



LENT

2019



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## THE BEGINNING

Welcome to Lent 2019.

For the next 40 days, we embark on a journey. You are invited to share with Christ the experiences of temptation, suffering, loneliness and sacrifice in the wilderness.

Each week starts with a short devotion and a poem that relates to the theme and content.

Daily you will be guided with a devotion and prayer. At the end of each week you will find pondering questions to help you reflect on your experience. Decide how you want to engage with every day's content (morning or evening) and with whom you want to share this journey (by yourself, with your life partner, your family or friends).

If this is your first time on the Lent journey, visit [www.mosaiek.com](http://www.mosaiek.com) to help you prepare for this time.

The next four days will serve as a time of preparation. It is a time to connect to your humanity and mortality before entering with Jesus into the wilderness.

### **Matthew 4:1–11.**

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word, that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*

*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

## POEM

*Lent*

Lent is a tree without blossom, without leaf,  
Barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep,  
All unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees  
The setting-up, the dressing-up of trees,  
Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,  
A starkness after all has been withdrawn  
Of surplus and superfluous,  
Leaving no hiding place, only an emptiness  
Between black branches, a most precious space  
Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;  
Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,  
Lest we should miss the stars.

Jean M. Watt

***\*\*Watt's poem compares Lent to a tree that has lost all blossom and foliage. It's a time when we can clear out the clutter and noise in our lives, and draw our attention away from the things in life that are surplus to requirement. There is something stark about a bare tree in winter. Perhaps you prefer to see the blossom in spring, the greenery of summer or the golden foliage of autumn. Yet when you take all that away, you get a different view, an emptiness, that we should cherish because it allows us to see the bigger picture, perhaps even the possibility of seeing the stars.***

***Lent is a time when we can choose to see beyond those things with which we surround ourselves for comfort, reassurance or pleasure, but which may also obscure the deeper richness of life. Lent is a chance to strip our lives back to the basics; to enjoy simplicity; to focus on what really matters in life - rather than risk suffocating our souls with the junk we accumulate along the way.***

**DAY 1****VULNERABILITY**

*"...for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

**Gen 3:19 (NIV)**

The first day of Lent is called Ash Wednesday. On this day, at the beginning of our 40-day journey in preparation for Easter weekend, we think about our humanity and mortality. In many churches the tradition on Ash Wednesday is to receive an ash mark or cross on your forehead. The ash is usually made from the palm branches of the Palm Sunday of the previous year and mixed with oil. The branches remind us of our brokenness where "Hosanna's!" turn to "Crucify him!"

We usually do not linger in the reality of our mortality. Yet, we live with the knowledge of it every day. We are fragile and vulnerable. At the end of the creation story in Genesis, scripture reads: "...for dust you are and to dust you will return." Gen 3:19 (NIV)

**DEVOTION**

Lie down on the floor, on your stomach in a prayerful posture. Place your ear to the ground. Remind yourself that you are dust, part of this earth. God breathes his breath into dust, and life is birthed. What is God possibly saying to you about your humanity and mortality? What memories or associations come up when you think about the words: "vulnerable" and "mortal?"

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to accept: I am dust.

**DAY 2****STRIPPED**

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"*

**Phil 2:5–8 (NIV)**

Jesus' life on earth was marked with humiliation. He stripped himself in a sense from his godliness by becoming human. He did this so that we, a sinful people, can become a redeemed people.

The Lord asks of each of us the same attitude. That we too, might be stripped for the sake of others and for the sake of God.

**DEVOTION**

Take a branch from your garden. Look at the leaves. Touch the places where you can see growth. Touch the places where you can see death, barrenness. Being stripped brings life. In what ways have you experienced circumstances where you have been stripped of something or someone to receive a new reality for your life?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me in being stripped: I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****SUFFERING**

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!"*

**Phil 2:5–8 (NIV)**

Lent reminds us of Christ suffering for us.

His suffering in humanity, rejection and the crucifixion.

In the early church the creed of faith describes Jesus' way of suffering:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell...

*(The Apostle's Creed)*

Notice how the Apostle's Creed describes Jesus' journey of suffering with the words: "born", "suffered", "crucified", "died", "buried" and "descended into hell."

During Lent, we are invited to embark this journey of suffering alongside Christ.

**DEVOTION**

Draw the symbol of the cross. Look at the symbol used for criminals over centuries.

A symbol of suffering. For us, a symbol of faith. Read the Apostle's Creed again. What emotions come to you when you receive the invitation to follow Jesus in suffering?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me in suffering: I want to follow You.

**DAY 4****IN HIS FOOTSTEPS**

*"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."*

**1 Pet 2:21 (NIV)**

Peter gives us words for our calling in following Christ, even in his suffering. He reminds us that Christ set the example of our suffering, even when we do not ask for or deserve it.

