

S.A.I.N.T.S. 2026

40-Day Lenten Challenge

John 10:10

February 18, 2026 - April 5, 2026

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Welcome Back for Year 2!

For those of you who are new to the **S.A.I.N.T.S. 40-DAY LENTEN CHALLENGE** or are interested to see what we've changed for this year, here are the newly updated goals for this Lent. *All changes are seen in red.*

Our theme verse for 2026 is:

John 10:10 - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

The goal of the **Lenten Challenge** this year is to stay focused on the abundant life you have through Jesus Christ your LORD as you strive to live in a hostile world.

What is the **S.A.I.N.T.S.** 40-Day Lenten Challenge?

John 14:9 [Jesus says] “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.”

It's always those questions of faith that I think we all struggle with one time or another:

“Why do we not see God nor hear his voice?”

“Why is life so hard? Why am I struggling so much?”

“Does God even care?”

“Why do I keep struggling with certain sins?”

“Why does Christianity not seem so exciting?”

The answer to every spiritual problem is to look to Jesus- *“the author and perfecter of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2). As the approaching time of Easter invites us into the story of Jesus’ sacrificial death and His glorious resurrection, year after year, we are endowed with the proof that our salvation has been completed and our hope of eternal life with God is secure.

Lent is a season of preparation, meditation, and I would add examination. The 40 days of Lent are associated with Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11) and with the connection of the Israelites 40-year wandering in the wilderness of the Old Testament.

Lenten Practices: As most churches decorate their sanctuaries with purple, the colors of royalty and repentance, these 40 days of Lent are a season of penitence, prayer, and preparation leading to Easter - where your abundant life is found - through Jesus’ resurrection.

Lent is a season set in a habit of repentance. We turn away from sin and focus our attention towards Christ, His mercy and forgiveness. This practice is marked by the activity of fasting as good bodily training and preparation. **Fasting** becomes a practice of giving up something in order to devote that time to prayer and meditation on God’s word.

When we say repentance, it is nothing other than two parts, Contrition & Faith. Contrition says that I am sorry for my sins as Faith calls out to God to trust in Him for our salvation. Jesus said, ***“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).*** “Time” here doesn’t refer to chronological time on a clock, but rather, God’s appointment of time to intervene in your life by the Holy Spirit to convict you of sinful ways. The picture of repentance is a 180-degree lifestyle change to lay down your sins that have been nailed to the cross and died with Jesus on Good Friday.

Daily Struggles & New Habits: (Lenten Formation for Faith): There are days where it seems like you are going through the same old rituals day in and day out and it seems somewhat boring and mundane. Lent is a great time to reset.

It has been said that new habits are formed in roughly 36 days. With the season of Lent upon us, why not take those 36 days to form a habit, and use Lent to build a spiritual discipline & reinvigorate your faith, hence the “challenge” component.

Journalist Charles Duhigg in his book *The Power of Habit*, noted that any person who is able to make small changes in their life can begin a chain reaction of positive changes in other areas of life. These newfound habits that become a part of one's life are called Keystone Habits. Utilizing this idea of a Keystone Habit in relation to faith, the **S.A.I.N.T.S. 40-Day Lenten Challenge** is designed to build habits in spiritual discipline through **six** key areas. **This year, we added a fifth and sixth habit.**

1. **Fast:** Giving up something as a fast, not necessarily food
2. **Replace:** Reading God's Word
3. **Pray:** Praying for one another
4. **Support:** Supporting each other by wearing the **S.A.I.N.T.S.** bracelet
5. **Check In: (*New)** Meet weekly with an accountability partner
6. **Work: (*New)** Complete the daily and physical task of physical discipline

Habit 6: Work - Physical Activity

All too often we live static lives and we lose stamina, the ability to flex, move, and bend. Our phones are even giving us a new posture with hunched shoulders and weakened necks leading to possible migraines (study the suboccipital muscles and poor posture).

It is estimated that 45-50% of Americans make a New Year's resolution to start exercising. They make the jump to start a gym membership complete with a new wardrobe of workout attire or even buy some equipment, but we find that we don't prioritize time to keep it up after 3 weeks. With January's frozen days, it always seems the longest month of the year, and we catapult into February already running dry.

In addition to the **Habit of Work**, I want to add an additional **Habit to Check In** as a response to the amount of people who have admitted last year that they struggle with consistency. I want to help build a base for success. In other words...

Habit 5: Check In

***Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)***

Though this is a challenge for many, especially those who are either introverted, or those who feel like they have no one, there is one very clear piece of wisdom that scripture teaches.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (ESV) “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up.”

Habit 5: Check in: The goal is **THURSDAY MIDNIGHT:** Check in to see if you need to lock in or better support your battle buddy.

The accountability habit is simple. Check in once a week, that's it. Feel free to use a spouse if you are married, or a friend if you are single.

