

MY BEAUTIFUL LENT

A prescription by the Church
that brings us closer to God





Great Lent

Great Lent is when the Christian participates fully in preparing himself to praise and glorify his Lord and Savior. It's often known as a three-legged stool of fasting, almsgiving, and increase prayer and worship. Without one leg, the stool will fall. It's a time to be spiritually uplifted and strengthened and re-dedicate your life to Him.

Lent is not for the sake of Lent itself, as fasting is not for the sake of fasting. They are the means by which the believer prepares himself to reach for, accept and attain the calling of his Savior.

Great Lent is sacred. The deep intent of the believer during the Great Lent is "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus", Philippians 3:13-14.

Maybe you're from a Christian tradition that observes Lent, but you want to get deeper into it, understand its origins in the Ancient Church, and experience the blessings and joy that it can bring.

Or maybe you are not sure what Lent is, or why the early church created a framework for the seven weeks leading up to Easter, or Pascha as it is known to Orthodox Christians who observe it every year.

In this primer, you will learn more about Lent and what you can do to make it a time of strength and renewal! Lent this year starts March 2nd ending with Pascha on April 19th. As you may note, Easter in the West is on April 12th.

The reasons behind the difference in dates goes back to old and new calendars. Depending on what faith tradition you follow, you can adjust your dates.



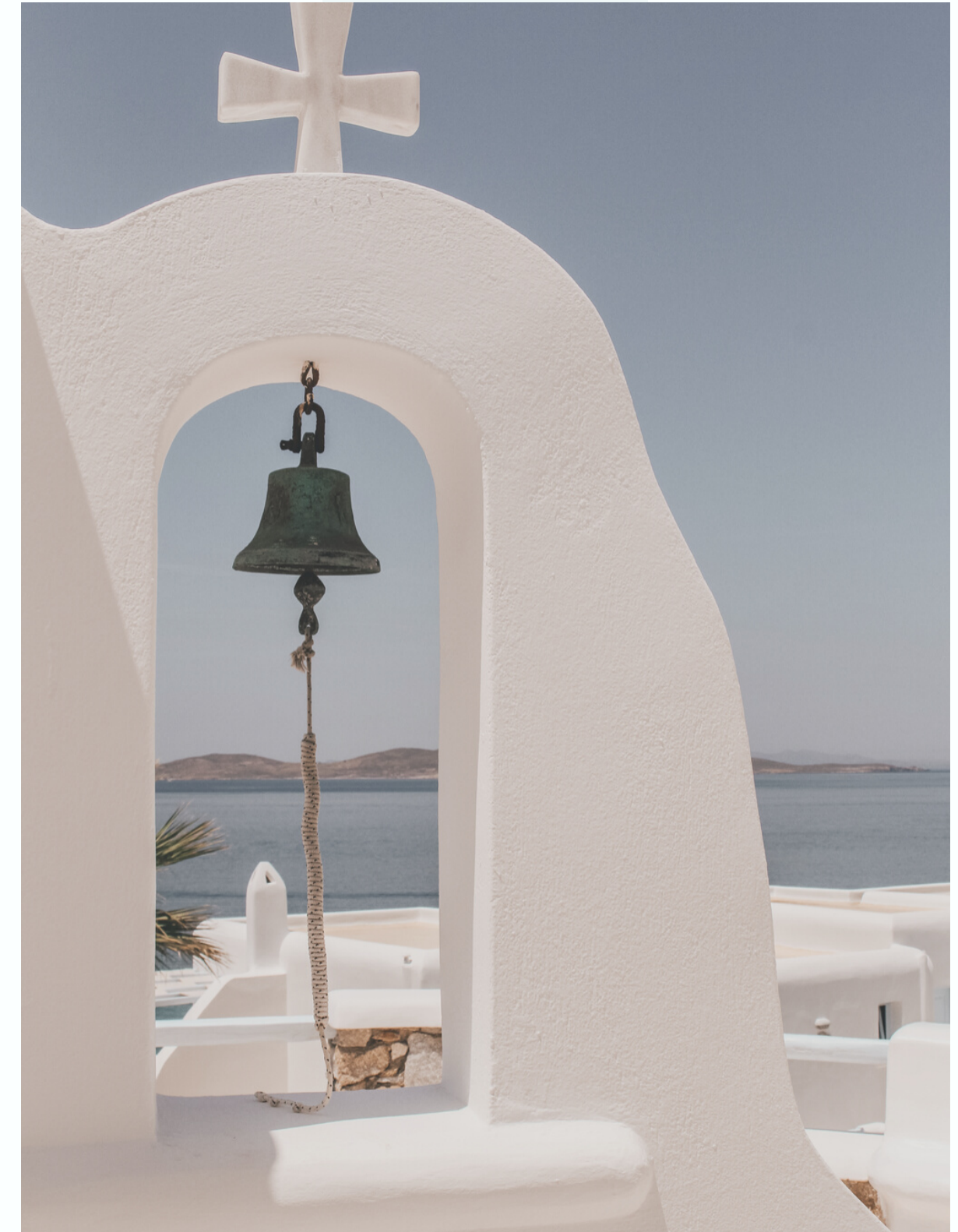
If you are wondering why I sometimes refer to the Resurrection as Pascha instead of Easter, Pascha means “Passover” and is what the early Church used to define this day. The term Easter, came later.

