

river | 40 DAYS OF FAITH 2025

Life in All Its Fullness

OVERVIEW

What Is Lent?

Lent — the 6 weeks leading up to Easter Sunday — is historically a season of reflection in which followers of Jesus engage in spiritual disciplines (such as prayer and fasting) to explore at a deeper level what it looks like to live the life of faith. At the River, we call this time “40 Days of Faith.” Over the years, we have found that it is especially meaningful to observe this season together as a community. And so, we like to offer a number of resources and opportunities to help us intentionally connect with God and each other.



Source: Raising Arrows®

Sermon Series

This season of Lent, we are embarking on a journey to explore how faith in God’s Agape love can help us to experience **Life In All Its Fullness**. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said that he “came to give life — life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, NCV). Other translations use the term “abundant life” (NRSVUE). *But what does this mean? What does it look like to live a life of fullness or abundance? And how does faith help us to do this?* These are the types of questions we will be exploring together through our sermon series. Join us in person or via livestream on the dates below:

- March 16, 2025
- March 23, 2025
- March 30, 2025
- April 6, 2025
- April 13, 2025 (Palm Sunday)
- April 20, 2025 (Easter Sunday)

Prayer for Agape Gathering

After the service on March 30, we will offer an optional time of prayer for anyone who wishes to experience more of God’s Agape. Pastor Alison will be there, along with leaders experienced in praying for others, to provide a chance for you to experience what the Bible describes as The Holy Spirit pouring Agape into our hearts (Romans 5:5). The Spirit of God is Agape, so, it stands to reason, if we focus our soul in prayer to receive Agape from God, this is something that God is eager to help us experience. Lunch will be provided for participants. To ask any questions you may have about the gathering, to RSVP, and/or to request childcare, please email Alison at alison@rivernyc.org.

Prayer Bracelets

Another tool for our Lenten journey will be Prayer Bracelets. Each bead on the bracelet symbolizes something and serves as a reminder of a truth about God, a spiritual practice, or something we are praying for. Bracelet-making supplies will be available for your use after our Sunday services. We hope that this will be a helpful resource as you seek to “pray on every occasion” (Ephesians 6:18).



Abundant Life (GEOMETRIC): When you look at this bead, remember that Jesus came to give us "life in all its fullness."

Something You Want (GOLD): Pray for one way you hope God will move in your life.

The Examen Prayer (GREEN): When you look at this bead, remember that God is with us in our "consolations" and our "desolations."

Breath Prayer (BLUE): When you look at this bead, remember that God's spirit is as near as the air we breathe.

Prayer for the World (PATTERN): Pray for one aspect of our world to move toward Agape.

Prayer for Others (LETTERS): Select up to five letter beads to represent people you would like to pray for during "40 Days of Faith."

The Examen

This year, one of the spiritual practices we will be exploring together will be The Examen. The Examen can help us to become more aware of God's presence in and direction for our lives. We gain this insight by prayerfully reviewing the events of our days and by tuning into our thoughts and feelings about them. On the prayer bracelet, the green bead will help us to remember that God is with us in our "consolations" and our "desolations" and will remind us to practice The Examen. Instructions on how to practice The Examen are included later in this guide.

Breath Prayer

This year, we will also be exploring Breath Prayer together. Breath Prayer is an ancient form of prayer that connects short, memorable phrases with deep breathing. This embodied practice can help us to connect with the Spirit, to release tension and stress, and to ground ourselves in the present moment. On the prayer bracelet, the blue bead will help us to remember that God's presence is as near as the air we breathe and will remind us to practice Breath Prayer. Instructions on how to practice Breath Prayer are included later in this guide.

Tips for Engaging

We recommend setting aside regular times each day to engage in the various prayer practices. We hope you will find that after a few days this will become a rhythm in your life. If you miss a day here or there, don't stress — just pick up where you are able. Let this resource be life-giving in your daily routine and not a source of shame or guilt.

Additionally, at the outset, we ask that you commit to venturing bravely into this journey. Self-examination and reflection are never easy tasks. It does not come naturally to us. No growth can come without intention and commitment to openness and humility. As we prepare the soil of our hearts, we can trust that God's Spirit will bring "peace that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). May God bless you richly so that you, "being rooted and established in Agape, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the Agape of Christ." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

At the Start

Poem by Sarah Speed

*Is this the fast I choose?
Will I wake with the sun each morning?
Will I start with thank you?
Will I peel back the cage around my frame to let you in
or will I get too busy? Will my Bible collect dust on the shelf,
along with my journal, along with my sense of self,
or will I roll back the stone and wade in?*

*Every new season beckons something of us—
attention, beauty, the chance to create.
This season is no different.
So, like moths to the light, will we find our way toward God,
or will we hover, circling fake suns?*

*I am seeking something deeper.
I am kicking off my shoes.
I am starting this season on holy ground.*

Excited for the Journey

We hope you share our excitement to take this journey together. As always, the church staff is available for whatever needs come up along the way. Let's begin our "40 Days of Faith"!

