

# 40 DAYS OF DECREASE

## WELCOME

Welcome! This tool's purpose is to prompt honest personal reflection and engaging discussion as you journey on your own or with a group through *40 Days of Decrease* by Dr. Alicia Britt Chole.

If your use of *40 Days of Decrease* is paralleling Lent and following the liturgical calendar, begin *Day One* on Ash Wednesday and do six of the forty days each week, skipping Sundays for Sabbath. But don't feel bound to specific dates - God knows your heart and you can begin anytime.

Inside this free download you'll find a chart for all 40 days of fasts and the companion Scripture readings. After the charts is a sampler of the first six days from the book, *40 Days of Decrease*. Due to copyright, we cannot give away the entire book but we invite you to purchase it from your favorite local retailer, Christian bookseller, or online at [Store.FaithGateway.com](http://Store.FaithGateway.com).

At the end of the sampler are additional bonus questions designed to help groups with discussion and process their *40 Days of Decrease* journey with intentionality.

Additional resources are available to churches, including six sermon outlines, at [www.40fasts.com](http://www.40fasts.com) or on Alicia Britt Chole's site: [www.aliciachole.com](http://www.aliciachole.com).

We are so grateful you have downloaded this resource. Many will find great freedom and healing as *40 Days of Decrease* mentors us in re-centering and deepening our spiritual lives.

**May we all honor sacred decrease for the love of God.**

# 40 DAYS OF DECREASE

## At a Glance Summary

Day	Reading Theme	Heart Fast	Featured Quote	Journaling Scripture
1	Our ache to live awed by Christ's Resurrection	Lent as Project	Peterson, Coe	Jn 12:1-11
2	Lent as a much-needed mentor	Regrets	Abba Theodore of Scetis	Jn 12:12-19
3	John the Baptist on sacred decrease	Collecting Praise	John of the Cross	Jn 12:20-28
4	John the Baptist on uncertainty	Artificial Light	Dillard	Jn 12:29-36
5	Questions as a friend of faith	Tidy Faith	Lewis	Jn 12:37-43
6	Jesus' response to John the Baptist's death	Speeding Past Sorrow	Spurgeon	Jn 12:44-50
7	Jesus' call to take up your cross and die	A Meal	Bonhoeffer	Jn 13:1-7
8	The problem with miracles	Fixing It	Coe	Jn 13:8-17
9	When we don't understand God's voice	Rationalism	Yancey	Jn 13:18-30
10	How the unknown reveals our defaults	Avoidance	May	Jn 13:31-36
11	Bartimaeus' moment	Religious Profiling	The Lenten Tridion	Jn 14:1-14
12	Zacchaeus and interconnectedness	Isolation	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Jn 14:15-22
13	Jesus' anointing for burial	Stinginess	Spanish poet	Jn 14:23-31
14	Jesus' response to the crowds' praise	Spectatorship	Andrew of Crete	Jn 15:1-17
15	Lessons from Jesus on vulnerability	Spiritual Self-Protection	May	Jn 15:18-16:4
16	When Jesus grieved	Halos	Yancey	Jn 16:5-16
17	When Jesus cleansed the courts	Apathy	Nouwen	Jn 16:17-33
18	When Jesus cursed a fig tree	Appearances	Traditional Orthodox hymn	Jn 17:1-5
19	When Jesus closed a question	Revisionism	Fryling	Jn 17:6-19
20	When Jesus rebuked the leadership	Spectatorship	Leavened Bread	Jn 17:20-26

A Different Kind of Hunger. A Different Kind of Fast.

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<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading Theme</i>	<i>Heart Fast</i>	<i>Featured Quote</i>	<i>Journaling Scripture</i>
21	When Jesus felt troubled	Premature Resolution	Yancey	Jn 18:1-11
22	God's sound from heaven	Sound	Hunter	Jn 18:12-14
23	Possible purposes of the foot-washing	Armchair Jesus	Nouwen	Jn 18:15-18
24	John 14:31 and the Crux	Neutrality	Sweet	Jn 18:19-24
25	Jesus' overwhelming sorrow	Denial	Bonhoeffer	Jn 18:25-27
26	The disciples' sorrow	Comparison	Merton	Jn 18:28-32
27	A co-worker's betrayal	Discontentment	Laubach	Jn 18:33-40
28	Jesus' voluntarily restricted freedom	Formulas	MacDonald	Jn 19:1-6
29	The misrepresentation of Jesus	Intimidation	Merton	Jn 19:7-16
30	Jesus' friend's failure—Peter's denial	Self-Confidence	Keating	Jn 19:17-27
31	The violent mockery of Jesus	Mocking Jesus	Yancey	Jn 19:28-37
32	Jesus' final rejection	Addition	Spurgeon	Jn 19:38-42
<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading Theme</i>	<i>Heart Fast</i>	<i>Featured Quote</i>	<i>Journaling Scripture</i>
33	Jesus' crucifixion	Willful Sin	Yancey	Jn 20:1-9
34	The 7 groups surrounding Jesus, part 1	Criticism	Francis of Assisi	Jn 20:10-18
35	The 7 groups surrounding Jesus, part 2	God-As-Job	Gregory of Nazianzus	Jn 20:19-23
36	Joseph of Arimathea's gift	Withholding	Azevedo	Jn 20:24-31
37	Jesus' time in the tomb	Your Voice	Abba Doulas	Jn 21:1-9
38	The disciple's response to loss	Escapism	Swoboda	Jn 21:10-14
39	At the empty tomb	Guarding Tombs	Saint John Chrysostom	Jn 21:15-19
40	Seeing Jesus	Fasting	Chesterton	Jn 21:20-25

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## Life Group Discussion Guide Questions

**General Discussion Prompts** (select 1+ of these questions to begin your group discussions each week)

1. Was there a phrase or concept that stood out to you from this week's readings?
2. Which were your most and least favorite fasts of the week?
3. Everything we do affects everything we do. How is this *40 Day* journey affecting your life? Your perspective? Your relationships?
4. What are some of the factors that make seeing decrease positively a challenge in our day?
5. Read Isaiah 58: 3-14. From God's perspective, what makes a fast acceptable?
6. Describe your experience with Lent to date.
7. Share any experiences you have had with fasting. What were your primary motivations in choosing to fast?
8. As you experience your *40 Day* journey, in what ways do you hope that a less cluttered soul might affect those near you?
9. What is your favorite day so far? Why?
10. If you were to give this book to one other person, whom would you choose? Why?