What might be helpful is to locate an Orthodox Christian church in your area. There are services that you will want to experience during this time period that will help you understand the framework the early church put into place.



Are you ready?

We are going to cover:





Why are you choosing to be more intentional about Lent this year?

Knowing the history behind it can help you and your family understand its significance, thus giving you more of an incentive to observe it closely. Knowing why this is important to you can make all the difference.



Adherence to dietary restrictions.

We go over how to navigate meal planning and preparation for 7 weeks of eating without meat, dairy, fish and oil.



How do you stay out of overwhelm?

The limited food choices, the increased services... we know it can lead to fatigue. We've been there, and we have ideas for you!



LET US BEGIN THE LENTEN TIME WITH DELIGHT . . . LET US FAST FROM PASSIONS AS WE FAST FROM FOOD, TAKING PLEASURE IN THE GOOD WORDS OF THE SPIRIT, THAT WE MAY BE GRANTED TO SEE THE HOLY PASSION OF CHRIST OUR GOD AND HIS HOLY PASCHA, SPIRITUALLY REJOICING.

THY GRACE HAS ARISEN UPON US, O LORD, THE ILLUMINATION OF OUR SOULS HAS SHOWN FORTH; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE TIME OF REPENTANCE. *Vespers Hymns*



WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

The Big Why. Why do we observe Lent in the way we do? Why does this matter to us? Why did the Ancient Church take it so seriously? And some may ask, "Why does it have to be so hard?"

Saint Ephraim can help us understand with a prayer we say so often during this season.



The Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faintheartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to your servant.

Yes, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sin and not to judge my brother, for You are blessed from all ages to all ages. Amen.

Don't we all want what Saint Ephraim wanted?

We want to be pleasing to God. We want to be the best version of what He created when He made us. Great Lent is a season of blessings and of renewed devotion. You may hear others look at it as a time of drudgery... but it isn't!