Here are the (guideline) questions that *should be answered weekly (I will provide these for you as part of the weekly packet);

- **Fasting / Self-discipline:** *Where did you practice self-control this week, and where did you struggle?*
- **Scripture:** *Have you been faithful in reading and hearing God's Word? What stood out to you?*
- **Prayer:** *Have you been consistent in prayer, and what has been weighing most heavily on your heart?*
- **Work / Physical Discipline:** *How did you care for your body through work or exercise this week?*
- **Community / Support & accountability:** *Where do you need encouragement or help to remain faithful in the coming week?*
- **Intercession:** *How may I pray for you specifically this week?*

If this seems overwhelming, the weekly emails will guide you through the process with a check-off list. Don't fret about having to remember everything. I got your 6.

S.A.I.N.T.S. 40-Day Lenten Challenge

Built on our School's Identity, the acronym of "**S.A.I.N.T.S.**" shows not only the "story of sin to salvation and the Christian life of faith" but **S.A.I.N.T.S.** will also serve as a guide over these next six weeks or 40 days. Think of the acronym as a **path** that begins with sin, then moving towards redemption, and a continuation of living a life of sanctification.

S- Sin (Romans 3:23 *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*)

A- Atonement (1 John 2:2 *"He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*)

I- Intercession (1 John 2:1 *"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*)

N- New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*)

T- Tribulation (1 Peter 1:6-7 *“in this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*)

S- Sanctification (James 2:17 *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*)

Ground Zero: Martin Luther once said in a paraphrase, “the only thing that we bring to our salvation is our sin.” Let’s say perchance, if we had any contribution to our salvation with our good works, who would get the credit in heaven? Why would Jesus have had to die then for our sins? If we understand that as the Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome that *“All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God,”* my hope during this time then is to draw you to the cross where you can see your Savior’s death for atonement for your sins and after having risen from the dead, He continuously makes intercession before God in heaven. But as we are all aware, we still suffer tribulations and sorrows day in and day out and struggle to live according to His word and calling.

Some of the language may be foreign to those participating in the **S.A.I.N.T.S. 40-Day Lenten Challenge**, but each week, there will be a **Simple Sunday Devotional** that will help edify your life and enlighten your knowledge of the faith. These “Simple Sunday Devotions” will be emailed out on Sundays at 2:00 pm ET along with the scheduled readings, prayers, and probing questions for the week.

How do I participate in the **S.A.I.N.T.S. 40-Day Lenten Challenge?**

46 days or 40 days? When you do the math, there are actually 46 days between the beginning of Lent on **Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026** and its culmination on **Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026**. Lent being 6 weeks long with those additional days from Ash Wednesday to the first Sunday of Lent on Sunday, February 22, 2026, creates an additional 6 days that we need to account for if we only celebrate 40 days.

Because we treat each Sunday as a miniature Easter celebration during the Sunday Service of Church, you do **not** have to fast on Sunday. Allow yourself to partake in what you fasted from through the week as a meditation of gratitude that we live in the grace and mercy of Jesus’ completed atoning death and resurrection.

46 days of Lent (Minus) 6 Sundays = 40 days

When does it begin? Our 40-day challenge begins with **Week 0** on Ash Wednesday as a mental and spiritual preparation for the next 6 weeks. Though these are 4 days of preparation, they still technically count towards the 40 days.

Week 0 is Ground 0: On Ash Wednesday as a student, you will receive the Ashes on your forehead during chapel with the reminder - *For you are dust, and to dust you shall return*". That day you will also receive your **S.A.I.N.T.S.** bracelet and you begin your fast. *(If you are not a student, I will have your student bring yours home with them. If you are not connected to Lutheran High, you may pick up your bracelet up from the LHS office, or we can deliver them to your home association church. Please make sure you communicate with Pastor Timothy Benzinger at Lutheran High School to make these arrangements - tbenzinger@lhsi.org).*

Rules & Guidelines:

We only have **one rule** in this and that is **'Let the Grace of God rule in your hearts.'** **What that means is if you miss a day of reading or if you stumble in your fasting, don't beat yourself up, nor let guilt burden you down. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and go at it again the next day. Please do not feel that you have to go back and catch up on days you missed reading, and please don't see it as a failure to Lent if you stumble. But please be intentional that you don't fall behind if possible. In all things, have fun with this challenge because you aren't in it alone.**

Guidelines:

Habit 1. Give up something

One thing that I desire for this 40-day Lenten Challenge is we begin with a Lenten tradition and that is to **FAST** from something. Yes, you read that right, give up something for these 40 days. It can be as simple as chocolate, caffeine, video games, movies, maybe even sugar to do a 46 day detox. As an example, one Lent, I gave up social media and doom scrolling from dinner until the next morning because I knew that it was robbing my time from my wife and kids as I completely checked out from reality. **(If you think someone needs to fast from something, please, do not put that fasting goal on another person. Live in grace as you bear with one another (Col 3:13). Keep your fast personal between you and God. Trust that God will show you and others what to fast.)**

What should you choose? Choose a habit or something that you partake in daily, something you do without thinking. It could be something that you know you needed to give up a long time ago, or it could be something that needs to be pruned or cut out of your life. Challenge yourself to struggle a little bit and make yourself uncomfortable, only through struggle do we grow stronger (Rom 5:1-5). The church has historically participated in a Lenten Fast to devote their minds and focus from oneself and turn in prayer and meditation to God.