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## Daily Reading Discussion/ Reflection Questions

### Prologue – Day One, page xiii–5

1. What stood out to you from the Prologue reading, *The Grand Reduction*?
2. Alicia speaks of “sins of addition.” (p. xvi) How can achievements weigh us down spiritually?
3. Have you ever “given up” anything for Lent or for a forty day fast? If so, share your experience.
4. Whether you are reading *40 Days of Decrease* as a preparation for Resurrection Sunday or at another time of the year, what would it mean to you to fast *Lent as a project*?
5. *Bonus content*: visit <https://vimeo.com/149386646> to watch a 02:18 video from Alicia on fasting Lent as a project.

### Day Two, pages 7-10

1. In what ways can Lent become a “much-needed mentor”?
2. Share any thoughts you had as you contrasted Bernard of Clairvaux’s first and fourth degrees of love.
3. In Days Two’s fast, Alicia calls *regret* a “sickly substance.” How can regret “steal our strength...flatten dreams, and suffocate hope”?

### Day Three, pages 11-14

1. In what ways can attention be positive? Negative?
2. Why did John want to decrease?
3. Is it always dangerous to be famous?
4. How did John the Baptist manage his season in the spotlight?
5. *Bonus content*: visit <https://vimeo.com/149386650> to watch a 02:09 video from Alicia on fasting collecting praise.

### Day Four, pages 15-19

1. John’s disciples said, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.” (John 3:26) What is your guess regarding what may have motivated this question?
2. Have you ever helped someone who eventually “surpassed” you? What emotions did you experience? Did anyone else feel offended on your behalf?
3. Imagine John in prison. What questions might you have had in John’s place?
4. Share your experience with Day Four’s fast of *artificial light*.

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## Day Five, page 20-24

1. Alicia states that our God-concept and our self-concept are connected. (p. 21) Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Dr. Sweet explains that in the Jewish culture, “it’s an act of reverence to ask questions of the story. The Jews are confident that the story is strong enough to be tried and tested. . . . Around the table, a Jewish child has ‘That’s a good question!’ drummed into his or her soul, not, ‘You don’t ask that question’ . . . Questions are as sacred as answers.” (p. 21-22) How comfortable are you asking questions about your faith?
3. What do you think John’s response was when his disciples returned with Jesus’ answer?
4. Day Four invites us to fast *tidy faith*. Is there a difference between doubt and unbelief?

## Day Six, page 25-28

1. Have you ever lost someone who truly believed in you? What was it like?
2. When grieving, when do you prefer to be alone? To be with others?
3. Share any of the names and stories that came to mind as you were answering today’s reflection question.
4. Today’s fast is *speeding past sorrow*. Why do some prefer to hurry through sadness?

## Day Seven, page 29-32

1. How does “fear, by nature, distort reality”? (p. 29)
2. Imagine surveying your neighbors with this question: “What comes to you mind when I say ‘the cross’?” What responses do you guess they might offer?
3. What do you think “the cross” meant to Jesus’ disciples before His death? After His resurrection?
4. Share your experience fasting *a meal* if you were able to participate in today’s fast.

## Day Eight, page 33-36

1. On page 34, Alicia states: “Tomorrow needs and storms cannot void the reality of today’s miracles any more than today’s miracles can void the potential of tomorrow’s needs and storms.” How can today’s storms prompt us to forget yesterday’s miracles?
2. Why are we tempted to offer platitudes in the face of other’s pain?
3. In your own words, what does it mean to “fast *fixing it*”?

## Day Nine, page 37-41

1. How would you answer the question Alicia poses on page 38: “Why does Jesus speak words that He knows we cannot understand?”
2. Countless studies have been done on how music affects the developing brain of a baby. Clearly then, we do not have to understand a thing’s complexity in order to be affected by its sound. What do you believe happens in your mind whenever you read or hear God’s Word?
3. List things you enjoy that may be beyond your current understanding. For example, a skillful saxophone solo or a star-filled sky.

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## Day Ten, page 43-46

1. What does the request of John and James (and their mom) tell you about how the disciples viewed Jesus' kingdom? (p. 43)
2. How do you most often respond when faced with uncertainty?
3. Share your response to today's featured quote from Gerald G. May. (p. 44)
4. *Bonus content:* visit <https://vimeo.com/149386647> to watch a 01:55 video from Alicia on fasting avoidance.

## Day Eleven, page 47-51

1. If you were given one week to live, how do you think you would spend it?
2. Think about making a movie of Bartimaeus' story. Which scene would you pick as your favorite? Why?
3. What possibilities did you list in today's reflection question concerning the reasons why the disciples' might have sought to silence and turn away children and Bartimaeus?
4. Concerning today's fast, what would it look like to discount the faith or potential of the beautiful? The poor? The highly educated? The mentally broken?

