

Junior Soldiers

Unit 7 : Lesson 9

Lent!



PURPOSE : For the children to understand what the season of Lent is all about, as they explore why and how followers of Jesus participate in Lent.

'Dear Friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God. Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.'

Romans 12:1-2 (CEV)

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Romans 12:1-2

Romans 12:9-21

Joel 2:12-14

Lent is an annual season of fasting, abstinence and preparation for Easter celebrated by many Christians, especially Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Anglicans. It is generally observed for forty days before Easter in commemoration of Christ's fasting in the wilderness and, while specific traditions and details of this period vary between the denominations, in the Western Church it runs from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday (excluding Sundays as they are days of celebration).

Shrove Tuesday, which is often referred to as 'Pancake Tuesday', is observed the day before Lent starts. Because Lent is a time of abstinence (of giving up things) Shrove Tuesday is the last chance to indulge, and to use up the foods that aren't allowed to be consumed during Lent. Traditionally, pancakes are eaten on this day because they contain fat, butter and eggs which were traditionally forbidden during the season of Lent.

While Lent has not been a key part of Salvation Army tradition in the past, it has become increasingly prevalent in corps and with Salvation Army members during recent years. There are some similarities between The Salvation Army's annual Self Denial Appeal and Lent, namely the abstinence of material pleasures and luxuries. However, one key difference between the two is the motivation for the abstinence. During the Self Denial Appeal the main focus is on social justice and the needs of those in developing countries; so the primary reason for our sacrifice is making a difference in the lives of other people. Fasting or abstaining from material items during Lent is more focused toward strengthening our relationship with God and taking time to prepare for the significance of what Jesus did for us at Easter. We intentionally decrease worldly distraction to increase our spiritual focus.

The Self Denial Appeal is referred to in this lesson, so you might like to refresh your memory of the Self Denial session from Unit 3 (Lesson 9).

During 'The Main Thing', the children will explore Lent in three smaller groups and move to different stations. It would be good to have these stations set up before you start the lesson, and organize to have a leader at each to guide the children through each activity. If you are short of leaders you might like to invite some of the children's Big Buds (or other key adults in their lives) to this lesson. However, if your group is smaller than six children we encourage you to move around the stations together as one group, as it is best to have at least three children in each group to gain benefit from interactions with others.

Be mindful that some children may never have heard of Lent before and will need enough information and teaching to help them to grasp the concepts behind this.



What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- A copy of *Charlie and Lola: The Most Wonderfulest Picnic In The Whole Wide World* (Volume 2, Episode 5)*
- Computer/projector/TV/DVD player to view movie clip on

*You can access it online at YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=J96KYE4AIUM)

Otherwise, someone you know might have a copy you can borrow or you might like to purchase it from your local ABC Shop or online from Fishpond at www.fishpond.com.au (free delivery).

For 'The Main Thing'

- Some props for the 'Learning about Lent' section. e.g. a TV remote, a block of chocolate, a Bible, milk, butter, eggs and a Self Denial Appeal brochure or poster.
- Three tables with chairs
- Butchers paper to cover the tables
- Glue or sticky tape
- Bibles
- Textas
- Print 'Leader's Note' cards (attached at the end of this lesson)
- Print the following scripture passages (ideally on A3 paper)
- Romans 12:1–2
- Romans 12:9–21
- Joel 2:12–14
- Magazines/catalogues/newspapers (check they are appropriate for children to flick through)
- Post-it notes
- A3 paper (one sheet for each child)
- Some items that can potentially clutter up our lives and take our focus away from God (e.g. television, chocolate, chips, McDonalds, iPod, computer, skateboard, toys, movie tickets etc.)

For 'Tying In'

- The butchers paper (with the scripture passages attached) used earlier in Station 1
- The 'Lent Plans' that the children created at Station 3

For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off a Home & Beyond card for each child.

Connecting In

Getting ready...

For this activity you will need a copy of *Charlie and Lola: The Most Wonderful Picnic In The Whole Wide World* (Volume 2, Episode 5) which is accessible on YouTube or available to purchase.

Watch the first six minutes of this episode (up to the point where Lola opens the picnic basket and says to Lola, 'Yes, the most wonderfullest ever').

