

Forgiveness is Not for Sissies

By Susan Vogt

Lent is a time to take stock of how our lives are going. Are there any bad habits to let go of or new habits to cultivate? Check yourself out.

For

Adult, Couple

Season

Spring



Needed

A contrite heart that's open, paper and pen, a lit candle, (optional: a safe place to burn a piece of paper)

Prepare in Advance

Decide whether to do this by yourself or with your spouse. If done with your spouse, see *Spouse Variation* at end.

Activity Plan

Ultimately prayer is the raising of the heart and mind to God. Over the centuries we humans have tried to organize and categorize prayer. One system that is simple and memorable works with the acronym – ACTS.

Adoration / Praise

Contrition / Sorrow

Thanksgiving / Gratitude

Supplication / Petition

For this activity, we will focus on the “C” (Contrition) since Lent is a time when Christians look at ways we have fallen short of being the loving, generous people that God calls us to be.

1. Begin by lighting a candle, pausing, and calling to mind the presence of God. Follow this by reading or praying out loud something to the effect of:

Merciful God, I come to you humbly today. You know I am not perfect and you love me unconditionally anyway. My faults are no secret to you, yet naming my mistakes, failings, and sins before You is my way of acknowledging that You are my God and savior. I put my trust in You to forgive me. Amen.

2. Take about five minutes to sit quietly and reflect on your life this past year, month, or week. Consider the following questions:
 - Have I broken any of the 10 Commandments? (Go beyond the literal words to the spirit of each commandment.)
 - How have I failed to love God with my whole mind, heart, and soul? When have I put my will before God's? (Consider things like being disrespectful to God's creation, being ungrateful for the blessings that I may take for granted.)
 - How have I failed to love my neighbor as myself? (Consider things like gossiping, ignoring someone in need, complaining about others.)
 - If you're not coming up with many failings, consider whether you are guilty of pride or self-righteousness.

3. On your sheet of paper, write down the ways you have failed to be your best self. Next to each failing write one action that you could take to improve. Choose one of these to give special effort to over the next week.
4. If you like, ritualize this experience by burning your faults. If you do this, write the action you plan to take to improve yourself on a separate piece of paper. Put it somewhere that you will see it frequently to remind you.
5. Close with a prayer of contrition. You can say something simple like:

Forgiving God, I'm sorry for the times I have failed to love you and my neighbor fully. Help me to do better.

OR you might use this classic Act of Contrition:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

Spouse Variation

If done with your spouse you could simply sit together and say the opening and closing prayer in common. The truly brave couple may choose to share their list of faults and remedies. You needn't discuss them, but letting another person see your vulnerability is a bonding experience. It also strengthens commitment if you know that another person is aware of the action you intend to take to improve your love of God and others.