## Day Twelve, page 53-57

1. Picture Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus in the same hometown before and after they met Jesus. Which one of these men, if either, do you personally identify with more?
2. Reread MLK, Jr's featured quote about interrelatedness. (p. 54) How authentically connected to others to you feel currently?
3. *Bonus content:* visit <https://vimeo.com/149386649> to watch a 02:11 video from Alicia on fasting isolation.

## Day Thirteen, page 59-63

1. Imagine yourself in any of the anointing accounts (p. 60) as another dinner guest. What thoughts might you have experienced while observing a woman pouring perfume on Jesus?
2. Read aloud the featured quote by an anonymous Spanish poet. (p. 61) Share what line stands out to you and why.
3. Today's fast is *stinginess*. Brainstorms ways in which you might be able to be "irrationally lavish toward someone who cannot possibly return the favor" this week. (p. 62)

## Day Fourteen, page 65-68

1. What do you think would motivate someone to throw their (possibly only) cloak on the ground to form part of a carpet that a donkey would walk over while carrying Jesus?
2. Why did the leaders' ask Jesus to stop the parade?
3. On a scale of one (reckless spontaneity) to ten (paralyzing over-think), how would you describe yourself? How does your answer affect your spiritual life?

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## Day Fifteen, page 69-73

1. Alicia states that, “Knowing that the Twelve would soon run for their lives and that the masses would soon reject Him, Jesus still stayed fully present for the party.” (p. 69) What would someone have to believe in order to joyfully stay present to favor that would not endure?
2. Under what circumstances can self-protection be healthy? Unhealthy?
3. How would you define *spiritual self-protection*? If you can, share how and/or when spiritual self-protection seems to manifest in your life.

## Day Sixteen, page 75-78

1. Imagine Jesus grieving over Jerusalem. What is your guess regarding what his disciples were thinking or doing during this time?
2. Close your eyes and picture Jesus. Is He glowing? What color is His hair, eyes, skin? Are His feet dirty? Are His nails clean? Discuss how your image has or has not been affected by artistic and cultural depictions of Jesus.
3. Where do you sense that God is weeping in the world today? Pause to intercede over that need.
4. *Bonus content:* visit <https://vimeo.com/149386648> to watch a 02:01 video from Alicia on fasting *halos*.

## Day Seventeen, page 79-83

1. What do you think motivated Jesus to clear the temple?
2. Share any responses to the questions Alicia asked regarding the physical nature of the temple clearing: “How would you have felt about Jesus in the temple that day if you were a Gentle? A moneychanger? A religious leader? His disciple?” (p. 80)
3. Regarding today’s fast, how would you describe the difference between *apathy* and *patient waiting*? Between *apathy* and *passivity*?

## Day Eighteen, page 85-89

1. If you could ask Jesus one question about this passage (p. 85), what would it be?
2. Share your reflections on the following statement: “Jesus, evidently, find utter fruitlessness frustrating.” (p. 87)
3. In today’s fast, what do you think motivates us to “inflate or deflate, exaggerate or belittle” our real selves? (p. 88)

## Day Nineteen, page 91-95

1. In your own words, explain why Jesus “closed the question” in this discussion with the chief priests and elders. (p. 92)
2. Jesus was speaking in this passage to the religious of his day. In the church today, what do we tend to value more than truth?
3. Today’s fast is *revisionism*. This could be a difficult fast because it addresses a form of self-deception. In the 1994 version of *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, a lawyer states in a courtroom, “Ask yourself which is better – a lie that brings a smile, or a truth that brings a tear.” What are some of ways in which we justify telling lies?

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## Day Twenty, page 97-102

1. Jesus reserves His harshest words for hypocrites. What is your definition of hypocrisy?
2. Share any thoughts from the parable you selected in the reflection section.
3. Today's fast is *leavened bread* as a symbol of rejecting hypocrisy in our lives. Many today accuse the church of hypocrisy. Why?
4. How do you discern the difference in your life between willful hypocrisy and broken humanity?

## Day Twenty-One, page 103-107

1. What factors may have contributed to Jesus's soul being troubled at this time in His ministry? (p. 104)
2. Do you agree or disagree with the following: "Obedience is not a moment: it is a process connected by countless moments." (p. 104)
3. Share a time when your heart was troubled due to "obedience-in-the-making." (p. 105)
4. Regarding Today's Fast of *premature resolution*, what is it about the middle of the process of obedience that is so trying?

## Day Twenty-Two, page 109-112

1. Of all the things Father God could have said, what is your guess as to why He chose to say, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28-30) over Jesus as He approached "this hour"?
2. Inaudibly, how does God most often "speak" to you?
3. If you were to hear God's audible voice at least once, what would you hope that He said? (e.g., your name, an answer to a question, specific direction, etc.)
4. Share your experience with fasting *sound* today.

## Day Twenty-Three, page 113-118

1. If you have ever washing someone's feet or had someone wash yours, share the how, why, and outcome of the experience.
2. Is there an area in which you struggle to receive Jesus' forgiveness? If so, spend a minute picturing Jesus washing your feet saying, "I forgive you. Though what happened surprised you, remember that it did not surprise Me. My love is still here. Return."
3. For Today's Fast of *armchair Jesus*, picture a football game. Where do you see Jesus? The coach on the sidelines? The owner in the exclusive box? The announcer? A cheerleader? The quarterback? Try to answer as honestly as possible.

## Day Twenty-Four, page 118-123

1. "Get up. Get going cross-ward." (p. 120) What does this mean to you personally?
2. Share your response to the reflection question: "How would you describe the difference between passion and love"?
3. In Today's Fast, Alicia defines fasting *neutrality* as taking a side in the seemingly small moments of life and choosing Jesus over self. In what areas do you tend to go passive? Ask for prayer if you would like support for the battle.