Link: Charlie and Lola had some important things to do in order to get ready for their picnic. They put time aside to prepare and make sure they had everything they needed to enjoy their picnic.

- I wonder what might have happened if they hadn't spent time preparing for their picnic?
- What are some other things that you need to do preparation for? (e.g. first day back at school, birthday parties, Christmas, cooking a meal, church service, Junior Soldier lesson etc.)

Before Christmas we spend time getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday. We call this time Advent and it starts four Sundays before Christmas Day. During the season of Advent, many churches stop each Sunday to remember why God chose to send Jesus to earth. Today we are going to talk about another season that is called Lent, this is the time that many people spend getting ready for Easter.

Going on a picnic...

You will not need anything for this activity. It is a creative guessing game that can be played with two or more people.

Ask the children to sit in a circle with you and explain that the aim of this game is for each of them to discover what can be taken on your pretend picnic. You then think of a 'rule' that limits the things that can and can't go on your picnic. The rule can be as simple or as complex as you like. You might choose an attribute such as the color, shape, size, or a letter pattern within the spelling of the object. Here are some example rules:

- Only things you can eat can go on the picnic (apples, oranges, pancakes).
- Only yellow things can go on the picnic (bananas, the sun, daffodils).
- Only things bigger than a person can go on the picnic (elephants, houses, helicopters).
- Only things that are spelled with a double-letter can go on the picnic (apples, balloons, lollies).

You can come up with something as easy or as complicated as you like, depending on your group of children. The aim of the game is to keep players trying to guess the rule. Let's say you pick the rule that only yellow things can go on the picnic, start the game by saying, 'I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing bananas, and I can go.' Then it's the next player in the circle's turn to guess something that they can bring on the picnic. They might say, 'I would like to come on your picnic. I'll bring apples. Can I come?' Then you would shake your head sadly and say, 'You can't come.'

Play then continues around the circle, with each player trying to guess something they can bring on the picnic. When it is your turn you generally say things that you *could* bring to the picnic, but occasionally it would be good to give the children some examples of things they can't bring, too.

The children keep guessing until all or most of them have discovered the rule and are asking to bring things that fit the rule. You might like to play a few rounds, choosing a different rule with each round.

Link: Well, I hope you had fun guessing what you could bring to my pretend picnic. Going on a real picnic can be a really fun time to hang out with families or friends. It is even more special if you have had time to get excited about it and think about what you would like to take, what you are going to do while you are there and some of the things you might share. Putting some time aside to prepare some yummy homemade snacks and pack some fun activities might help make your picnic a more memorable outing. Easter is a very special time for people in God's family and some of them start getting ready for Easter quite early; they do this preparation during a time called Lent. We are going to explore some more about Lent today in our time together.



The Main Thing

Let's learn about Lent...

It will be important for the children to have a clear understanding of Lent from participating in the following stations, before being invited at the end of the session to think of a way they might like to participate in this season. You might like to use some props to help the children remain engaged while you are talking. For example, a TV remote, a block of chocolate, a Bible, milk, butter, eggs and a Self Denial brochure or poster.

- Because Easter is so important to the people in God's family, some people want to make sure they are ready for it when it comes around each year. This preparation period before Easter is called Lent. It is time when we think about why Jesus died on the cross and what that means for us and our relationship with God.
- In the past, people would spend the 40 days of Lent fasting, that is, by giving up eating most foods. The aim was to be less distracted by 'worldly' things like cooking and eating in order to spend more time with and focusing on God and remembering what He has done for us.
- Today many people will choose one or two things they enjoy to give up/stop doing for a while during the period of Lent rather than fasting from most foods. This way they can put more time aside to pray, read the Bible and make more room in their lives for worshipping God. For example, if I gave up watching television or even cut the amount of television I watched in half for Lent I would have a lot more time to pray and read my Bible. Or imagine if I gave up eating chocolate for Lent, I am sure this would be tricky for some, each time I felt like eating chocolate it would bring to mind the reason I was not eating it and it would remind me to talk to God instead.
- I wonder why you think that people might give things up for 40 days or some of the time during Lent. (*Because we follow the example of Jesus fasting and spending time praying to God for 40 days and nights in the desert.*)
- Even though Lent lasts for 40 days it actually starts 46 days before Easter. This is because the six Sundays during Lent are not counted in the 40 days. Sundays are always a day of celebration for God's people.
- The day before Lent is Shrove Tuesday but we often call it 'Pancake Tuesday' because people used to fill up on pancakes and use up all their butter and milk and flour and eggs before they weren't allowed to eat them anymore during Lent. Some people still follow this tradition and enjoy pancakes on Pancake Tuesday.
- In The Salvation Army, we are invited to participate in the Self Denial Appeal and give up something for a period of time in order to make a difference in the lives of other people who might not have as much as we do. It is important that we understand that the main reason for Lent is different to why we do the Self Denial Appeal. We give something up during Lent in order to strengthen our relationship with God and remember what He has done for us.



