

# Fasting, Giving, Praying: 25+ Lent Ideas for Kids and Teens

Help your kids renew their baptismal commitment during Lent with these ideas for fasting, giving, and praying.

**F**asting, almsgiving, and prayer are at the heart of the forty days of Lent. Here are some strategies for helping your kids get involved in these traditional penitential practices.

Most of these ideas are appropriate for kids ages six and up. The best way to introduce younger children to Lenten practices is for them to see adults and older kids in the family practicing them. Use their natural curiosity and desire to be “grown up” as a springboard for talking about what you’re doing, and why.

## Let's Talk about Lent

**A** good way to start Lent is to simply talk to your older kids about what Lent is—especially its connection to baptism. Here are some talking points:

- The roots of Lent go back to the early Church, when those who wished to become Christians underwent a period of preparation before their baptism. Eventually the whole Church adopted the practice of renewing one's baptism through a period of penitence and re-commitment to the Christian life.
- Today, Lent is a time when “all the baptized are called to renew their baptismal commitment,” [according to the U.S. Catholic bishops](#). “The key to fruitful observance of these practices is to recognize their link to baptismal renewal. We are called not just to abstain from sin during Lent, but to true conversion of our hearts and minds as followers of Christ. We recall those waters in which we were baptized into Christ's death,



died to sin and evil, and began new life in Christ.”

- Translation for younger kids: “Lent is a time when we practice new ways of giving up sin and doing good so we can be closer to God.”
- The traditional practices of Lent are almsgiving (Matthew 6:2–4), prayer (Matthew 6:5–15), and fasting (Matthew 6:16–18).

## Fasting

**F**asting and abstinence are the practice of giving up something in order to turn away from sin and draw closer to God. The thing we give up might be good in itself, but we relinquish it in order to obtain a greater good...God. Fasting is not only a form of penance, but a spiritual discipline. Here are some of the spiritual benefits of fasting:

- **It's a form of penance.** Throughout the Old Testament, people fasted in order to express their repentance from sin. Fasting serves a similar purpose today.
- **It makes room for God.** By emptying ourselves, even if just a little bit, we make room for God to enter our lives more fully. When fasting and abstinence are hard, we are moved to turn to God in prayer for help.
- **It strengthens the will.** Just as physical exercise makes our body stronger, fasting strengthens our will. Practicing self-denial in small things strengthens our will to resist sin in other areas of our lives.
- **It prepares us for mission.** Just as Jesus spent his forty days in the desert preparing for his public mission, fasting prepares us to continue his mission in the world.

Get a longer version of this article and more Lent ideas on [pbgrace.com](#).

- **It puts us in solidarity with the suffering Christ.**

Whatever small suffering we experience when we fast brings us closer to the suffering Christ—and all suffering people around the world.

Only adults (ages 18-59) are obligated to fast (although teens 14 and older are obligated to abstain from meat on Fridays). In addition to this obligation, everyone is invited to choose additional penitential practices during Lent. Beginning at about age five or six, children can be encouraged to “give something up,” or to adopt a positive practice, as a way of joining in Lent.

When encouraging your kids to fast, help them brainstorm some creative ideas. A positive experience is more likely if you make the fast concrete and measurable. Recording kids’ lenten achievements with a chart or a coin jar might help your kids stay on track.

Here are a few fasting ideas for kids and teens.

### 1. Give up the usual suspects

Consider some of these tried-and-true fasting favorites: sweets, video games, smartphones, soda, junk food, social media, and other creature comforts. LifeTeen has posted a fun list of [teen-specific fasting ideas](#), some of which work for older kids, too.

### 2. Quiet it down

Monks practice silence in order to better hear God. Your family can, too, by turning off radios and music players, eating a meal in silence (or while listening to some sacred reading), practicing [Thirty Seconds of Silence](#), or even having a day of silence.

### 3. Transform bedrooms into “deserts”

Kids and teens can imitate Jesus’ time in the desert by making their room more desert-like as well, storing away all but the most essential items for the period of Lent. Can they make it as bare as a monastic cell?

### 4. Slim down wardrobes

Kids can count up the number of outfits they have and select ten percent to wear during their fast. For

inspiration, read the stories of saints who gave away their clothes to the poor. Donate some of the clothes at the end of Lent.

### 5. Write that fight

Older kids can cut down on sibling squabbling by committing to writing down their complaints rather than making them verbally. Print out “complaint forms” that include guidelines for rephrasing complaints using respectful language.

### 6. Give up your place

If your kids are always fighting about who gets to sit where or who gets to be first, then read and talk about Jesus’ teaching about “first” and “last” place: [Mark 10:41-45](#). Challenge your kids to live that teaching out during Lent.

### 7. Be one with the poor...sleep on the floor

One of the purposes of fasting is to practice solidarity with the poor. Your kids can emphasize this by giving up something that is symbolic of a basic necessity that other people lack. For example:

- Sleep on the floor, not in bed, in solidarity with the homeless.
- Drink nothing but water in solidarity with those who lack safe drinking water.
- Walk to school instead of getting a ride in solidarity with kids who lack access to education.
- Do not purchase anything except essentials in solidarity with those who live on less than \$2 a day.

### 8. Give up hair

If having their hair “just so” is an attachment for teens, they might consider giving it up (one way or another) for Lent. In doing so, they will be imitating countless saints and biblical figures who cut their hair to symbolize their dedication to God.

### 9. Give up something for the sake of the environment

Let your Lent fast do double duty by giving up something that will benefit God’s creation as well. Give up warm showers to save energy (and water); give up meat and reduce carbon emissions; give up un-



necessary lights (the darkness will be appropriately Lenten); give up unnecessary car trips (use the time walking or biking to pray); or give up soda cans.