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## Day Twenty-Five, page 125-128

1. A few days ago we studied Jesus' description of His soul as troubled. Today we hear Him saying, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." (Matthew 27:37-38) What would you be feeling if you described your soul in this way?
2. Jesus specifically asked Father God to, if possible, take the cup away and clearly God's response was for Jesus to continue cross-ward. What do you think Alicia meant by the statement: "Sharing Jesus' certainty honors Jesus' sacrifice"? (p. 126)
3. Alicia points out the misalignment between Jesus' emotions (overwhelmed with sorry to the point of asking for the cup to pass) and God's will (that Jesus would continue cross-ward). In other words, Jesus was not emotionally thrilled to continue the journey and yet was still without sin. Why then do we so often pray, "God, if this isn't your will, then change my emotions"?

## Day Twenty-Six, page 129-133

1. If you were Peter, James, or John, how might you have felt when Jesus returned to find you sleeping?
2. Alicia relayed how she sometimes defaults to taking a nap when she is sorrowful. How do you respond to deep sorrow?
3. Today's fast is *comparison*. Have you ever looked at others' lives and assumed them more spiritual and/or more favored? What creates these assumptions? What dissolves them?

## Day Twenty-Seven, page 135-139

1. Think of the movies you have seen and/or fiction books you have read in the past year. How often was some form of betrayal part of the plot?
2. What is it about betrayal that makes it a particularly painful wound?
3. From the featured quote, what do you think Frank Laubach meant by the phrase, "I can turn life's rough spots into Your vocabulary"? (p. 137)
4. What does Alicia mean in today's fast that, "one of the fiercest allies of not-enough-ness is our imaginations"? (p. 138)

## Day Twenty-Eight, page 141-145

1. Reread the featured quote by George MacDonald. (p. 143) In what ways did Jesus resist, "every impulse to work more rapidly for a lower good"?
2. In your own words, what does Alicia mean by the "Discipline of Restraint"? How did Jesus model this strength at His arrest?
3. Are you currently experiencing any forms of restricted freedom?
4. Share any thoughts you had from today's fast of *formulas*.

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## Day Twenty-Nine, page 147-151

1. Consider each of the eight recorded accusations against Jesus. Which were valid? Which were misrepresentations?
2. Alicia states that, "Jesus had no fear for Pilate to exploit." (p. 149) How might Pilate have exploited the fears of his prisoners?
3. Share your responses to the questions posed in today's fast: "What do you fear? Being misunderstood or misrepresented? Being unwanted or unneeded? Illness or injury?"
4. How can awareness of our fears be a weapon of spiritual warfare?

## Day Thirty, page 153-157

1. What emotions do you think Peter might have felt after the rooster crowed?
2. Reread today's featured quote from Keating. (p. 155) How can our failure become a "triumph of grace"?
3. In your own words, what does Alicia mean by fasting *self-confidence*?
4. *Bonus content:* visit <https://vimeo.com/149386651> to watch a 01:57 video from Alicia on fasting self-diagnosis.

## Day Thirty-One, page 159-163

1. Reread the list on pages 160-161 of all that Jesus experienced prior to the crucifixion. What might the abusers have believed to mentally justified their treatment of Jesus?
2. Share any thoughts you had during today's reflection exercise.
3. In today's fast, Alicia states, "Perhaps we mock Jesus more than we know." (p. 162) Pause prayerfully asking God to search your heart for anyway in which you are mocking Him.

## Day Thirty-Two, page 165-170

1. Why do you think Pilate tried repeatedly to free Jesus?
2. Rejection is often at the root of our greatest pains. Jesus absorbed the world's utter rejection to make the way for our complete acceptance. How can His offering affect our pain in daily life?
3. How easy or hard, meaningful or mundane was today's fast for you?

## Day Thirty-Three, page 171-176

1. Alicia states, "Perhaps we would live differently if we remembered more frequently (and more accurately) what the cross cost." (p. 171) Do you agree? Disagree? Why?
2. Share your responses to today's featured quote from Philip Yancey. (p. 172)
3. Reread Psalm 22. Underline the phrases that describe Jesus' experience one thousand years after they were prophesied.
4. Today's fast is *willful sin*. What motivates us to keep sin alive in our lives?

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## Day Thirty-Four, page 177-181

1. Who would you surround yourself with if you had six hours to live?
2. In what ways were the taunts Jesus heard on the cross at the end of his earthly ministry similar to the temptations Jesus heard in the desert at the beginning of his earthly ministry?
3. Today's fast is *criticism*. How can we distinguish between being a critical thinker and being critical?

## Day Thirty-Five, page 183-187

1. Consider the rebel's request of Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His kingdom. (Luke 23:41-42) Why do you think Alicia considers this statement "among the most insightful statements of faith in Christ in the Gospels"? (p. 184)
2. Share any stories you know of believers who saw death as a finish line instead of defeat.
3. What came to mind as you read today's fast of *God-as-job*?

## Day Thirty-Six, page 189-193

1. Joseph kept his commitment to Jesus a secret while He was alive and made a bold proclamation of faith in Christ at His death. What do you think occurred in Joseph's soul to prompt the change?
2. What does it mean to you to give Jesus your "resting place"? (p. 191)
3. In what ways do we withhold love from others? From God? From ourselves?

## Day Thirty-Seven, page 195-201

1. What comes to mind when you think of the disciples after Jesus' burial and before the resurrection? Where do you picture them? What conversations or thoughts do you guess they might have had?
2. As we did a few days ago with Psalm 22, reread Isaiah 53 and underline the phrases that depict Jesus' cross-ward journey.
3. Describe your experience with today's fast of your *voice*. Was the silence loud for you? Did your mind wander every second or every few minutes?
4. Was the fast valuable? Why or why not?