Our Confessions teach *that right fasting is a fruit of repentance commanded by God in the same way as right praying and right alms-giving; that fasting is useful for keeping the flesh in check; and that it is fine external training (Ap XII 139, 143)*. Fasting helps to strengthen a person's resolve when they are used to falling towards instant gratification and giving in. Where the mind gets used to resisting from partaking in what was fasted and given up, your resolve and your fruit of self-control grows to help you to stand against and resist temptations to sin (Gen 4:7-8).

Habit 2. Daily Scripture Reading

Hebrews 1:1-2 *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

If we are going to “fast” and give up something for these 40 days, it is only natural that we **replace** it with something else. We have to intentionally replace it with something else otherwise we will pick up other bad habits of distraction that comfort us instead of allowing the uncomfot to grow us. (Remember my giving up social media, I turned to YouTube instead because I wasn't intentional and was still guilty of checking out).

As has been mentioned before, the goal ultimately is to lead us to the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb on Easter Morning. Our readings are coordinated with weekly themes. To understand why our sin led Jesus to the cross to die for us, we begin the acronym of **S.A.I.N.T.S.** with “**sin**” on **Week 1** and through the five consecutive weeks, we will see Jesus' active work, reign, and rule through His finished **atonement**, continued **intercession**, our identity of being a **new creation**, our daily **tribulation**, and our finished and active **sanctification**.

Habit 3. Pray

Not just pray for yourself during this time because it will be challenging, but pray for one another too because you're not in this alone. The fact that we are going through this together makes the challenge fun because we can all discover and discuss where we struggle, we support each other through mutual encouragement, and we become battle buddies, brothers, and sisters in this valley of tears.

Habit 3 will have some guided prayers, probing questions, and will consistently have the Lord's Prayer which we will pray every day. Because Jesus Christ gave us this perfect prayer in the words of the "Our Father," I want it to be integral to these 40 days. There is no prayer that reflects on God's saving mercy, that hits upon our sin, supplicates for our tribulation, and seeks Him for all that we need in this life through the petition of daily bread than the words He specifically gave us.

Habit 4. Support Each Other

Wear your bracelet. Is this a law or form of legalism? No, not at all. Is this a small form of piety (NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH PRIDEFUL PIOUSNESS)? To that I would say yes. Wearing your bracelet/wristband whatever you call it is a devotion and a confession that you are placing Jesus first during this season, that it's all about Him!

Wearing your bracelet is a bold statement that this Lenten season truly is all about Him and His finished work on the cross and resurrection from the grave, and that you have placed your faith and trust in Him. *This bracelet may serve a double purpose. People may ask questions, let it be a chance to witness Christ.*

As it relates to piety and religious devotion, we will dive deeper into the larger discussion of Sanctification during holy week when we come to the final "S" of **S.A.I.N.T.S.** For now, in the wide sense, sanctification includes all that God does for your salvation. In the narrow sense, sanctification is your spiritual growth and devotion, hence the challenge.

The goal of having something tangible serves as a visual reminder that **you are a part of something bigger than yourself.** When we live in the kingdom of God by our faith in Jesus Christ, He declares us righteous. We are tied to our triune God vertically (divine to human) *by His grace we are saved through faith,* and we are also connected to the body of Christ of believers horizontally (from person to person). Symbolically, this makes the sign of the cross. These connections bring us to the two great commandments, ***"To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself"*** (Matthew 22:37-38).

Habit 5: Check in

The goal is to check in with an accountability partner who is in the challenge with you by Thursday to help you stay on track. You will either meet in person or by phone call once a week.

Habit 6: Work

Find your baseline of exercise. These numbers will be used throughout the rest of the six remaining weeks for Habit 6: Work.

- How many pushups can you do in one minute (on knees, on feet, or against the wall if necessary)?
- How long can you plank?
- How far can you walk/run in 15 minutes? If you have a spin bike, ride for 15 minutes.

Disclaimer:

Under no circumstances do we want anyone hurt. If you are physically unable to do anything, please keep things simple and just move through your house, walk to the end of the yard, do some chair sit and stands... anything you struggle to do and yet push through is a success. Celebrate small victories.

Student Athletes:

If you are currently involved in a sport, your practice time counts for Habit 6: Work.

Why are we adding Habit 6 this year? You have one life to live, and people are counting on you. If you struggle to find time, give up doom scrolling and fight your flesh as you fight for your families. If it's worth it, you will make time. ***“And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Neh 4:14).***

I am excited for these next 40 days to see how the Lord will grow your faith and unite this community with one another.

The Lord's Blessings to you.

+Te Deum+