

LENT 2020

A RACE WORTH RUNNING

SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Plans for a stronger faith.

A DOWNTOWN PRAYER WALK

MOVE AND PRAY



Realize



Reset



Refuel



Redefine



Reroute



Rejoice

EXCLUSIVE!

WEEKLY
FAITH
EXERCISES

WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

You are likely asking yourself, "What is Lent, why does it matter, and what am I supposed to do during it?" If those, or some other questions, have popped into your head during Lent, it is okay. We've all asked the same ones.

As Christians, we understand Lent to be a time of intentional reflection on the call of Jesus in our lives and an opportunity to dedicate extra time and energy towards our faith. Faith requires practice. Like any skill, it is not something we are born good at. Living a faithful life does not come naturally to any of us. Instead, it is something we learn, something we develop, and something that we get better at through intentionality. No one haphazardly stumbles into a strong relationship with Jesus. No one has their world view transformed overnight. None of us build a stronger faith without guidance, a plan, or encouragement.

So, during Lent, six weeks leading up to Easter Sunday, we pour ourselves into our faith in the hope that focusing on spiritual exercises will create some muscle memory that serves us and others more permanently.

This guide, developed in coordination with our Lent 2020 sermon series "A Race Worth Running," offers some practical and achievable spiritual exercises for people at all levels of faith fitness. If you are just beginning to explore what it means to follow God and engage with a community of Jesus followers, these exercises might offer insights and answers you've been looking for. If you have been a Christian for as long as you can remember, these exercises will strengthen an already established faith in ways that might surprise you. Whoever you are and wherever you are in your journey with God, we hope that you find ways to grow closer to the God that created and loves each one of us through this Prayer Guide. The guide includes scripture for the week, fitness goals, and catered exercises that will guide you on your journey. Join Topeka First UMC as we run the race of faith, a race truly worth running.

Jeff Clinger
Lead Pastor

WEEK ONE

REALIZE

Psalm 32 and Matthew 4:1-11

A journey towards increased fitness, whether in our physical, mental, or spiritual lives, can only begin when we realize that things are not quite what we want them to be. There is a recognition that something is out of place. Often, we can't put a finger on just what is wrong, but we know that it is time for a change. Sometimes the changes are significant, sometimes the changes are small, but there are changes we can each make to align our lives with God better.

As we embark on a spiritual race during Lent, we are reminded that even Jesus faced temptation that pulled him away from the love, grace, and mercy of God. In the book of Matthew, specifically chapter 4, Jesus is given a choice between following God and having the dreams of the wildest imagination fulfilled. In the face of this, Jesus recognizes the value that comes when life is centered on God, rejects the temptation, and begins his public ministry. In doing so, Jesus not only changed his own life but the lives of billions of people across time and place. One small change, one moment of realization, can be incredibly transformative.

We are tempted, every day, by choices, opportunities, habits, and actions that separate us from God. As we enter this lenten race, take time to reflect on the temptations in your own life. How good are you at resisting the temptations of gossip, greed, or power? What temptations pull us apart as a society?

"The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason."

- T.S. Elliot

Where have we failed to share the goodness of God by building exclusionary communities and groups? Have we given in to the temptation to deny the suffering and pain in the world because that is easier than working to address it? What would it look like if we resisted what is easy and comfortable and instead led faithful lives that transformed communities and lives for the better? One small change, one moment of realization, can be incredibly transformative.

FITNESS CHALLENGE

This week, name one specific thing about your faith life that you want to change during Lent. Write that thing down and reread your goal every day.

REALIZE EXERCISES

Temptation is not going anywhere. Every day of our lives, it is present. To recognize temptation and reject it in favor of choices that reflect the love and grace of God, we have to build up some muscle memory that strengthens our faith.

Every morning, as you prepare to begin your day, spend some time in prayer with God. Seek God's guidance as you navigate your day. When you face decisions, pause and consider; does the choice you make move you farther from or closer to God?

Every evening, as you wind down and look to the next day, take some time to reflect on the choices you made throughout the day. Did you respond to God instead of temptation? Did you make progress towards your goal? If you did, give yourself a win... if you didn't, give yourself a loss. Losing a day is okay, in fact, it is guaranteed to happen. If you take an L, spend some extra time thinking about how you can turn tomorrow into a win. Track your win-loss record as a tool to keep you accountable.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____

TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE _____

WEEK TWO

RESET

Genesis 12:1-4 and John 3:1-17

Having a moment in which we realize that it is time for a change is an essential first step. But after that realization, we are faced with another challenge. How do we reset our lives once we determine an adjustment is necessary? We have recognized aspects of our lives that push us out of alignment with God. We see disappointments in our own lives, within the broader society, and we wonder, is it possible to reset? Is it possible to be reborn and begin living a new life?

