

Dear Friends,

A few years ago, I came across some great advice for filling a ten-minute gap in a primary school class, “Ask the students,” the advice went, “if they’ve ever seen a snake?”

No one can manage a class better than Penny and Ally Jackson! And, thanks to last weekend, now no one has a better snake story than Penny and Ally Jackson!

On their way back from church camp, Penny and Ally stopped at Mawson Shops for a few things, and a passerby informed them that they had a herpetological hitchhiker! There was a quick call to the snake catcher, who came and removed the snake, a 1.3 metre diamond python, and has promised to return it to its coastal habitat home!

Snake stories also feature in the journey through the wilderness for the people of Israel and, with their strange mythological power to represent both death and the promise of new life, become part of the theology about the nature and work of Jesus. John 3:14-15, *“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believe in him may have eternal life.”*

Today is Ash Wednesday, the start of the season of Lent in the church calendar, the season of penitential preparation for Easter when we reflect on how Christ’s death, and our own experiences of death, have the power, in Christ, to offer us eternal, never-ending, life-giving life.

Below are forty simple practices, one for each day of Lent, that were prepared by Sarah Bessey (author of *Field Notes for the Wilderness*) in 2020. As Sarah says, *“You could do all forty but honestly, that sounds exhausting so perhaps choose just a few of the practices there to keep things simple this year.”* In a couple of places, I’ve added something more relevant to us in Canberra!

Grace and peace be with you – as we continue this wilderness journey, as we journey to Easter, from life to death, and to eternal life!

Belinda

PS If you would like to unsubscribe from this weekly email, please contact office@canbap.org

40 Simple Practices for Lent by Sarah Bessey (*all rights reserved*)

Day One: Participate in an Ash Wednesday service in your town. Receive the imposition of the ashes and consider your mortality. Read Jan Richardson’s [Blessing for the Dust](#).

Day Two: Download an app or [online resource like Common Prayer](#) or pick up a prayer book like [Eastertide](#) by Phyllis Tickle and begin to pray the daily offices at morning, midday, and evening, if you’d like a daily practice throughout.

Day Three: Choose something to fast for the remaining days to remind you of your dependence on God. Something like the traditional meat or alcohol, sugar or caffeine or even social media. (One year, a friend gave up sleeping in while another friend gave up complaining, another gave up cynicism, another unnecessary spending.) Be creative and honest about your dependencies. Look for ways to channel that energy into something generative and healing. P.S. you don't have to fast on Sundays!

Day Four: Pray for your friends *and* for your enemy/ies by name. Bless them, one by one. Think of the person you most struggle to love and pray for them as a beloved child of God.

Day Five: If you normally listen to a podcast or music or watch TV, choose silence for the day.

Day Six: Unfollow or mute five social media accounts that make you feel angry, afraid, or envious.

Day Seven: Read Psalm 51 three times out loud in a different Bible translation than you usually read. [Here's the Message for instance.](#)

Day Eight: Step outside and walk/ride/drive/motor/wheel to a spot with trees or water.

Day Nine: Repent. The kingdom of God is at hand. Read Amos 5 while you're at it.

Day Ten: Make a list of 40 things, experiences, or people you're thankful for.

Day Eleven: Look at your bookshelves and ask yourself: where are the women? the people of colour? disabled voices? LGBTQ+ voices? the ones who come from a different tradition? Ask yourself, "who is forming my spiritual life? and whose voices are missing?"

Day Twelve: Think of five people who inspire you or others on social media. Amplify their voices or buy their books, send them an encouraging note or share their work with a friend.

Day Thirteen: Donate 40 things to a charity or thrift shop.

Day Fourteen: Educate yourself about whose land you are living on by visiting [Native-Land.ca](#) and learn something about the people. If there is a learning centre nearby, plan a visit. (*Here in Canberra we live and work and work on Ngunnawal land. The <https://www.ngunnawal.org/> site has some great resources to explore.*)

Day Fifteen: Bring your own bags to the grocery store and your own mug to the coffee shop or work.

Day Sixteen: Read a poem. Mary Oliver's [Wild Geese](#) is one of my favourites but there are so many that may capture your attention.

Day Seventeen: Skip the Internet for a day and turn off notifications on your phone.

Day Eighteen: Invite someone over to your home and cook them a simple weeknight meal. If they are also a believer or comfortable with the practice, pray for one another together at the table.

Day Nineteen: Speak words of forgiveness out loud to yourself for that thing you've been holding onto for too long.

Day Twenty: Send an encouraging email to your pastor or priest and tell them how much you appreciate all the extra work they are doing for Lent and Easter prep. Drop off a coffee or a gift card or a note. *(This looks a bit self-interested in an email I'm sending out, but Steve will back me up on this, it is lovely when people initiate an invitation for a coffee and conversation!)*

Day Twenty One: Light a candle and meditate for five minutes, bringing yourself back over and over again to one word you need to cling to right now (example: beloved).

Day Twenty Two: Plant a tree or a flower. Take a moment to be grateful for this world. Place your hands in the dirt and rejoice.

Day Twenty Three: Tell someone you trust the truth you've been holding back.

Day Twenty Four: Ask for help with something or for a three-minute quiet hug from someone you trust.

Day Twenty Five: Read or listen to the Gospel of John. Write down a verse that you like or want to remember in your journal.

Day Twenty Six: Go outside late in the day and don't take a single picture, just look, while the sun sets. Or stare out a window for at least 5 minutes and consider what you notice.

Day Twenty Seven: Write a lament for injustice you or people you love have experienced, modelled on the Psalms of Lament. Bury that piece of paper at the base of a tree or in a garden so that your grief and lament can nourish the soil of a living thing.

Day Twenty Eight: Sign up to a monthly supporter of a ministry or non-profit that you feel doesn't get enough love or attention. Even \$5 a month matters. Look for a way to turn your anxieties about the world into real, positive work.

Day Twenty Nine: Donate some of your in-good-condition books to the library *(or to Lifeline!)* Recycle any books with toxic or abusive theology in your home, get rid of them.

Day Thirty: Go to a church or a concert or an evening prayer service and sing your heart out.

Day Thirty One: Read Psalm 139 out loud.

Day Thirty Two: Wake up early to pray for persecuted Christians around the world including our LGBTQ+ siblings.

Day Thirty Three: Imagine God looking at you with infinite love and tenderness, kindness and mercy.

Day Thirty Four: Try to meet or get to know a neighbour.

Day Thirty Five: Buy (or collect from your pantry) a bag of groceries and drop it off at the Food Bank.

Day Thirty Six: Write out by hand Matthew 11:28-30 and tape it to your mirror.

Day Thirty Seven: Memorize the Jesus Prayer - *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"* - in the morning and pray it throughout the day. Consider switching the word "sinner" for "your beloved child" and see how that changes things.

Day Thirty Eight: Write a short one-page letter to your younger self at a time when you felt most vulnerable or afraid or sad to encourage her that despite difficulties and challenges, she is never alone or forgotten. Tell her what you wish somebody would have said to you in those days.

Day Thirty Nine: Every time you become aware of your body in any way - positive or negative - speak kind words to your body or say, *"I bless and love my body."*

Day Forty: Sing the kids' song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" but switch the pronouns to feminine ones: "She's Got the Whole World in Her Hands." Notice how it feels to use a feminine pronoun for God. Imagine how God would mother you today, how it would feel to be held in the hands of God, and open yourself to those possibilities.

Bonus: Think about the past forty days and choose one practice to carry forward.

Love S.