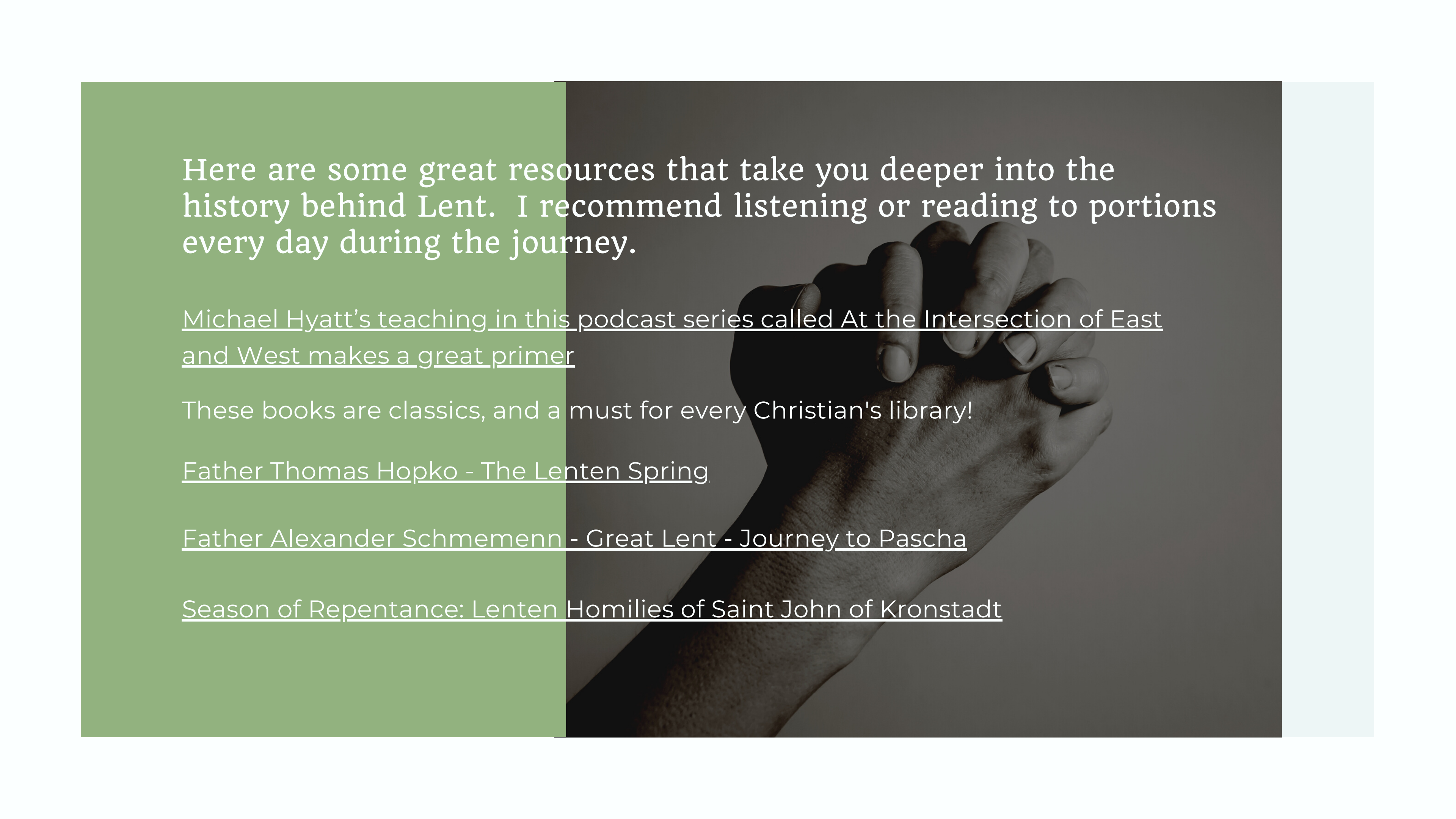
Lent is a time of love.

Love for God.

Love for ourselves... as the child of God we are.
Love for our neighbor. We are fulfilling His
commandments when we observe Lent.

That is, if we are observing it through the lens
of love. Seven weeks leading up to the greatest
act of love of all. When He gave His life for us.

Great Lent was observed by many before the
Council of Nicea, but it was at that council in
325 AD that it was formalized and agreed on to
be taught to all Christians everywhere.



Here are some great resources that take you deeper into the history behind Lent. I recommend listening or reading to portions every day during the journey.

[Michael Hyatt's teaching in this podcast series called At the Intersection of East and West makes a great primer](#)

These books are classics, and a must for every Christian's library!