Let's explore together...

Organise the children into three groups so they can move around the three different stations outlined below. The stations have been designed to allow the children to explore what they have learnt about Lent and start thinking how they can apply this to their own lives. It would be good to have these stations set up before you start the lesson and organize to have a leader at each station to guide the children through each activity. If you are short of leaders you might like to invite some of the children's Big Buds (or other key adults in their lives) to this lesson. Place the 'Leader's Note' cards at each station to ensure that the leaders can effectively guide the children through each activity. It is best to have at least three children in each group; however, if your group is smaller than six children we encourage you to move around the stations together as one group. Allow enough time for the children to spend about seven minutes at each activity. You might like to sound a buzzer or a bell or even play some music for a minute to signal when it is time to rotate to the next station.

Station 1 – What does the Bible say?

For this activity you will need a table with chairs, butchers paper, glue/sticky tape, Bibles, textas, the Leader's Note card (attached at the end of this lesson) and the following scripture passages printed on paper:

Romans 12:1–2

Romans 12:9–21

Joel 2:12–14

Cover the table with butchers paper and attach the three passages to the paper, leaving space for the children to write around each one.

When the children first arrive at this station read the different passages to them and give them opportunity to clarify anything they might not understand. Encourage the children to look the passages up in their Bibles before spending some time exploring what they have read. Using different coloured textas, have them circle parts of the scripture that caught their attention and then write or draw their thoughts on the paper surrounding the passages using a line to join their idea to the circled text. Use these questions to help prompt the children as they respond:

- What stood out for you in these passages? Why? Circle this in orange and write why.
- What did you like in the passages that were read? Why? Circle this in green and write why.
- I wonder if there was anything that you didn't like. Why? Circle this in red and write why.
- I wonder if you have any questions. Circle this in blue and write your question.

Have each group add to the previous groups' responses and then use this collection of responses during the Prayer Activity in the Tying In section below.

Station 2 – Why do we have Lent?

For this activity you will need a table with chairs, butchers paper, magazines/catalogues/newspapers (check they are appropriate for children to flick through for pictures), the Leader's Note card (attached at the end of this lesson), glue and textas.

Cover the table with butchers paper and write the word 'LENT' on it in bubble writing, large enough for the children to write words inside each letter but also leaving enough space around the outside of the bubble writing for the children to paste/draw pictures on.

Remind the children that the reason for Lent is to spend time strengthening our relationship with God and learning more about why we celebrate Easter.

- I wonder why you think we are encouraged to give something up during Lent? (*Giving up something for Lent allows us to remove a material item that takes up some of our time and attention and use that time and attention to focus on getting to know and connecting with God better.*)
- I wonder what sorts of things could help to strengthen our relationship with God? (*Talk to Him, read His word, learn more about what He is like by learning more about Jesus, talking with others about God, spend time sitting in nature, listening to music, etc.*)

Invite the children to:

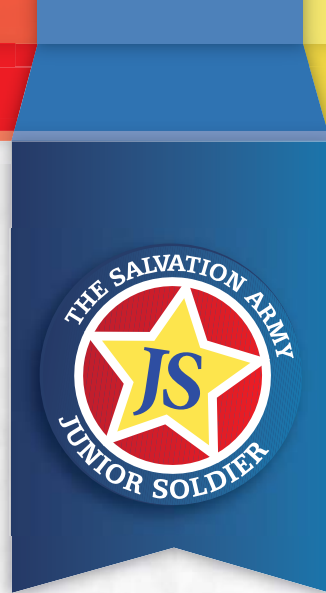
- Write words that describe what they know and think about God inside the bubble letters of 'LENT'.
- Paste magazine pictures or draw pictures around the outside of the word 'LENT' to represent things that might distract us from God (e.g. television, iPod, lollies, chocolate, money, social activities, favourite hobby etc.).
- Encourage the children to start considering if there might be something that they might like to give up or limit for Lent.

