

NOT IF BUT WHEN

THE LESSON: JOHN 8

From the time of the early Church to the present day, there has always been a Christian practice of observing days and seasons of “penance”: times of sober reflection and repentance. The reason for this lies at the very heart of the Gospel: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). *We all need to repent, because we all sin.*

If you belong to a church that observes the Christian calendar this will sound familiar, and it probably makes you think of Lent, the 40 days (not counting Sundays), leading up to Easter. During this time, we focus on remembering that our sin had to be paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. On Ash Wednesday, the Prayer Book calls believers to observe a “holy Lent” by “self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial, and by reading and meditation upon God’s holy Word” (BCP, p. 612).

But these spiritual disciplines are not *just* for the season of Lent. They are for any time in our personal or communal lives when the awareness of our sin or the challenge of our circumstances moves us to seek God more diligently. Indeed, “God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*). The disciplines should be the ongoing “healthy habits” of the Christian life – not intended to weigh us down with a new kind of law, but as a means by which we are drawn into greater intimacy with our Lord, the one who loves us and paid the price for our sin.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Set aside some time this week to confess your own sins and to ask God to turn the hearts of sinners to repentance.

Close your time with this prayer:

Lord, for thy tender mercies' sake, lay not our sins to our charge; But forgive that is past, and give us grace to amend our sinful lives; To decline from sin, and incline to virtue, That we may walk with a perfect heart before thee, now and evermore. (FROM THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP, P. 614)

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JOHN 8: **WHO IS WITHOUT SIN?**

²Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”