[Father Thomas Hopko - The Lenten Spring](#)

[Father Alexander Schmemmann - Great Lent - Journey to Pascha](#)

[Season of Repentance: Lenten Homilies of Saint John of Kronstadt](#)



DIETARY GUIDELINES – WHAT TO DO?



So often the focus during Lent is on food.

That's when our sin gets a chance to come out and play. It seems to be against human nature to embrace what we're told we can't do. Sometimes it makes us even want it more. Food is sustenance that keeps us alive, healthy and thriving.

Yes, we celebrate with it, use it to comfort ourselves, and it has even become a hobby for many of us. There's nothing wrong with that, but for 7 weeks each spring, we are asked to not focus on it. It isn't about deprivation, just about curbing our enthusiasm.

During Lent we are asked to basically become Vegan. No animal products that is. Alcohol is only used on certain days, as is olive oil and fish. Different churches that observe Lent have different "restrictions."

If you're just starting out, I would recommend only cutting out alcohol and animal products for the 7 weeks. During this time, there will be temptations, and it's a perfect time to acknowledge them and consider what is behind them in your life. You will see different aspects of yourself that you may not have seen before. It may be pride, it may be envy... fasting during Lent puts a magnifying glass on some things we may not have seen before. But it isn't for everyone. If you get sick during Lent, please consider this quote from St. Timothy of Alexandria in 381AD.



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FASTING WAS DEvised IN ORDER TO HUMBLE THE BODY. IF, THEREFORE, THE BODY IS ALREADY IN A STATE OF HUMBLENESS AND ILLNESS OR WEAKNESS, THE PERSON OUGHT TO PARTAKE OF AS MUCH AS HE OR SHE MAY WISH AND BE ABLE TO GET ALONG WITH FOOD AND DRINK. *Canon 8 of St. Timothy of Alexandria, 381*





Plants. Getting back to the garden... of Eden that is.

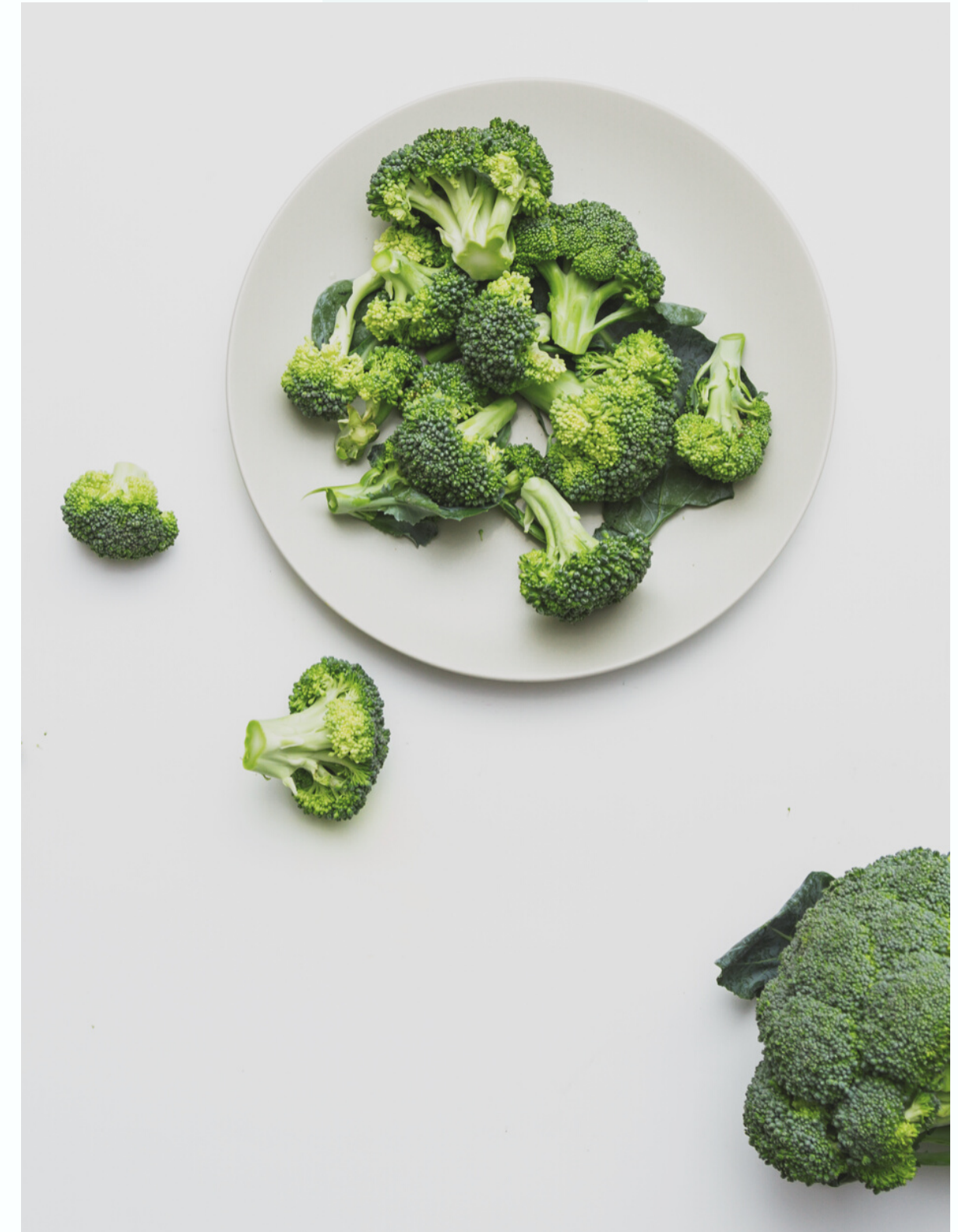
Before God gave us animals, He gave us plants for food. It's something to embrace, and the discipline is wise to follow even after Lent is over. Think of meat as a condiment on the side of a plate filled with nourishing vegetation when you start adding it back in.