PRAYER BRACELET REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you prepare your bracelets, it may help to consider the reflection questions below. (You may recognize some of them from Conversation Church on March 2!)

Geometric Bead: Abundant Life | What does “life in all its fullness” — or abundant life — mean to you? What does it look, feel, sound, smell, and taste like?

Green Bead: The Examen Prayer | In the past week, when did you feel most alive? (consolation)
In the past week, when did you feel the life draining out of you? (desolation)

Blue Bead: Breath Prayer | What helps you to feel grounded, rooted, calm, and/or at peace? Consider using one of the breath prayers included in this guide.

Gold Bead: Something You Want | What is one way you hope God will move in your life? Is this something you would like to pray for during “40 Days of Faith”?

Pattern Bead: Prayer for the World | Is there one aspect of our world that you would like to see move toward Agape (unconditional love)? Is this something you would like to pray for during “40 Days of Faith”?

Letter Beads: Prayer for Others | Are there people in your life that you would like to pray for during “40 Days of Faith”? If so, who are they and how will you be praying for them?

THE EXAMEN

The Examen is a reflective prayer practice created by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. It involves prayerfully reviewing the events of our days in order to become more aware of God's presence in and direction for our lives.

St. Ignatius "expected that God would speak through our deepest feelings and yearnings, what he called 'consolation' and 'desolation.' Consolation is whatever helps us to connect with ourselves, others, God and the universe. Desolation is whatever disconnects us." (from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn)

The Examen Process



1

You may wish to light a candle. The candle's flame symbolizes the light of divine revelation in our everyday experience.

Do whatever helps you to experience unconditional love. For example, imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone whose love you trust, such as a friend, Jesus, or God as you understand God. Put your feet flat on the floor, take a few deep breaths from the bottom of your toes, up through your legs, your abdominal muscles, and your chest. Breathe in that unconditional love, and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.

2



3

Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God as you understand God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful. *If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today?* Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. *When were you least able to give and receive love?* Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

4



5

Give thanks for whatever you have experienced.

Write down some of your main takeaways. The Examen is especially powerful as we begin to notice trends over time. And so, it will be important to track your insights somewhere like a journal or a calendar, like the ones from *Praying in Color* (Sybil MacBeth) included in this guide.

6



7

Finally, consider sharing as much as you wish of these two moments with a trusted friend or family member.

The Examen Questions

Consolation	Desolation
<i>When did I feel most alive today?</i>	<i>When did I most feel life draining out of me?</i>
<i>For what moment today am I most grateful?</i>	<i>For what moment today am I least grateful?</i>
<i>When did I give and receive the most love today?</i>	<i>When did I give and receive the least love today?</i>
<i>When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God, and the universe?</i>	<i>When did I have the least sense of belonging?</i>
<i>When was I happiest today?</i>	<i>When was I saddest?</i>
<i>What was today's high point?</i>	<i>What was today's low point?</i>
<i>What did you feel good about today?</i>	<i>What was your biggest struggle today, or when did you feel sad, helpless, or angry?</i>
<i>When today did I ask for what I needed?</i>	<i>When today did I not ask for what I needed?</i>
<i>When today did I do something because I enjoyed it rather than because I should?</i>	<i>When today did I do something because I should rather than because I enjoyed it?</i>

Feel free to substitute “today” for any significant experience or period of time. This may include a conversation, a meeting, a class, a movie, a meal, an entire week, an entire year, or a specific aspect of our lives.

BREATH PRAYER

Breath Prayer is an ancient prayer practice that connects short, memorable phrases with deep breathing. This embodied practice can help us to connect with the Spirit, to release tension and stress, and to ground ourselves in the present moment. As we inhale and exhale, we are reminded that God's presence is as near to us as the air we breathe.

Breath Prayer Process

1 Select the phrases you would like to use. Below we have provided a different Breath Prayer for each day of "40 Days of Faith," which have been drawn from Bible verses, @blackliturgies (Cole Arthur Riley), and @liturgiesforparents (Kayla Craig). You are welcome to use them whatever way resonates with you. You may want to follow our **daily calendar**, to skip around to the prayers that stand out to you, to use the same prayer for multiple days, or even to write your own!



2

You can practice Breath Prayer anywhere you'd like — while sitting, while walking, at home, on your commute, etc. You can close your eyes (if comfortable and safe) or can keep them open if you prefer.



3

On each inhale, consider the first phrase. On each exhale, consider the second phrase. Continue breathing and praying for as long as you would like.



4

Pay attention to where you are holding tension in your body. Release.



5

Repeat as often as you'd like throughout your day, week, and the entire season of "40 Days of Faith."