If we learn anything from Jesus, it's that the answer is yes.

Time and time again, we are given the opportunity to reset and restart. Think about times in your life when it feels like you have had the chance to be reborn. Maybe it was your first move away from home. Perhaps the start of your dream job. Possibly the beginning of your family. Our lives are full of clean slates and second chances. The question is not whether or not we can be reborn, it is what we will do when the opportunity to reset is present.

As we focus on our spiritual lives through the season of Lent, think about what it might mean to take this opportunity to reset. What habits, prejudices, and weaknesses can you leave behind through a new beginning. What would it look like if you found a way to return to a place of openness and vulnerability that allowed you to reconnect with the God that created and loves you? Can you be reformed, reordered, or rebuilt to love more, forgive more, give more, and be more?

"When I let go of what I am, I
become what I might be."

Lao Tzu

The answer to all of these questions is you. When we realize that our level of spiritual fitness is less than what we might hope for or expect and accept that we can reset and restart, the possibilities are endless.

FITNESS CHALLENGE

This week, name one new thing that you want to add to your faith life during Lent. Write that thing down and reread each of your weekly goals every day.

RESET EXERCISES

Accepting that you can reset is the first step in actually making significant changes in your faith lives. To do so, we have to put a great deal of trust in God and where God is calling us to go.

When we reset, we acknowledge that it is time to follow God's will, not our own. Every morning, pray for the strength and courage to follow where God is guiding you and to prioritize your faith over other temptations and pulls.

Every evening, take time to reflect on how effectively you listened for and trusted God. Did you make decisions that strengthened your faith? Did you take steps that furthered both of your Lenten goals? Continue to track your wins and losses. Remember, a loss is okay, it is bound to happen. When one occurs, accept it and find ways to do better the next day.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____

TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE _____

WEEK TWO _____

WEEK THREE

REFUEL

Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4:5-15

When we are training for or running a race, we must stay hydrated. It seems simple enough, but a failure to refuel can be devastating to our efforts to realize and reset. In the same way, refueling during our spiritual race is vital. Throughout the scripture, we are reminded that, as followers of God, we too need hydration from the living water of God. Making significant change and putting in the work that is required to turn new efforts into established habits takes dedication, time, and energy. So, as we navigate lent and find ways to strengthen our spiritual fitness, we must be careful to refuel our spirit properly.

Every day we drink water. It gives us life, strength, and the ability to function at any level. Just as our bodies need water to survive and thrive, our spiritual lives also require regular rehydration through the living water of Christ. As Jesus promised the woman by the well, those who drink of his water, the living water of God, will never be thirsty. As we spend time focusing our hearts, minds, and spirits on Christ during this season of Lent, it is important to remember that our faith is as much about transforming our own lives as it is transforming the lives of others.

Staying hydrated requires us to remain connected and close to a source of water. Just as cities grow along rivers, our spiritual lives should be anchored in places, practices, and people that hydrate our souls. This week, spend time reflecting on your sources of living water. Where do you go that refuels you? Who do you speak to and share life with who refuels you? What activities, thoughts, or actions refuel you? If you answer these questions quickly, consider the frequency with which you engage in refueling. If you struggle to think of the people, places, and things that offer you hydration, can you think of practices that might start fueling your spirit?

"When the well is dry, they
know the value of water."

- Benjamin Franklin

FITNESS CHALLENGE

This week, list the places, practices, and people that currently refuel you. Do the same for practices that you would like to be sources of fuel. Can you do each one time this week?

REFUEL EXERCISES

Fuel drives us. We cannot grow or be transformed if we are not adequately hydrated by the spiritual waters.

To refuel, we have to connect to the God who creates, loves, and empowers us all.

Every morning, start your day by praying to God for the energy, courage, and strength to respond to God's call. As you do so, think about your day and calendar some moments for quiet reflection and refueling.