Studies show that even just three weeks of a plant based diet can turn around disease, bolster our immune system, and balance our hormones. It can begin to heal gut dysfunction, improve autoimmune disorders, and improve metabolism. So much for the alarmists who think we will die due to a lack of protein! In fact, many of us will thrive on plant protein alone.

Lent isn't about being on a "diet," but do you see how God, in His Wisdom, created us so beautifully? Our bodies can actually rebound with the right fuel.

Tips

Dietary Suggestions:





1. It can be those last minute scrambles that overwhelm and tempt us to throw in the towel. As I mentioned in the video above, have a plan in place ahead of time.

For instance:

Monday - Bean Soup

Tuesday - Pasta Primavera

Wednesday -Vegetarian Chili etc, etc.

Make lunches out of the leftovers, then repeat the same menu each week.

That's easy enough. I know a lot of people who only make a couple pots of soup each week and eat it until it's gone. Breakfast? Protein shakes are perfect. I use pea protein in mine, adding in berries, walnuts, avocados, and spinach along with other nutritious yummys. This is a good way to start out the day any time of the year.

2. Team up with a friend. Each of you make a double batch of a couple of your favorite fast appropriate recipes, and share! You get twice the variety of your usual dishes, and half the cooking time!



3. Invest in a good cookbook that already adheres to fasting principals, and go crazy experimenting. This is great for those who love to cook but are at a loss during Lent. One I recommend is Straight Up Food by Cathy Fisher.

Other good cookbooks for Lent would be by anyone who embraces the teachings of Dr. John McDougall, Dr. T. Colin Campbell, and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn.

4. Still need ideas, and your mind is blank? Go through your current cookbooks with those handy sticky note flags and mark each recipe that is fast friendly. I was shocked when I did this with some of my favorite cookbooks. The books ended up full of flags!