#### 10. Practice humility, and give up a vice

Practice the virtue of humility by asking friends and family members, “What area of my character do you think I need to work on the most?” Then practice the related virtue. For example, if everyone thinks you talk too much, practice holding your tongue.

If people think you worry too much, focus on giving your worries to God.

## Giving

Like fasting, giving (traditionally called “almsgiving”) is as much a spiritual discipline as an act of charity, especially when our giving comes at a personal sacrifice. In our small acts of giving, we strive to imitate Christ, who gave his life for us on the cross so that we might have eternal life.

When you talk to kids about their ideas for giving, share with them the story of the widow’s mite ([Luke 21:1-4](#)), in which Jesus teaches us that it is the size of our generosity, not the size of our act, that matters.

Here are a few giving ideas for kids and teens.

#### 1. Make a Giving Jar

Make a list of small acts of giving that your kids can perform throughout the day. Later, count up their acts of kindness and allow them to deposit a coin (or other token) in a “giving jar” for every act. On Good Friday, count up the coins and give them to the poor; on Easter Sunday, fill the jar with candy.

#### 2. Perform a random act of kindness every day

Perform a different random act of kindness every day; doing it secretly makes it more fun. For ideas, see the [Random Acts of Kindness website](#).

#### 3. Share

Older kids who are especially possessive of their toys or bedroom space can be encouraged to share, actively and kindly, with their siblings. Or, encourage kids

to share by donating the money they saved from their sacrifices to a charitable cause.

#### 4. Practice being present

Teens can commit to putting down their phone (or other electronic device) when someone is present with them. Even better: create phone-free zones (like the dinner table).

#### 5. Share stories

“The sharing of tales is an act of love and can truly change the world,” says Marni Gillard, a member of the [PB & Grace Parents Facebook group](#). She suggests that kids and teens practice sharing their stories in order to “push through” their resistance to being open and vulnerable with others.

The companion to this practice would be for kids and teens to ask parents, grandparents, and other elders to share their stories...and then to practice active listening.

#### 6. Learn and take responsibility for a new chore

Even little kids can participate in giving by learning a new chore, especially if the chore is a simple adult task that makes them feel more grown up. But this is a great idea for older kids, too.

#### 7. Raise money for a charity

Let your older kids and teens choose a favorite cause, then challenge them to raise as much money as they can for that cause. At the end of Lent, they can donate the money to a related charity.

Catholic Relief Services is famous for its [Rice Bowl campaign](#), which has also gone digital in recent years. But whether you raise money for CRS or another worthy charity, encourage your kids to be creative with their giving. Can they raise money by putting on a show, or doing small favors for neighbors? How about donating allowances, or scouring cushions and floors for loose change? What about a social media campaign?



## Praying

Virtually all of the saints spent lots of time in prayer. The reason? These wise men and women realized that prayer—that ongoing conversation or relationship with God—is essential to living the Christian life. Prayer powers the spiritual life. When we pray, we are better able to let God work through us instead of trying to “do it ourselves.”

[Peanut Butter and Grace](#) is full of great ideas for praying with kids, but here are a few ways your kids might pick up their prayer this Lent.

### 1. Put out holy water

You can underline the connection between Lent and baptism by making holy water available for your kids to bless themselves...at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, or when they go out.

### 2. Do an examen every day

The examen is one of the most powerful practices for spiritual growth. Popularized by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the examen involves setting aside fifteen or twenty minutes a day to prayerfully “examine” your day to see where God was present, and to discern how God is calling you to grow. See [A Daily Examen for Children and Teens](#) at the Peanut Butter & Grace website for more information about what to do.

### 3. Say the rosary throughout the day

Teens and pre-teens can carry a rosary with them, using it to pray throughout the day. Any set of beads (such as a beaded necklace or bracelet) could be used to keep track of prayers.

### 4. Get to know Jesus

Get to know Jesus by reading the Gospels this Lent. Have kids read one of the Gospels in an age-appropriate Bible, or read it together as a family, over the course of Lent. Supplement (but don't replace) your reading of the Scriptures with any of the great movies or videos depicting the life of Christ. Max McLean's *Gospel of Mark* is an excellent one-man dramatic retelling of the Gospel available on YouTube.

### 5. Pray three times a day

Did you know that Christians are called to pray throughout the day? We call this prayer the [Liturgy of the Hours](#). While your kids will not be able to pray the actual Divine Office throughout the day, they can pray a simple morning, noon, and evening prayer. Older kids and teens can set an alarm on their digital devices (or get a Catholic prayer app) to remind them.

### 7. Go to confession

If your family hasn't been to confession this year, calendar it for Lent. If you do celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, try to increase your frequency during Lent. Can you celebrate the sacrament once a week? Check out [Celebrating Reconciliation with Kids: 9 Ways to Get Into the Habit](#) for help.

### 8. Go to daily Mass

If you're able, try taking your family to Mass every day during Lent...or pick a special day (perhaps a Friday) once a week to attend daily Mass. If daily Mass is impossible, read the daily Scripture readings with your kids instead.

### 9. Pray the Stations of the Cross

Retrace the steps of Jesus during his suffering and death (the Via Dolorosa or “Way of Sorrow”) with your kids by praying the Stations of the Cross, either at your local parish or at home; check out [The Stations of the Cross for Families](#) at the Peanut Butter & Grace website for ideas.

### 10. Pray the Seven Penitential Psalms.

Check out the USCCB website for both audio and text versions of the [Seven Penitential Psalms and the Songs of the Suffering Servant](#), and incorporate these into your family prayer time.

### 11. Keep a Lent Journal

Invite older kids and teens to keep a spiritual diary or journal during Lent. It's a concrete way for them to keep track of their spiritual life, and an easy step toward doing a daily examen. **pb&g**

