

YOUTH MINISTRY RESOURCE



Abide with Us

YOUTH TEACHING OUTLINES

How to Use This Resource

These teaching outlines for youth are a companion to the devotional *Abide with Us*. The series looks at how the season of Lent invites us to abide with Christ as well as with our community. The teaching outlines are meant to be used in a midweek youth gathering, starting on Ash Wednesday and then following the scriptures used in the *Abide with Us* Pastor's Resource for the Sundays in Lent.

These outlines are meant to be a starting point that you can use to contextualize the content for your group. Each outline will contain the scripture(s), a big idea, a way to practice the big idea, some discussion questions, and a few explanatory and practical thoughts to help guide you. The intent is for you to choose what to expand on and what to cut out. The purpose is to guide you, not to box you in, so feel free to add or subtract whatever you think will best help you connect with your students.

These outlines can be used in conjunction with the suggested social media posts to help you stay engaged with your students and their families throughout the week.

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Week 1: A Change of Clothes

(Ash Wednesday)

BIG IDEA

Abiding leads to new life in Christ.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:22–24

WHAT?

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Lenten series. During this series, we will look at Scripture, the Christian calendar, and advice from past Christians as ways to embrace a deeper relationship with God.

Our series is called “Abide with Us” for two reasons. The first is that *we have companions on the journey*. During this series, we will look at the rich history of Christianity and converse with our siblings, parents, and grandparents in the faith. We tend to think our current understanding of God and faith is the most accurate. However, many influential people, pastors, and theologians through the centuries have helped people develop and grow in their relationship with God. Just like we may go to an older sibling, a parent, or a grandparent for advice in our lives today, as followers of Christ, we should also look to the wisdom of past Christians to help us understand how we should love God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

The second reason for the series title is that *we abide with God*. In John 15, Jesus invites the disciples to abide in him. To *abide* is to stay with, know, or spend time with someone. So during this series, we are invited to stay and be present with Jesus. One of the ways we will focus on abiding with Jesus is by embracing the season of Lent.

Lent is a forty-six-day journey (forty days without Sundays) in the Christian calendar. It comes right before Easter and helps us prepare for Easter. But we shouldn't only look at it as a precursor to Easter. Instead, we embrace the fullness of the journey of Lent. During Lent, we are reminded of our sin, our frailty, and our need for God and the life God offers us. Lent can

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provide a reset for those who love God and want to follow God but have gotten distracted or have not taken the faith as seriously as they want to or should. Or, for those who are continuing to grow, Lent reminds us of our continual need for God. We are therefore invited to abide with Jesus and allow Jesus to reveal to us the ways we can love God, ourselves, and others more faithfully.

One of the ways we do this is by practicing the discipline of fasting. But we aren't called to fast from something random and meaningless. Instead, we are invited to fast from things that have become obstacles in our faith journey—things that keep us from loving God, ourselves, or our neighbors. Fasting helps us focus on God and how we can grow in our love.

For example, if you spend countless hours on TikTok or Netflix and don't spend much time connecting with God, you could fast from TikTok, or a different social media app, or *all* social media. Or if you find yourself constantly gossiping about other people, you can fast from gossip. Lent requires some self-reflection that can be uncomfortable. Examine your life. Whatever activity you currently participate in that keeps you from growing in your love for God, self, or others is a good option to choose for a Lenten fast.

DISCUSSION

Sometimes Lenten fasting is deeply personal because we are giving up something we never should've been doing in the first place. If that's where you're at this season, that's okay! You can talk to myself or a mentor about it privately if you would like some help or guidance, and you don't have to share publicly. But a lot of times during Lent we also fast from things that are harmless in and of themselves but have maybe become too much of a focus for us in our daily lives. What are some examples of things we might want to fast from in order to better focus on and connect with God this season?

The point of fasting is not to gain more points with God by giving something up. We have already received God's love and favor, but fasting puts us in a better place to receive and respond to God's love. Each week of this Lenten series, I will invite you into a practice that will help you focus on growing in God's love. That practice could be an activity, a prayer, or another thing to fast.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the holiday that kicks off the Lenten season. We call it Ash Wednesday because we use ashes to remind ourselves of the fact that one day we will die. Thinking about death also reminds us that sinning is the way of death. We need God's grace and love to live the way God intended for us to live—in abundance and love, and abiding with God.

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TRANSITION

Lent extends to us an opportunity to change how we live. This way of living aligns with how God wants us to live. Let's look at a passage of Scripture that encourages us to live a new way in the world.

SO WHAT?

Read Ephesians 4:22–24.

Paul talks about how our lives should change when we begin to follow Jesus. When we follow Jesus, something new begins to happen. Our old life, which was dominated by sin, should not be the way we live after we know Jesus. This does not mean we will automatically stop sinning. We all make mistakes from time to time. But when we follow Jesus, we are intentional about focusing on loving God, self, and neighbor. The new life God gives us frees us to love *better*.