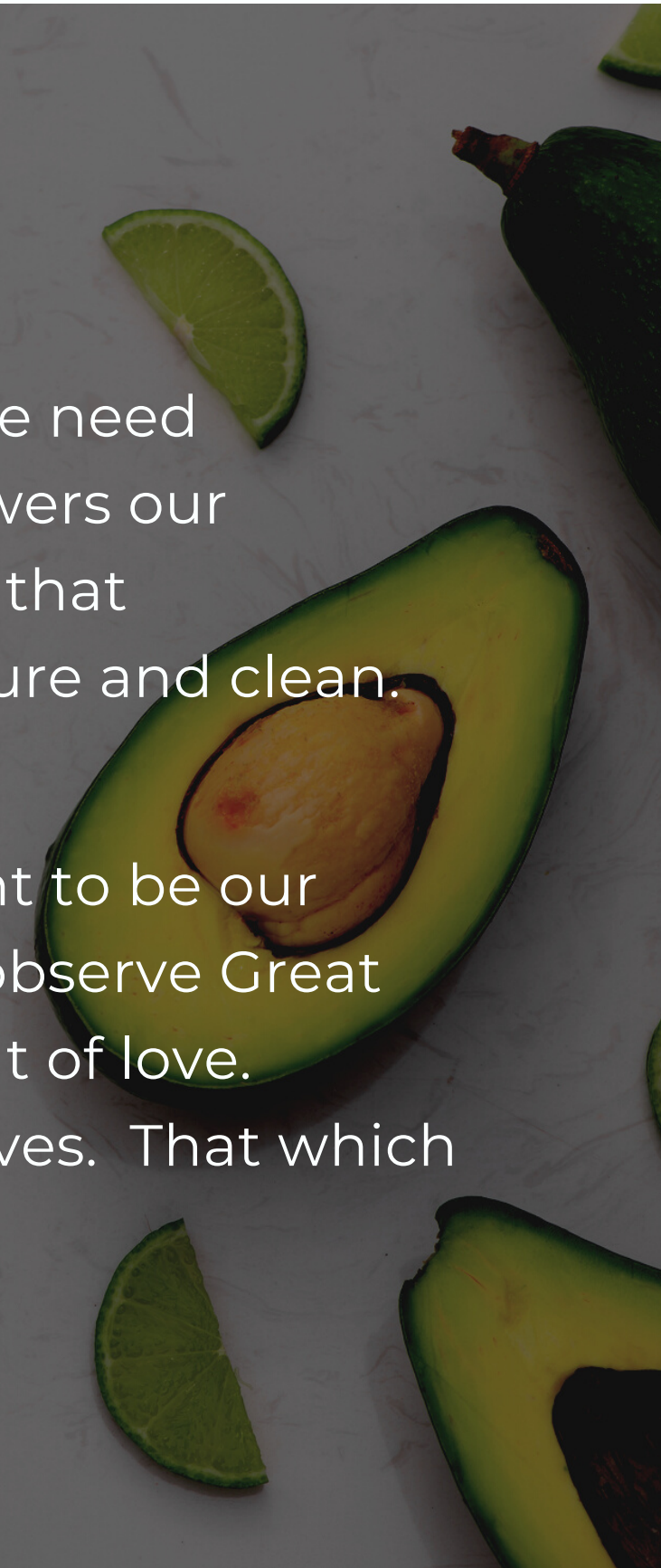
5. Don't let "saute in olive oil" deter you! If you are advanced and are staying clear of olive oil also, that's ok. Coconut and avocado oils are a healthy alternative.

(Please don't succumb to margarine or other unhealthy vegetable oils like Canola). Also, with a ceramic coated pan, you can saute in water or vegetable stock...no oil needed!

Please remember two things for me:

Number one, Great Lent is not the time to eat unhealthy foods. We need perseverance, strength, and a good mental attitude. Junk food lowers our immune system, messes with our hormones, and creates cravings that undermine our intentions. Keep it as God created. Wholesome, pure and clean.

Secondly, don't forget that abstinence of certain foods is not meant to be our focus. As I mentioned before, the reason behind your decision to observe Great Lent is not because you want to be deprived and miserable. It's out of love. Feeding ourselves in a wholesome manner shows a love for ourselves. That which God created is being taken care of responsibly and respectfully.