## Day Thirty-Eight, page 203-207

1. If you have ever buried dreams, share how the experience has affected, challenged, strengthened, etc. your faith.
2. Why do some try to rush through the grief process?
3. When disillusioned or experiencing spiritual pain, do you naturally seek company or solitude or both?
4. Reflect on today's fast of *escapism*. Long-term, how does using escapism as an anesthesia affect our personal development? Our relationships?

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## Day Thirty-Nine, page 209-213

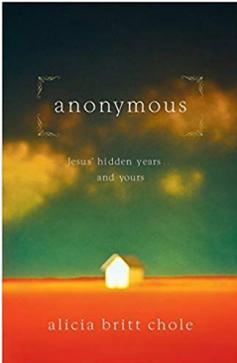
1. Picture the guards in front of the tomb, unknowingly hand-selected by God for this moment. Why did they think they were there?
2. Just as the angelic choir sang their God-song to an audience of shepherds, now an angel comes in blinding light to move a stone in front of guards. What do shepherds and guards have in common? Why do you think they responded so differently to the angelic visitation?
3. What does Alicia mean by her invitation to fast guarding tombs? (p. 211-212)

## Day Forty, page 215-213

1. Though the reality is beyond our imaginations, what comes to mind when you think of one day seeing Jesus?
2. Reflect once again on John the Baptist's commit to decrease that we examined toward the beginning of *40 Days of Decrease*. In what ways have you experienced sacred decrease during this journey?
3. Share any responses you had to the questions Alicia posed in today's reflection section: "What concepts stood out to you? Were there any areas in which a discrepancy was revealed between God's thoughts toward you and the thoughts you have toward yourself? In what ways has the journey enriched your portrait of God?" (p. 217-218)
4. End your 40 days with others thanking Jesus for the holy decrease that set us free!

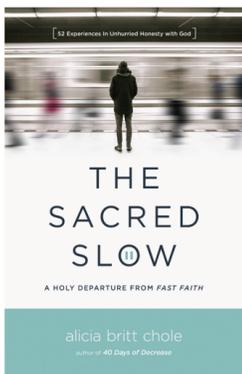
# 40 DAYS OF DECREASE

If you and your group enjoyed *40 Days of Decrease*, you will love three other offerings from Alicia!



[\*Anonymous: Jesus' Hidden Years and Yours\*](#) addresses those seemingly barren spaces in life where it seems as though someone pressed the pause button on our dreams and potential. Available as a [book and Bible study](#), as well as a [12-video teaching series](#) on TBN, Dr. Alicia Britt Chole's study of Jesus' wilderness experience will fill seemingly barren seasons with eternal purpose.

*The 7<sup>th</sup> Year* is a 52-week spiritual formation journey that many alumni have likened to "a welcomed surgery" or "a fitness trainer for the soul." Each year, Drs. Barry and Alicia Chole each lead men and women in leadership into soul health and sustainable nearness with God. For more information, visit [Leadership Investment Intensives, Inc. \(Lii\)](#), a non-profit devoted to the soul-care of leaders.



This book may read you. Formatted as 52 experiences in unhurried honesty with God, [\*The Sacred Slow\*](#) reminds readers on every page that God never wanted to use them: He always wanted to love them. This is the actual material Alicia uses in her mentoring of leaders and learners. In addition to the short readings and engaging exercises, [12-video teachings](#) are available on TBN to complement each of the 12 sections of the book!

A Different Kind of Hunger. A Different Kind of Fast.

# SIX DAYS TO REINVENT YOUR LENT

By  
Alicia Britt Chole



DARE  
TO BE AWED  
BY EASTER

A guide for those hungering for a fresh Lenten experience.

Adapted from  
*40 Days of Decrease: A Different Kind of Hunger. A Different Kind of Fast.*

## INTRODUCTION

“What are you giving up for Lent?” Our minds begin to whirl: *Chocolate? Coffee? Social media?* Forty days later, some feel disappointed in their efforts, some feel surprised by their success, but perhaps precious few feel spiritually renewed.

We ache deep within to meaningfully honor Christ’s resurrection. Yet, in practice, this focal point in the liturgical calendar is often a celebration of public holiday more than it is of humanity’s hope.

But, what if you fasted stinginess? What would happen if our churches fasted spectatorship? What if families fasted accumulation? What might erupt if a new generation fasted escapism? Such fasts could trigger a spiritual revolution.

In *40 Days of Decrease*, I offer forty different fasts in the hope that collectively they will prepare us to be duly awed by Christ’s resurrection by being duly available to daily crucifixion.

As we experience this sacred season and the holiness of loss and less in Jesus’ journey cross-ward, may our hearts open vulnerably to a greater commitment to love and be loved by the Savior. For, in the words of Orthodox Reverend Alexander Schmemmann, “The purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to ‘soften’ our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden ‘thirst and hunger’ for communion with God.”<sup>1</sup>

Let such softening begin with *Six Days to Reinvent Your Lent*.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 31.



## DAY ONE

Self cannot satisfy self, no matter how frequently it feasts. Lent is a much-needed mentor in an age obsessed with visible, measurable, manageable, and tweetable increase, for it invites us to walk with Jesus and His disciples through darker seasons that we would rather avoid: grief, conflict, misunderstanding, betrayal, restriction, rejection, and pain. Then Easter leads us in celebration of salvation as the stunningly satisfying fruit of Jesus' sacred decrease. A thoughtful Lenten journey directly confronts our modern obsession with increase and introduces us to unexpected friends of spiritual formation.

