So far has he removed our transgressions  
from us.

13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
So the LORD has compassion on those who  
fear him;

14 for he knows how we are formed,  
He remembers that we are dust.

15 The life of mortals is like grass,  
They flourish like a flower of the field;  
16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
And its place remembers it no more.

17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
The LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
And his righteousness with their children's  
children—

18 with those who keep his covenant  
And remember to obey his precepts.

19 The LORD has established his throne in  
heaven,  
And his kingdom rules over all.

20 Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
You mighty ones who do his bidding,  
Who obey his word.

21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
You his servants who do his will.

22 Praise the LORD, all his works  
Everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the LORD, my soul.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (NIV)

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.