Station 3 – How can I participate in Lent?

For this activity you will need post it notes, a sheet of A3 paper for each child, Bibles, textas and some items that can potentially clutter up our lives and take our focus away from God (e.g. television, chocolate, CDs, chips, McDonalds, iPod, computer, skateboard, toys, movie tickets etc.)

Spread the images over a table or a designated carpet space and give the children time to look at them and chat about their initial thoughts and reactions. Talk about how:

- We often try to make ourselves happy by eating junk food, by buying things to entertain us or



spending lots of time watching TV or using technology. We fill our lives with all sorts of things and, most of the time, want more.

- During Lent we try to stop filling up on some of these ‘things’ and try to make more room for God in our lives as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.
- Giving up some of our comforts can also help us understand how much Jesus gave up for us.
- We would like to give you some time now to think about how you might like to participate in Lent. You might like to try to give up something different each week. You could have a TV-free day, or a TV-free week! How about giving up eating chocolate (even if it is for a day or a week)? You might like to give up eating your favourite take-away or dessert, or limiting how much you play video/computer/electronic games, or how you spend your pocket money. There are lots of options that you might like to consider.
- Then, it would be important to think about some ways you can get to know God better, spend some more time with Him and learn more about Jesus and His life.



Invite the children to make a ‘Lent Plan’ by writing, drawing and using post-it notes on a sheet of A3 paper.

- List one or two things you might like to give up for Lent and what that might look like, i.e. will you give something up for a certain day each week? Or something different each week? Or use something for a less amount of time each day? Are you thinking of sacrificing something for the entire Lent period?
- Brainstorm some times in your day/week that you could spend more time with God, e.g. after breakfast, when you get home from school, after dinner, or before bed, set aside time once a week with your parents, Big Bud/ Prayer Pal. Or maybe have a plan for each time you think about the item that you are giving up—how will you think, pray or spend time with God even if only for a few minutes?
- What might you do during the time you have set aside? For example, talk to God, write Him a prayer or poem, read your favourite Bible story, write/draw some things you would like to thank Him for, make some actions to your favourite song about God, close your eyes and imagine you are talking with Jesus about God and what He is like, make a poster/bookmark of a Bible verse you want to remember etc.
- Where can you find out more about Jesus and Easter in the Bible? (*Direct the children to the gospels and help them note down particular chapters that are most relevant to Easter and to what they would like to find out more about Jesus.*)

Some ideas for some key Easter chapters are:

Matthew 26

John 18 & 19



Tying In

Prayer circle...

For this activity you might like to place the butchers paper (with the scripture passages attached) from Station 1 in the middle of the circle, and ask the children to have their Lent plans in front of them. Much of the ‘tying in’ has been integrated into the Station activities, so you might like to spend some time reflecting on what the children have taken away from each of those activities using the following questions to guide the discussion.

- Can you share something you have found interesting about Lent during our time together today?
- Does anyone want to share something new they learnt about God after reading the Bible passages today?
- What is one thing you think you might find most challenging about participating in Lent?

Conclude this time together by having the children pray in turn for the person sitting on their left and then close off by praying something like:

Heavenly Father,
Thank you that You love us so much!
We are Your children and our relationship with You is really special.
We want to know You better and feel closer to You.
Sometimes we get distracted by things in this world.
Please help us give up some of those things for a little while,
So we can spend more time with You.
Amen



Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.


Practicing Lent...

- Share your Lent Plan with someone in your family or your Big Bud. Ask them if they can share a time when they have given something up before to spend more time with God.
- They might like to give something up as well and participate in Lent with you.
- Choose one of these Bible passage to explore and get to know better this week: Romans 12:1–2, Romans 12:9–21, Joel 2:12–14.
- Write it in your journal or on a piece of paper to put up somewhere as a reminder to read it each day.

Home & Beyond

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