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LET US FAST WITH A FAST PLEASING TO THE LORD. THIS IS THE TRUE FAST: THE CASTING OFF OF EVIL, THE BRIDLING OF THE TONGUE, THE CUTTING OFF OF ANGER, THE CESSATION OF LUSTS, EVIL TALKING, LIES AND CURSING. THE STOPPING OF THESE IS THE FAST TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE. *(Monday Vespers of the First Week)*



STAY OUT OF OVERWHELM

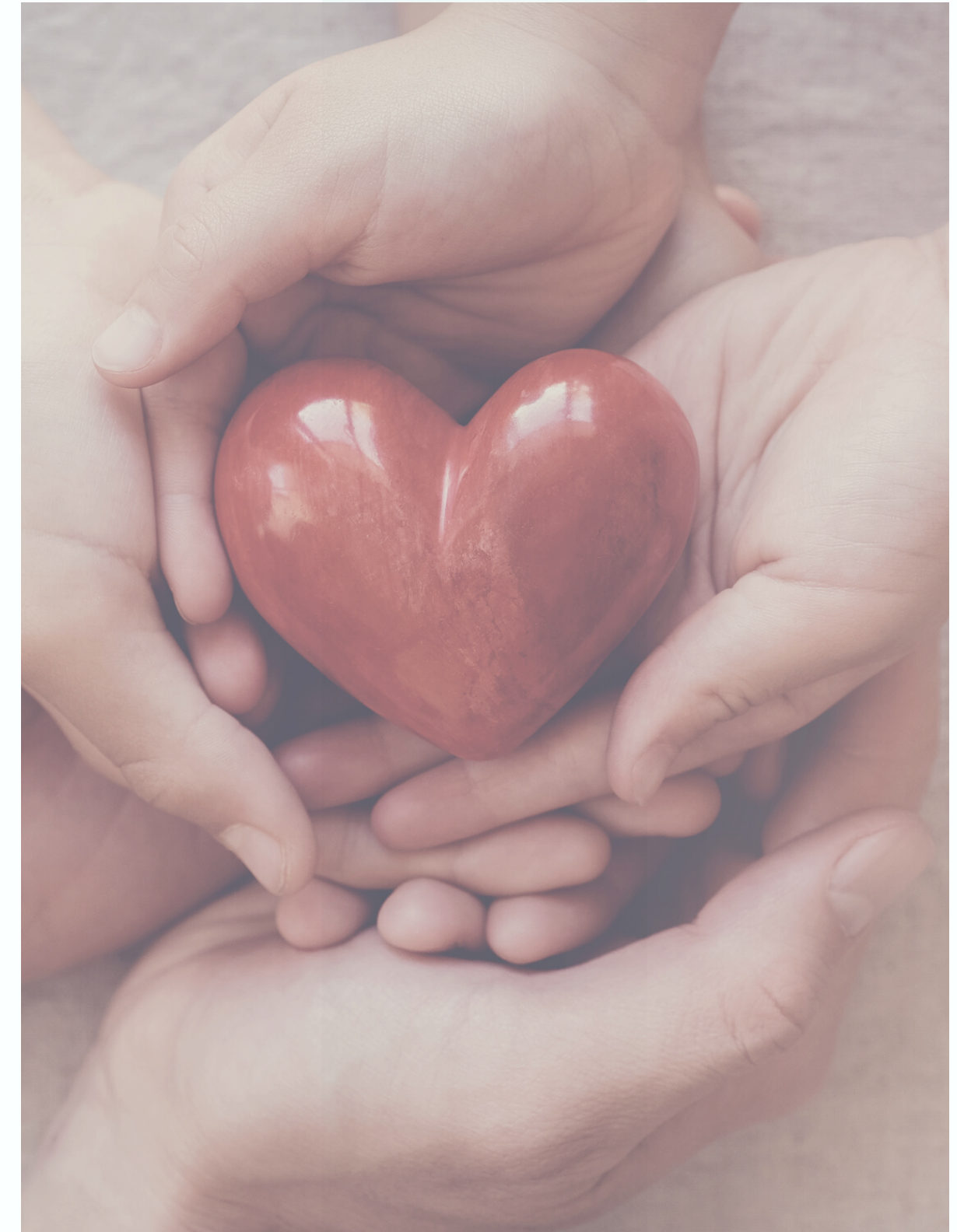
In this video I mention priorities. I can't tell you how freeing it is to put Lent in its proper place. I used to pile Great Lent on top of my "already full to the brim" life. I expected to carry on all of my usual activities, and just add the extra services, recipes I'm not used to making, a special devotional book to study after extending my morning and evening prayers... and was surprised when I felt ready for a breakdown by Pascha!