In Jesus' journey cross-ward, the disciples' illusions of what Jesus could and should do with His power were shattered by the reality of what Jesus actually did with His power, and their personal illusions of commitment-unto-death were shattered by the reality of fear-inspired self-protection. Meditating upon Jesus' suffering and the disciples' disillusionment creates a framework within which we can spiritually process our own loss of illusions and gaining of realities. This is critical, because in the words of Dr. Dan B. Allender and Dr. Tremper Longman III, "reality is where we meet God."<sup>2</sup>

### TODAY'S FAST: REGRETS

Approaching a fresh endeavor can be both energizing and stressful. New is inspiring. New is enlightening. And new is, oddly enough, a reminder of what is now old. When fresh beginnings are stalked by the memories of stale endings, a sickly substance can steal our strength: regret. Regret empties anticipation, flattens dreams, and suffocates hope, because regret is a form of self-punishment. Whereas hindsight helps us learn from the past, regret beats us up with the past.

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<sup>2</sup> Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 24.



So for one entire day (or go for forty), I invite you to fast regret. Do not feed it. Do not give it space. Let it go: God's mercies are "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23). And meditate on Jesus' glorious promise from Revelation 21:5, "I am making everything new!"

TODAY'S READING: JOHN 12:12-19

(Adapted from Day 2 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)



TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 12:12-19

## DAY TWO

I wonder if Peter rebuked Jesus as the spokesman for all the Twelve. Surely, Jesus' talk of crosses and death would have been deeply unsettling for His followers, especially in light of the miracles they had witnessed. Approaching their two-year mark as Jesus' inner circle, the disciples had seen a dead girl come back to life, a demon-possessed man returned to peaceful sanity, storms calmed, bodies healed, bread multiplied, and, most recently, the Messiah walk on water.

Miracles, evidently, had not adequately prepared them to welcome crucifixion however. The problem, of course, is not with the miracles themselves but rather with our perception of the miracles. We tend to view a miracle as a divine deposit on more miracles. We like our miracles to be perpetual, thank you. Once raised, we want Lazarus to live forever. But he cannot. So we are bewildered when the recipient of the miracle still dies. It seems to me that miracles are less of a promise for tomorrow and more of a manifestation of God's love and power for today. Today, God provides bread. Today, God calms the storm. Tomorrow's needs and storms cannot void the reality of today's miracles any more than today's miracles can void the potential of tomorrow's needs and storms.

When miracles miscarry, we tend to panic and attempt to prop up hearts and hopes with forced optimism. Here, then is my Lenten plea for the day: let the mourning mourn. Grant those who grieve the dignity to ask questions. Bestow upon the bewildered permission to not edit their honesty.

Crucifixion is, after all, serious work.

### TODAY'S FAST: FIXING IT

Six years before I met my husband, his first wife died in a tragic car accident. The two loved God and one another and were headed back to seminary from celebrating Christmas with their families when



they hit an ice-covered stretch of road. Barry explained that following the accident the greatest gift people gave him was their supportive presence. The most hurtful offerings came from those who tried to fix Barry's pain with platitudes such as *God picks His favorite flowers for His heavenly garden*. Or *You're young; you will remarry*. Such clumsy attempts to fix someone else's pain reflect the probability that we are uncomfortable facing our own. So today, fast fixing things. Let the broken be broken for a day—be that a tool or a heart.

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 13:8-17

(Adapted from Day 8 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)



TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 13:8-17

## DAY THREE

Leaving Bethany, Jesus' nard-adorned feet carried Him the short two-mile distance to Jerusalem. The Apostle John described two distinct "crowds" that surrounded Jesus on what we now call Palm Sunday. The night before, in Bethany, as Jesus enjoyed the warmth of Lazarus's hospitality and Mary anointed His feet, "a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (John 12:9). According to Luke's account, it seems that some part of this crowd—which Luke 19:37 further identified as a "crowd" of μαθητής (*mathētēs*), i.e., "disciples"—followed Jesus into Jerusalem the next day.

Entering the City of David with a crowd of followers and disciples, Jesus was then further surrounded by a crowd already in the city. John explained, "The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna!'" (John 12:12–13). Around 550 years earlier, Zechariah had prophesied:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you;  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

As Jesus, in fulfillment of the prophecy, entered Jerusalem riding a borrowed colt and as the crowd of His followers met the crowd at the Feast, messianic joy erupted! For a moment, for one beautiful moment, the crowds of Jerusalem honored their King.

And Jesus did not stop them.

Even though He knew that the people would soon reject Him, Jesus still showed up for the parade they held in His honor. Jesus did not let the rejection of tomorrow cause Him to reject the love of today.



## TODAY'S FAST: SPECTATORSHIP

The religious leaders were aghast on Palm Sunday with the crowds, the cloaks, the palm branches, and the praise. "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" they demanded (Luke 19:39). The whole celebration was too wild, too organic, too out of their control. So they refused to enter in and sacrificed joy to something they deemed greater—be that propriety, suspicion, or, perhaps, jealousy. I wonder if I, too, would have paused, because I am by nature overly cautious. At times, the combination of troubleshooting, discernment, and introversion reduces me to a spectator instead of a participant.

Today, fast spiritual spectatorship. Enter into worship. When considerations start turning into hesitations about something Jesus is clearly at the center of, throw hypercaution to the wind, and celebrate Jesus with abandon.

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 15:1-17

(Adapted from Day 14 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)

A silhouette of a person standing on a dark, rocky outcrop, looking up at a vibrant, colorful sky filled with stars and a bright, glowing band of light, possibly the Milky Way.

TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 15:1-17

## DAY FOUR

Jesus (our pure Redeemer) experienced grief, anger, and frustration. Jesus (our sinless Savior) cursed fig trees, turned over tables of injustice, and issued public rebukes to hypocrites. Which brings us to John 12:27 and another window into Jesus' holy—but not remotely dull—inner world.

