

Changing Our Hearts

Family Session for Lent

For this session you will need: candle, Bible, one stone for each family member, a small dish of soft heart candy, (chocolate or a gumdrop texture, one for each family member), soft instrumental music, heart-shaped cookies.

(Gather as many family members as possible to a central spot such as the dining room table. Light your candle as a sign that Jesus is present in your home.)

OPENING PRAYER: Dear Lord, Jesus, it is so easy to fall into sin and selfishness. Every time we act solely out of our own needs and desires without considering the needs and desires of others, we harden our hearts. We are often blinded by the words "I", "me", and "mine". More and more we think only of ourselves. We lose our connectedness with each other and everyone feels crabby and out of sorts. Help us to change our hearts, Lord, to become less selfish and more loving. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 36: 25-28

DISCUSSION: Look at the stones you have assembled and the heart candy. What is the difference between the two? What do you think the scriptures mean by a "stony" heart and a "natural" (or "fleshy") heart? Give examples of your everyday family interactions that harden your hearts (example: when two siblings argue over the rules of a game). What are times that have softened your hearts? (example, when someone cleans up the dishes without being told.)

ACTIVITY: Spend some quiet time examining your hearts. Give each family member one of the stones to hold during the meditation. Play quiet instrumental music while all family members close their eyes, and one especially good reader reads the following questions slowly and thoughtfully, pausing between each question for reflection.

Do I really love God before all things?

Are there things of this world I put before God? My friends? TV/computer? My job? Being popular? Money? Clothes, toys, possessions?

Do I pray daily for strength to be a good person?

How do I treat the members of my family? Have I said things that hurt them? Do I always want my own way or to be first?

Do I speak harshly and out of anger? Do I hurt others' feelings?

Do I show my love for my family through words and actions? When is the last time I have told my family members how much I love them?

At the end of the quiet reflection time, each family member exchanges his/her stone for one of the soft heart candies. It is eaten as a resolve to turn his/her real heart into a heart of love.

Giving and Receiving in Abundance ***Family Session for Lent***

For this session you will need: candle, Bible, large cardboard box, 2 dozen homemade cookies.

(Gather as many family members as possible to a central spot such as the dining room table. Light your candle as a sign that Jesus is present in your home.)

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, Jesus, you have truly blessed our family in so many ways, but at times we become greedy and think that we do not have as much as someone else. Many messages come from the media that tell us we should have more and more. You have told us that we should be thankful for what we have and that we should share it with others. Lord, help us to grow generous hearts and to know that if we give readily to others, we will always have enough for ourselves, and more besides. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:38 and Luke 12: 32-33

DISCUSSION: "Almsgiving" is a traditional Lenten practice in which we give to those less fortunate than ourselves. Discuss your family's practice of charitable giving. To what charitable organizations or causes do you donate money, time, or other goods? Many families give to Operation Rice Bowl as a Lenten practice. This money is used to improve the quality of life for poor people throughout the world. Find out if your parish participates in this effort or other charitable efforts to which you can donate.

ACTIVITY: Take an "eyes wide open" walk through your house together. In each room stop to thank God for one blessing (for example, in the bedroom thank God for your desk where you can study and for the gift of a good education, in the kitchen for enough food, in the bathroom for clean running water etc.) In addition, you might carry a box on your walk in which you place clothes, toys, books, etc. that your family no longer uses and would like to donate to a shelter or church thrift shop.

PRAYER: Lord, Jesus, you have opened our eyes to the many blessings you have given us. We are grateful! We wish to grow generous hearts, always sharing with others the abundance you have given us! Amen.

SNACK: Enjoy homemade cookies, putting aside one dozen to share with someone you know who is sick, lonely, or having a hard time right now.

Overcoming Temptations

Family Session for Lent

For this session you will need: candle, Bible, a small table and space for a prayer corner, some objects to create a desert space, perhaps a dish of sand, some rocks, a cactus, a rough cloth, etc., dried fruit, and water.

(Gather as many family members as possible to a central spot such as the dining room table. Light your candle as a sign that Jesus is present in your home.)