Sin gets in the way of love and breaks relationships. God doesn't love us *less* when we sin because there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. But new life in Christ helps us sin less often and orient our lives so that we make more intentional choices toward loving God and our neighbor, and fewer choices that are selfish and harmful to others. In our scripture today, the metaphor of changing clothes is really helpful to understanding the kind of life change that comes with following Jesus.

In the verses leading up to our scripture for today, Paul talks about why the people he was writing to needed to change their clothes. They were living disconnected from God with closed hearts, without a strong sense of right and wrong. In short, they had let selfishness and greed take over (see vv. 17–19).

In the verses that follow our scripture for today, we see what kinds of things begin to happen when we live disconnected from God: lying and deceit, anger that leads to sin, stealing, tearing people down, bitterness in our hearts, violent tendencies (see vv. 25–31).

Remember, sin keeps love from manifesting itself. That is why Paul uses the metaphor of putting on fresh clothes that reflect truth rather than deceit, or loving words rather than gossip, or acceptance and reconciliation rather than racism. Let's read verses 23 and 24 again: "Instead, renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit and clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness" (CEB).

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ILLUSTRATION

Use a couple of outer layers of clothing to demonstrate changing our clothes. If possible, use a dark hoodie or jacket to illustrate the old sinful life and a lighter-colored jacket or hoodie to show new life in Christ. If the clothing is old and you don't care about it you can use a Sharpie to write different kinds of sins all over it, or if you don't want to deface it permanently, use sticky notes. Cover the sinful life clothing with various kinds of sin: gossip, pride, racism, sexism. Ask for input from the students. When you are finished, put on the jacket or hoodie and talk about how these sins keep us from loving God and our neighbor properly. Then brandish the new, clean piece of clothing and make a display of taking off the old one and putting on the new one to symbolize being clothed with God.

You see, we can have a new life and a new identity with Christ. This is part of the reason we celebrate Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday invites us to reflect on sin, and the ways sin may manifest itself in our lives. Then we are invited to repent and change how we live, no longer living in the old way but instead living lives that reflect the new change of clothes God has given us. During this Lenten season, we will reflect, abide, and ask God to help us live into this new change of clothes.

Transitioning to a new life may sound difficult or even impossible. However, with the gift of the Holy Spirit we can begin to live lives that are branded by God's love.

NOW WHAT?

While living this new life may be difficult, it's not impossible because God helps us. In our devotional for today, George Whitefield, an evangelist who was friends with John and Charles Wesley and helped spread Methodism in the United States colonies, said this about living the new life God has for us: "We are commanded in Scripture to 'put off' the old sinful self and to 'put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.' Now it must be admitted that this is a very difficult challenge. But it is not impossible. Many happy souls have been assisted by divine power to bring it to pass" (quoted in *Abide with Us*, 8).

Sin keeps us from living the type of life God wants from us. That is why Paul invites us in our scripture to turn from sin and put on the new life God has for us. Luckily, just like George Whitefield says, we are not expected to figure things out all on our own. God's grace and presence are always at work in our lives to help us grow in love and faith. Putting on the new way of love is not just something *we* do. We work with what the Holy Spirit is already doing in our lives to embrace the love of God.

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Abiding in God is an important way to help us begin to embrace the new life God has for us. Jesus said this to his disciples before he was about to be betrayed and arrested and killed: “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5, NRSVUE).

As we spend time being present with God through prayer, silence, Scripture reading, and other spiritual disciplines, God will start to work in us to reveal the ways we can grow in love. And through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, God helps us live lives that bear the fruit of love. *Abiding* leads to new life in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION

Share with the group about one way God has worked in your life as you have adopted the new life Christ has for you. Talk about how spending time with God helped you embrace this new life.

Abiding in God leads to new life in Christ. But we are also invited to abide with one another. Christian community is a gift that can help and encourage us to live lives that are branded by God’s love. That can mean looking back at Christian history to gain wisdom from those who have gone before us, but it also includes embracing the community we have now. We cannot live this new life without one another.

On this Ash Wednesday, I want to invite you to begin to reflect on the ways your life is branded by the old way. Then begin to reflect on how God may want you to grow in love during Lent this year.

PRACTICE

If you have your phone on you, open your texting or email app and send a message to yourself for later. Take some time to think about it, and then write one thing you would like to take off this Lent (this would be the metaphorical sinful clothes you are taking off in order to live into new life in Christ). Examples could be gossip, greed, pride, lust, etc. Then write one thing you would like to put on in place of it. Examples could be building others up, generosity, humility, better time management, helping around the house more, getting along better with a sibling, etc.

Christ invites us to embrace a new way of living that seeks love and abides with God. Let’s embrace this new way during this season of Lent.

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