Either Hellenistic Jews or God-fearing Gentiles, “some Greeks” who had come to worship God at the Passover Feast told Philip that they would like the opportunity to see Jesus (John 12:20–21). The news triggered something deep within Jesus.

He said, “Now my soul [ψυχή (*psychē*)] is troubled [ταρασσω (*tarassō*)]” (John 12:27). He stated (aloud) that His “inner self, mind, thoughts, feelings, heart, and being”<sup>3</sup> was *tarasso*, which can mean to “stir up, cause great distress, trouble, disturb, cause a riot, throw into confusion.”<sup>4</sup> In that moment, Jesus' self-described *psychē* resembled more of a stormy sea than a mild meadow.

Pause a moment to take in this reality: Jesus was troubled. When was the last time you heard a leader confess, “My soul is troubled”? Yet, from Jesus' life, *holy can feel troubled*. Does it trouble us that Jesus felt troubled? Is Jesus' disclosure consistent with our images of Him? These are critical questions because they reveal the attitudes and actions we have associated with words like *holy*, *sinless*, and *sanctified* for Jesus, and, subsequently, for ourselves.

Jesus then followed up this somewhat startling statement by asking, “What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:27–28).

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 320.

<sup>4</sup> Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.



Obedience is not a moment: it is a process connected by countless moments.

And in the midst of Jesus' journey, He felt troubled. Clearly, then, a troubled soul is not always the sign of a faith deficit. A troubled soul is sometimes the signature of obedience-in-the-making. The obedience of Christ that set us free on the cross was the closing parenthesis on earth of a long process, not of a sudden decision. Likewise, when we hear Jesus' "Come, follow Me," our opening "Yes!" and the Father's closing "Well done!" are connected by countless moments in which we discern and reconfirm our decision to follow over and over and over again.

And, evidently, in the process, it is Christlike to admit, "My soul is troubled!"

## TODAY'S FAST: PREMATURE RESOLUTION

Process can be a troublesome thing. It disrupts us and disorients us and we would much rather skip to the end. But to live true, we must allow process to run its course. Question it, weep through it, agonize over it . . . but, for the sake of our souls, we dare not truncate process because time alone makes its work soul-deep.

Today, fast premature resolution. Resist tidying up when you are in the muddy middle of the process of obedience-in-the-making. Befriend undone. Name the trouble. Like Jesus, talk to yourself and your Father God. Ask Him if alternative routes exist again and again and again . . . until you push through resistance, pass around resentment, press past resignation, and emerge into willful (even if tearful) partnership with God.

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 18:1-11

(Adapted from Day 21 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)



TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 18:1-11

## DAY FIVE

Years ago, I began to study a simple sentence that held profound insight regarding the route and ultimate destination of Jesus’ “Follow Me.” In John 14:31, hidden between Jesus’ messages about the coming of the Spirit and abiding in the vine, Jesus told His disciples, “Come now, let us leave,” and proceeded to teach for another twenty minutes. In the Greek, the sentence is structured as a command [Ἔγειρεσθε (*Egeiresthe*) “Come”] followed by an exhortation [ἄγωμεν (*agōmen*) “let us leave”] and an adverb [ἐντεῦθεν (*enteuthen*) “from here”].

The command especially caught my interest. In various forms, *egeirō* occurs in Scripture over one hundred forty times. *Egeirō* is an ordinary, as opposed to a deeply theological, word that appears in a small handful of contexts, all of which have in common the theme of *transition*. Most often, *egeirō* refers to the transition from death to life. In roughly a quarter of occurrences, *egeirō* is used to describe a transition of posture, as in the context of the miraculous.

However, in John 14:31, *egeirō* has less to do with the miraculous than with the extraordinarily ordinary; less to do with life after death than with crucifixion during life. In John 14:31, *egeirō* refers to a transition in direction: it provides instructions for movement from a certain place in a specific direction.

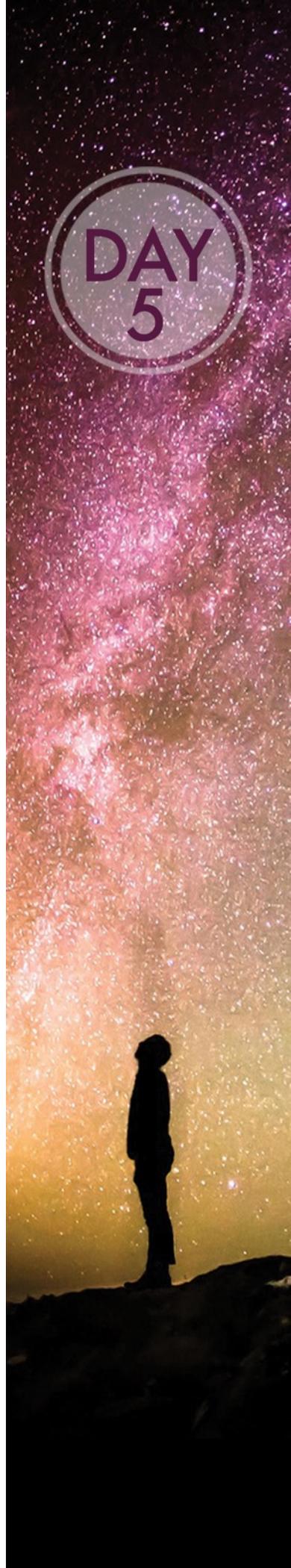
Jesus’ words were announcing a shift in His, and His disciples’, story. In short, it was time to purposefully get moving. Personally, I translate John 14:31 as “Get up! Get going!”<sup>5</sup>—which begs the rather logical question of “Where?”

The cross.