Every evening, take time to reflect on how you did or did not give yourself the time and space to refuel and recharge. Were you able to engage in one of your Fitness Challenge goals? If so, give yourself a win. If not, take the loss and try to do better tomorrow. Continue to track your win=loss record for week three.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____

TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE	_____
WEEK TWO	_____
WEEK THREE	_____

WEEK FOUR

REDEFINE

1 Samuel 16:1-13 and John 9:1-12, 24-30

We live in a world full of definitions. It seems that every aspect of our lives is based on how we define ourselves, how we define others, and how we define the events of the world around us. Pick up a dictionary or turn to google and you will find a definition for every word under the sun. Often, the harshest and most difficult decisions to overcome are the ones we make for ourselves. In our physical lives, we routinely decide that a goal cannot be achieved, that a transformation cannot occur, or we are not capable of doing that thing. Changing our perceptions, redefining who we are, is incredibly difficult. Despite the challenge, we are reminded that through God, we are redefined.

In the scripture story, we encounter a blind man who, everyone else has assumed, must be full of sin. This definition consumed the man's life and influenced every interaction he had with the people around him. But Jesus assures the man and others that he was not sinful and gave him the freedom to redefine himself. By letting go of the assumptions that others had made about him, the man found new life.

Assumptions are dangerous things (you know the saying). We let them influence how we see and treat ourselves and others. But as we focus on our faith throughout Lent, think about the definitions you have created for yourself. Do they empower you to live a fulfilling, generous, and faithful life? Or do they tell that you are not good enough, too imperfect, or hopeless? Lent is the perfect time to look in the mirror and decide how we want to define who we are. This week, reflect on who you are and who you want to be. It is never too late to redefine ourselves and the world we live in.

"There's got to be a voice deep within you that is untouched by definitions. And it is there that you become divinely who you are."

- Viola Davis

FITNESS CHALLENGE

Think about how you want to be defined. Write down any definitions for yourself that you can come up with. They can be ones you already have or new. Read them every day and try to live redefined.

REDEFINE EXERCISES

We often feel like we are beyond changing, that we are too stuck to be transformed. But God promises that we can be and are redefined.

Every morning, read your self-definitions out loud to yourself. Consider using "I am..." statements or standing in front of the mirror so you can look yourself in the eyes as you redefine. Strive to live according to these new definitions throughout the day.

Every evening, take time to reflect on which definitions of yourself you lived by. Did you let other people and the assumptions they make define you, or did you lean into being redefined by Christ? Continue to keep track of your wins and losses.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____

TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE	_____
WEEK TWO	_____
WEEK THREE	_____
WEEK FOUR	_____

WEEK FIVE

REROUTE

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and John 11:17-44

Sometimes, even the best-routed journey hits a significant roadblock. We find ourselves facing obstacles that we are just sure cannot be overcome. When we hit these moments, we are faced with two options, give up or reroute. Athletic trainers and coaches call this a plateau. You make progress, make progress, and then nothing. The weight stops coming off, the muscle stops building, and you feel stuck. This happens to everyone, and it occurs in the context of our spiritual fitness as well. We get stuck and aren't sure how to grow deeper or broader in our faith. So what do we do? Give up or reroute?

As Christians, we encounter countless stories of dead ends and insurmountable obstacles in scripture. The people of Israel are stuck in captivity in Egypt, but God reroutes their lives and takes them to the promised land. Creation is stuck in a brutal cycle of disavowing and rejecting God. Still, God reroutes our story and does something unpredictable. Through Christ, we are all given the opportunity to reroute when the trail ends. Why? Because Jesus came and lived among creation. He offered ministry, guidance, and love to the least cared for people in society. Jesus proved, once and for all, that there are no permanent dead ends. Even death has been overcome through faith.

As we focus on our spiritual fitness during Lent, you might feel like you have been stuck in the same routine, practices, or level of spiritual fitness for a while now. The answer is not to give up, it's to take a next step and to find a route that deepens your spiritual life.

"It's impossible to map out a route to your destination if you don't know where you're starting from."

- Suze Orman

At Topeka First UMC, we view faith as never-ending journey full of twists, turns, and the occasional setbacks. This reality is captured in our Discipleship Pathway and in the systems that we build to help individuals of all faith levels grow closer to the God that loves them. This week, you are encouraged to visit www.forthegoodofthecity.org/discipleship-pathway and explore where you are on your faith journey and where a reroute might take you.

FITNESS CHALLENGE

After taking a look at the Discipleship Pathway, write down one or more spiritual practices that you would like to improve this week and this year.

From worship to story telling, there is room for all of us to grow.

REROUTE EXERCISES

Though journeys feel that they sometimes end in failure, we know that as Christians, we can always reroute and grow stronger.