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, Jesus, while in the desert, you wrestled with temptation, just as we do every day. Oh, how much easier it is to give in to our own desires, to our tiredness, to our need to have some time for ourselves, to our anger and strong feelings, to our lust for control. Lord, we are often tempted to go the "easy route" which leads only to hurt and destruction. In the desert times we need to be strong and steadfast in what we know is right and kind and good. We pray for strength in times of temptation. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 4: 1-13

DISCUSSION: When Jesus was alone in the desert and hungry, the devil came to tempt him, hoping to influence Jesus at a time of weakness. What are your greatest times of temptation? When you come home from school or work tired and hungry? Oftentimes this is a difficult time for families; some even call it "arsenic hour". We are all needy and not at our best. Meal preparations, homework, unanswered messages, and plans for the evening all crowd our minds and overwhelm us, sapping our patience and causing us to be less than loving with one another. What can each family member do to ease the tension of this time of day? What personal weaknesses and temptations must we confront? What strengths must we call upon to be our best selves to each other?

ACTIVITY: Work together to create a small desert corner in your house where you, like Jesus, can go to pray. From this sacred spot and Jesus' example, gather strength to resist the temptations of the day.

PRAYER: *Gather round your desert corner and pray:*

Lord, Jesus, strengthen our minds and hearts against temptation.

When we are weak, make us strong.

When we are hungry, feed us with your love.

When we become controlling or arrogant, help us to know yours is the only power.

When we are selfish, open our hearts to love.

Here in this desert place, we worship you. Amen.

SNACK: Share a simple snack of something you might have on your journey to the desert, perhaps dried fruit and water.

Turning Back to God ***Family Session for Lent***

For this session you will need: candle, Bible, timer, snack (a lavish dessert!)

(Gather as many family members as possible to a central spot such as the dining room table. Light your candle as a sign that Jesus is present in your home.)

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, Jesus, we get distracted. We forget to pray. We don't always feel like going to church. We get tired and crabby. People and things grab our attention and lead us down paths that take us far from our true selves and from you. Lord, today, we pray for strength to turn back to you, to find our true path. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 15: 11-32

DISCUSSION: Reflect on the story of the Prodigal Son. What things distracted the younger son and caused him to leave his family? What things distract you from your family and from God? Is it other people? Does your work or school preoccupy your mind so much that you take for granted or mistreat your loved ones? Does TV, music, or the internet entice you down wrong paths? At the present time, do you feel near or far from other family members? Do you feel near or far from God? The story of the Prodigal Son tells us that we can always turn back to family and to God.

ACTIVITY: Everyone in the house goes off and hides from each other for 10 minutes (set a timer in the gathering spot). When the timer goes off, everyone reassembles with hugs, as if you haven't seen each other for a long time.

PRAYER: Lord, bless our family. Keep each of us on our true path to you. Thank you for the love of family and for your love and forgiveness. You always welcome us home! We praise and thank you! Amen.

SNACK: Share your lavish snack in a celebration of love, forgiveness and homecoming!

Walking In Jesus' Footsteps *Family Session for Lent*

For this session you will need: candle, Bible, brown construction paper, scissors, something to write with, tape, trail mix, and juice.

(Gather as many family members as possible to a central spot such as the dining room table. Light your candle as a sign that Jesus is present in your home.)

OPENING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, during your years of public ministry you walked many miles, and met many people. Everywhere you went you were kind to people, you listened to their troubles, you healed them, and you told them of your Father's love. During this time of Lent we want to practice walking in your footsteps by being kind and loving to everyone we meet. Lord, please help us to see the opportunities for love all around us. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Micah 6:8 and Luke 8: 1-3

DISCUSSION: How can you walk in Jesus' footsteps? In what ways can you be kind, helpful, and loving to the people you meet? Think about your family members, people you meet at work and school, and strangers you meet on the bus, the store, and other places you go during the day. What small things might you do for them that Jesus himself may have done?

ACTIVITY: Have each member of the family trace around their shoes on the brown construction paper and put their name on them. Cut out the shoes and tape them on the refrigerator. Work on following in Jesus' footsteps throughout the week. Record your good deeds on the shoes. After one week has each family member become more Christ-like? Your family might like to do the activity one more week, or even until Easter Sunday. Jesus is the Way and when we follow in His footsteps we can make a positive change in our world.

PRAYER: Lord, Jesus, help us to follow your way and to lead others on the path to your Father. Give us the strength to follow your example and through our words and actions, to spread the Good News of your Kingdom. Amen.

SNACK: When people go on a walking journey or a hike, they often take a snack of dried fruit, nuts, and cereal so they will have energy for the road. Share a snack of trail mix and juice as you set off on your week of following in Jesus' footsteps.