As we read in Luke 9:51, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Note that

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<sup>5</sup> In the course of writing this book, I was delighted to discover that *The Message* version of the Bible translates John 14:31 similarly: “Get up! Let’s go. It’s time to leave here.”



Jesus did not start with this revelation. When calling the first disciples, Jesus said, "Follow Me" not "Follow Me to the cross."

The disciples, no doubt, started following Jesus with great respect and sincere admiration. However, love needs time to grow before it has the strength to go wherever the Beloved beckons. Though all would stumble, one would bail, and none could fathom the cost, the disciples from John 14:31 forward followed Jesus cross-ward.

Cross-ward is a commitment that passion may make but that only love can keep.

## TODAY'S FAST: NEUTRALITY

Cross-talk can be rather confusing. The disciples, too, were baffled by what *the cross* meant to Jesus. When Peter chided Jesus for His predictions of doom and gloom awaiting in Jerusalem, Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but merely human concerns." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow me." (Matthew 16:23–24)<sup>6</sup>

Deny self or deny Jesus: this is the crux. Remaining neutral is not an option. We have to choose a side. Today, fast neutrality. In the small, undocumented details of life, choose Jesus over self and recommit to living cross-ward.

*The cross* is the ultimate call to decrease. *The cross* is a call not to forget our own names but to live and die for the Name of Another. *The cross* is a call to renounce self-direction and shift leadership loyalties from our *selves* to our Savior.

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 18:19–24

(Adapted from Day 24 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)

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<sup>6</sup> See also Mark 8:34–35 and Luke 9:23.



TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 18:19–24

## DAY SIX

“This hour” was still not over. “This cup” was still full of suffering. Countless pilgrims have sought to retrace Jesus’ agonizing steps alone with the Scriptures, in respectful silence before Stations of the Cross, and even along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. Why linger in the pain so many centuries after Christ’s resurrection?

Because it was real. Perhaps we would live differently if we remembered more frequently (and more accurately) what the cross cost.

After Pilate handed Jesus over to his soldiers for crucifixion, his soldiers led Jesus out of the city. Once the company arrived outside the city at the place where Rome executed its prisoners, all four Gospels starkly state, “they crucified him.”<sup>7</sup>

Crucifixion was not a Roman invention. Eastern cultures—such as Assyria, Phoenicia, and Persia—employed crucifixion for almost a thousand years before Rome officially adopted the method for use with non-Roman criminals.<sup>8</sup> Rome utilized the punishment liberally, and though Pilate used water to symbolically wash responsibility off his hands (Matthew 27:24), his soldiers used water to wash very real blood off their hands daily. Crucifixion was part of the job. What we call Good Friday was simply another day of work to them.

Jesus’ breath had jump-started Adam’s life but now Jesus, paying for the sins of Adam and his descendants, was struggling for air. With bones nailed to the cross and blood pouring from His wounds, the “author of life” (Acts 3:15), through Whom “all things were created” (Colossians 1:16), was dying.

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<sup>7</sup> See Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18.

<sup>8</sup> Vassilios Tzaferis, “The Archaeological Evidence,” Biblical Archaeological Society. <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/crucifixion/a-tomb-in-jerusalem-reveals-the-history-of-crucifixion-and-roman-crucifixion-methods/> (accessed April 23, 2015). Originally published as “Crucifixion—The Archaeological Evidence,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 11 no. 1 (January-February 1985): 44–53.



Our jewelry-studded crosses did not prepare us for this. Perhaps more than other ages, we must work to see Jesus in Golgotha. Soberly consider Jesus' sacrifice and be humbled anew by the prophetic words of Isaiah spoken some seven centuries before Golgotha:

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

## TODAY'S FAST: WILLFUL SIN

Jesus died for our sin. Why then do we work to keep it alive? What benefit do we perceive ourselves receiving? Does that benefit outweigh the cost Christ paid? This is not a simplistic call to stop sinning. No, this is a sincere call for us to start loving Jesus to a degree that compels us to walk away from sin where we can and get help where we cannot. Today, in the shadow of Christ's crucifixion, offer this prayer to Jesus:

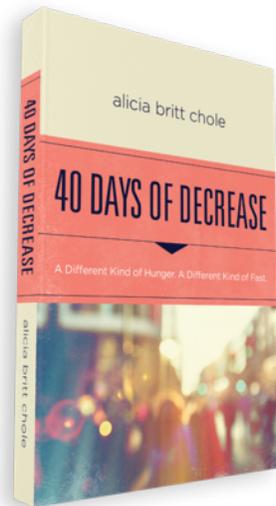
Savior, am I caressing anything you were crucified for?  
If so, I repent: forgive me, heal me, send help to me,  
and strengthen my love for You.  
When I am tempted, may I see Your cross, remember Your cost,  
and let love "bind my wandering heart" to You.

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 20:1-9

(Adapted from Day 33 of *40 Days of Decrease* by Alicia Britt Chole)



TODAY'S  
READING:  
JOHN 20:1-9



## ABOUT THE BOOK

*40 Days of Decrease*, by Dr. Alicia Britt Chole, guides readers through a study of Jesus' uncommon and uncomfortable call to abandon

the world's illusions, embrace His kingdom's realities, and journey cross-ward and beyond. Designed to prepare our hearts for Easter, *40 Days of Decrease* can also be experienced by those who desire to honor Christ's resurrection year-round. A life-engaging guide for communities and individuals, each day of *40 Days of Decrease* features a devotional based upon Jesus' life, guidance for reflection, suggested (and occasionally surprising) daily fasts, an inspiring quote for prayerful meditation, an optional and somewhat academic sidebar chronicling the historical development, practices, and images of Lent, and a suggested Scripture reading with journaling space.