Breath Prayers By Date: March 5 - March 29

SUN	<p>March 9 Inhale: <i>As You show mercy,</i> Exhale: <i>I, too, will show mercy.</i> Source: Luke 6:36</p>	<p>March 16 Inhale: <i>Cynicism won't save me</i> Exhale: <i>I protect my dreaming.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	<p>March 23 Inhale: <i>My unseen labors,</i> Exhale: <i>Are seen by you.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	
MON	<p>March 10 Inhale: <i>I won't carry it alone</i> Exhale: <i>I am no burden.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	<p>March 17 Inhale: <i>The old is gone;</i> Exhale: <i>The new is here.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	<p>March 24 Inhale: <i>Under the shelter of Your wings,</i> Exhale: <i>I find refuge.</i> Source: Psalm 61:4</p>	
TUE	<p>March 11 Inhale: <i>Breathe a new dream,</i> Exhale: <i>Into me, O Lord.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	<p>March 18 Inhale: <i>As I bring you my burdens,</i> Exhale: <i>You give me rest.</i> Source: Matthew 11:28</p>	<p>March 25 Inhale: <i>We don't get free alone</i> Exhale: <i>May the right company find me.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	
WED	<p>March 5 Inhale: <i>O God of dirt and dust,</i> Exhale: <i>Bring beauty from ashes.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	<p>March 19 Inhale: <i>I feel where it hurts.</i> Exhale: <i>I listen for truth.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	<p>March 26 Inhale: <i>Help me,</i> Exhale: <i>Pay attention.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	
THU	<p>March 6 Inhale: <i>You lead me beside still waters.</i> Exhale: <i>You restore my soul.</i> Source: Psalm 23:2</p>	<p>March 20 Inhale: <i>You are near,</i> Exhale: <i>The brokenhearted.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	<p>March 27 Inhale: <i>Strengthen my inner being,</i> Exhale: <i>Through the power of Your Spirit.</i> Source: Ephesians 3:16</p>	
FRI	<p>March 7 Inhale: <i>There is beauty in the stillness.</i> Exhale: <i>I am free to rest.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	<p>March 21 Inhale: <i>Blessed are those who mourn,</i> Exhale: <i>For they will be comforted.</i> Source: Matthew 5:4</p>	<p>March 28 Inhale: <i>I am doing my best.</i> Exhale: <i>I've given enough.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	
SAT	<p>March 8 Inhale: <i>Help me see You,</i> Exhale: <i>In and around me.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	<p>March 22 Inhale: <i>In the tears of another.</i> Exhale: <i>I meet the face of God.</i> Source: @blackliturgies</p>	<p>March 29 Inhale: <i>You were with me then;</i> Exhale: <i>You are with me now.</i> Source: @liturgiesforparents</p>	

Breath Prayers By Date: March 30 - April 20

SUN

March 30

Inhale: *Show me the path,*
Exhale: *The path of life.*
Source: Psalm 16:11

April 6

Inhale: *I know the sound of dreaming.*
Exhale: *It is not the sound of shame.*
Source: @blackliturgies

April 13

Inhale: *Help me remember,*
Exhale: *That You wept too.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

EASTER

MON

March 31

Inhale: *I am known and loved.*
Exhale: *I release the unlove.*
Source: @blackliturgies

April 7

Inhale: *May Your peace,*
Exhale: *Surpass my understanding.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

April 14

Inhale: *God of compassion,*
Exhale: *Comfort me.*
Source: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

TUE

April 1

Inhale: *I'm not alone.*
Exhale: *This feeling will pass.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

April 8

Inhale: *Help me to drink,*
Exhale: *From Your living waters.*
Source: John 7:37

April 15

Inhale: *My soul stirs.*
Exhale: *I stay awake.*
Source: @blackliturgies

WED

April 2

Inhale: *Nothing can separate me,*
Exhale: *From Your love.*
Source: Romans 8:39

April 9

Inhale: *I am free to feel,*
Exhale: *Without apology.*
Source: @blackliturgies

April 16

Inhale: *Help me stay awake,*
Exhale: *To the goodness in front of me.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

THU

April 3

Inhale: *I am not who I was.*
Exhale: *I honor my becoming.*
Source: @blackliturgies

April 10

Inhale: *Bravery is within me,*
Exhale: *And so is courage.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

April 17

Inhale: *You're a lamp to my feet,*
Exhale: *A light to my path.*
Source: Psalm 119:105

FRI

April 4

Inhale: *I won't lose heart.*
Exhale: *You are renewing me.*
Source: @liturgiesforparents

April 11

Inhale: *God of hope,*
Exhale: *Fill me with joy.*
Source: Romans 15:13

April 18

Inhale: *I receive Your love;*
Exhale: *Help me to love others.*
Source: 1 John 4:19

SAT

April 5

Inhale: *Thank you Jesus,*
Exhale: *For calling me friend.*
Source: John 15:15

April 12

Inhale: *I make room for all of me.*
Exhale: *I am free to expand.*
Source: @blackliturgies

April 19

Inhale: *I pause to behold.*
Exhale: *Even here, there is beauty.*
Source: @blackliturgies

LENT 2025

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
			<i>March 5</i>	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	<i>April 1</i>	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19

LENT 2025

March 5-April 20