It's time to clear the slate. This year, your church calendar takes priority over your personal calendar. In my life, this has kept me sane, and the bonus is that I've been able to not only observe Lent, but embrace it, and yes, enjoy it.



Tips

Lifestyle Suggestions:





1. **Go through your calendar and look at your standing appointments.** First, is there anything that conflicts with your church schedule? Are there meetings already scheduled that will fall apart if you're not there?

If you have Monday, Wednesday and Friday night church services, staying home and resting on Tuesdays and Thursdays might be more important than continuing to meet with your book club, etc. Make sure that you are making time for yourself and your family in a way that will keep you charged, not depleted.

2. **Keep your meals wholesome and simple.** Similar to our topic above, if you are the cook in the home, easy one pot meals are the way to go. Not only does it cut down on overwhelm, there is a bonus. The time we save in the kitchen cooking and cleaning can be used for worship, prayer, reading, acts of charity, etc. The money saved from multi-course meals and desserts can be used for alms-giving.



3. **Get exercise daily.** This is one easy way to stay healthy and keep your stamina and your immune system bolstered. Just 20-30 minutes of walking a day can make all the difference. I like to listen to podcasts while I walk. Many times the podcasts I listen to also lead to introspection and prayer. You can also subscribe to Audible, or get audio books based on your interests. A simple walk can be something that benefits you in multiple ways, not to mention creating endorphins that release stress and overwhelm.

4. **Get serious about your sleep patterns.** We need 7-9 hours a night in order for our glymphatic system to clean the cellular waste that builds up in our brains during the day. This is also when our livers are able to process the toxins we've absorbed into our bodies during the day through our diet and environment. A lack of sleep contributes to feelings of overwhelm though a loss of brain function and hormone imbalance.

5. **Cut down on media.** This means TV, radio, most movies, magazines, etc. Ten to one, the subject is not edifying to begin with. News programs and secular magazines can lead to concerns over things that you have no control over. We can pray for the world without knowing exactly what is happening murder by murder... bit of gossip by bit of gossip. Studies have shown that when people are exposed to the news, it increases stress, raises cortisol levels, affects adrenal glands, thyroid function, and overwhelm is the result.

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UNFORTUNATELY, OVERWHELM IS NOT AN END UNTO ITSELF. IT IS A SYMPTOM OF STRESS, AND STRESS IS DANGEROUS IF IT ISN'T MANAGED EFFECTIVELY. DID YOU KNOW THAT STRESS CAN ACTUALLY BE A GOOD THING? IT CAN DRIVE US TO BE THE BEST WE CAN BE, OR IT CAN BREAK US DOWN AND WEAKEN OUR BODIES. GREAT LENT IS THE PERFECT TIME TO PRACTICE LIVING A WELL-BALANCED, CALM, PEACEFUL LIFE.



One last thought:

If you are able to attend any Orthodox Christian services during Lent, there is a “theme” for each week leading up to Holy Week. Each Sunday is devoted to what we can learn from a certain event or Christian who went before us. Then during Holy Week, each day has its own theme taking us through Christ’s death and resurrection. It is very powerful, and I hope you get the chance to experience it.

I hope you enjoyed your primer on Great Lent and will be able to embrace it this year. Go slowly if you are un-used to it. If you slide back, it’s ok to re-group and jump back in again.

Everyone’s journey is personal.

