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Ash Wednesday:

Background: "A season of prayer, penance and self-discipline. It precedes the joyful celebration of Christ's victory over death."ⁱ

"Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. It is a somber day of reflection on what needs to change in our lives if we are to be fully Christians. Lent is a season that reminds us to repent and get our lives centered, our priorities straight, and our hearts clean. This holy season offers us a new chance to say, "yes" to the Lover of our Souls who created us, who made us in his own image. Lent is the time for a restoration project that will reveal the beauty of God's design for us, showing once again the scale, proportion, and priorities intended by our Maker."ⁱⁱ

Scripture:

Matthew 6: 1-18 and Psalm 51

Prayer: "Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are repentant: Create and make in me a new and remorseful heart, that I, worthily lamenting my sins and acknowledging my wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. - Amen"ⁱⁱⁱ

Reflection: Spend a few minutes to reflect on the scripture.

Insight: As we enter this season of Lent or what we can call "spring training" for the soul a great way to start is by checking our motives. Why do we do good things? Why do we flip through the pages of scriptures? Why do we decide to replace coffee or soda with water for 40 days? Is it our gratefulness to Jesus for freely giving his life, or is it because of the rewards that he offers? Do we do the right things to impress our savior or to impress our community? How can we deny the tension we face when facing our motives? We can train ourselves to become more grateful by "continually looking away from self to the finished work of Jesus' ministry and considering deeply the alternative consequences of our fate without it."^{iv} Throughout this season different spiritual disciplines will be suggested to help in training an inside-out mindset "so that Spirit-produced growth of the inner person is in harmony with outward obedience." A.B. Bruce suggested that we try this formula: "Show when tempted to *hide*, hide when tempted to *show*. The Pharisee were exposed, and yielded, to the latter temptation."

Notes: Use post-it notes or type some notes into smart phone etc. to remind yourself of any insight you might have gained.

Go: This week try and give to the needy, pray, and fast in secret as a training of the soul.

ⁱMetford, J.C.J., *The Christian Year* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991), 42.

ⁱⁱThe Voice: Biblical and Theological Resources for Growing Christian, "Lent", Christian Resource Institute, <http://www.crvoice.org/cylent.html>

ⁱⁱⁱTickle, Phyllis, *Eastertide: Prayers for Lent Through Easter from The Divine Hours* (New York, NY: A Galilee Book, 2004), 4.

^{iv}Wilkins, J. Michael, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 284.