Every morning, read over your fitness challenge goals and strategize ways to make improvements today. Take time to reflect on the ways that rerouting could make a positive impact in your life, both spiritual and otherwise.

Every evening, do a mental recap of your day. Did you hit any dead ends? How did you respond to them? Did you make progress on your spiritual journey? How so? Continue to keep track of your wins and losses.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____

TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE	_____
WEEK TWO	_____
WEEK THREE	_____
WEEK FOUR	_____
WEEK FIVE	_____

WEEK SIX

REJOICE

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Matthew 21:1-11

Celebration is important. Celebrations mark moments of great accomplishment. When you finish school, you get to celebrate with your friends and family at graduation. When you complete a career, you get to celebrate with cake and a gold watch. When you achieve major goals, you should give yourself room to rejoice in what you have done. In the fitness world, this might take the form of a cheat day on a diet or a short break from a workout routine. With fitness, whether physical or spiritual, celebration does not mean the end of the journey. If we stop working for progress and only cheer for our past success, we will inevitably backslide.

The story of Palm Sunday and Passion Week reminds us that celebrations do not last forever. They are worthwhile undertakings that highlight the excellent work that has been done but must be followed up with renewed dedication and vigor. As Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds celebrate. Jesus has done incredible ministry throughout Judea. He and his followers deserve this opportunity to reflect on their success. But Jesus knows what the crowd does not, that his work is not done.

As you take a similar opportunity to rejoice in the progress you have made during Lent, remember that our spiritual fitness requires constant attention and work. You have hit major milestones and intensified your dedication to faithfully following Jesus, but as the year continues and life rolls on, that commitment should remain constant. So, celebrate what God has done, be thankful for what God is doing, and look forward to what God will do.

"If you have overcome your inclination and not been overcome by it, you have reason to rejoice."

- Plautus

FITNESS CHALLENGE

You've done something wonderful. For six weeks you have focused extra time and intentionality on faith. Celebrate that! As you rejoice, think about the progress you would like to continue to make. Write down bigger spiritual goals you can work on for the year to come.

REJOICE EXERCISES

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."
This scripture from Psalms reminds us that God has, does, and will give us things to rejoice in.

Every morning, take time to recognize and celebrate the ways that your faith has grown stronger over the last six weeks. Have you established new routines that bring you closer to God? Do you feel more in touch and confident in your faith?

Every evening, think about the year to come and the goals you have set for your ongoing faith journey. What did you do today to advance those goals, and what can you do tomorrow to take another step in this race worth running?
Continue to track your wins and losses, maybe for the whole year.

WINS & LOSSES

Day	Win	Loss
SUNDAY	_____	_____
MONDAY	_____	_____
TUESDAY	_____	_____
WEDNESDAY	_____	_____
THURSDAY	_____	_____
FRIDAY	_____	_____
SATURDAY	_____	_____






TOTAL W-L RECORD

WEEK ONE	_____
WEEK TWO	_____
WEEK THREE	_____
WEEK FOUR	_____
WEEK FIVE	_____
WEEK SIX	_____

DOWNTOWN PRAYER WALK

During this season of Lent, you are encouraged to take the downtown prayer walk at least once a week. Whether you walk it alone or in the company of family and friends, this walk has been designed to help you focus your thoughts and prayers while getting out in the community our church calls home. There are two paths, each offering their own stops and focuses. Both of the trails are 1.3 miles and can be walked in 15 to 20 minutes.

MAP GUIDE

	Surface Streets
	Path A Route
	Path B Route
	Topeka First UMC, your start and stop point
	Points of Interest

- A - The Capitol Building: As you walk by, pray for the leaders of our state and the unique challenges they face.
- B - The Cyrus Hotel: This and other new businesses represent a revitalization for Downtown Topeka. Pray for this community and our role in it.
- C - The Pencil: As you walk by the pencil, reach down and touch it. As you do so, pray for all who continue to learn, including the children and youth of our church.
- D - Charles Curtis: Charles Curtis was the 31st Vice President of the United States. Take an opportunity to pray for the leaders of our church, past and present.
- E - Anchor: As you walk by, reflect on the aspects of your life that anchor your faith.
- F - Every Plaza: We hope that Every Plaza will become a centerpiece of life in Topeka. Think about how our church can be the same thing.
- G/I - Our Church: As you round the corner, you will see our church. Pray for it; the past, the present, and the future. What potential lies within its old stone walls.
- H - Kansas Health Institute: As you pass by the KHI, pray for those in your life who are ill or struggling.

PRAYER MAP