We prefer to ask God to save and free us from sinfulness and the consequences of our wrongful acts and words. We forget that we are called to follow in his steps by being prepared to also suffer with him.

Lent is a tree without blossom, without leaf,  
 Barer than blackthorn in its winter sleep,  
 All unadorned. Unlike Christmas which decrees  
 The setting-up, the dressing-up of trees,  
 Lent is a taking down, a stripping bare,  
 A starkness after all has been withdrawn  
 Of surplus and superfluous,  
 Leaving no hiding place, only an emptiness  
 Between black branches, a most precious space  
 Before the leaf, before the time of flowers;  
 Lest we should see only the leaf, the flower,  
 Lest we should miss the stars.

Jean M. Watt

Suffering is "*stripping bare*" and being left in the "*emptiness*." It is usually in this "*emptiness*" that we come closest to God. It is the place where we find meaning for and in our suffering.

**DEVOTION**

Sometimes we choose suffering, other times it comes across our path without our asking. What memories of your life come to you when you think about the word "suffering?"

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me in my suffering: I want to follow You.

## THE BEGINNING - *Reflection on the week*

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times this week where you felt close to God, consoled, what was life-giving or what interested you.
- When, this week, did you feel far from God, what felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.



WEEK 1



## INTO THE WILDERNESS

### *Sunday*

Jenny Baker writes about the wilderness seasons of our life:

*Deserts are harsh, inhospitable places; places of danger and risk where death walks close behind you.*

The Greek word for wilderness is *heremon*, and it means "place of silence or solitude". This was the kind of place in which Jesus found himself in the wilderness. It was a time of preparation. As he came to a place of silence and solitude, he also came into a place of preparation for his ministry.

The wilderness is not always a pleasant place to be in. It is empty. It is dry. It is strange. The experience in the wilderness can be painful. It can be lonely. Yet, you are not alone. Christ is with you in the wilderness, and you are with Him...

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry... Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.***

***Matt 4:1–2, 11 (NIV)***

## POEM

*Meister Eckhart*

And now, because we all seek perfection,  
we must stop complaining before God,  
realise that the runway towards God and heaven  
is found in the self and in the silence.

One thing is necessary Martha, tell this to the sisters,  
and that is the solitary walking through deserts.  
Love is not greater than what you will find there -  
even though Paul lyrically wrote about it to the Greeks.  
God is in you. From him, nothing is apart  
and when you are alone, his company is closer.  
Solitude is necessary, close to the Nothing and the Not  
where God is. And, do not weary yourself with up cheer,  
up to God. He will come towards you.  
He strives towards the human, his abiding place.

Go thus to the deserts, but do not  
carry the desert in your heart.  
Because deserts grow until everything  
is still and cold and dead. M. M. Walters

- ***Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1328) was a theologian who taught that to finally be with God, one needs to be stripped of one's perceptions of God, and for that one needs silence.***
- ***"perfection" – Matt 5:48 (NIV)***  
***"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."***

**DAY 1**

**DESERT**

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

**Matt 4:1 (NIV)**

When you think about the desert, what comes to mind? Hot? Dry? Thirst? Survival? Death? When you think about your own desert experiences, what comes to mind? A terminal illness? A divorce? The death of a loved one? Unemployment?

The desert strips us from everything we rely on to go through life. We are stripped until it is only us, our experiences, and God. The desert can kill you, or give you a deeper meaningful life.

Notice the first phrase of the poem *Meister Eckhart*.

We journey with Christ to attain *perfection* (Matt 5:48).

It might sound strange, but this perfection does not mean to be without fault. This perfection invites us to fully love the Father, as Christ loved him. To fully love others, as Christ loved them. This journey to *perfection* invites us to know ourselves and to know God. The two are not a part. Silence and solitude, which is a given in the desert, help us on this journey.

**DEVOTION**

Ball your fists. What are the things you rely on in your spiritual and life journey? Open your hands. What might be the effect of receiving the desert experience, and God to rely on?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me in my desert experiences: I want to follow You.

## DAG 2

## ALONE

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1–2 (NIV)**

From the Poem Meister Eckhart

*One thing is necessary Martha, tell this to the sisters,  
and that is the solitary walking through deserts.  
Love is not greater than what you will find there -  
even though Paul lyrically wrote about it to the Greeks.  
God is in you. From him, nothing is apart  
and when you are alone, his company is closer.*

The Holy Spirit led Jesus to the *solitary walking through deserts*. There the devil tempted Jesus and during the challenges of hunger, hardships and loneliness Jesus declares his love for God.

- In 1 Corinthian 13 Paul writes lyrically about love. One can speak a lot about love, but the *solitary walking through deserts* forces you to experience and find God's love.
- While Moses was in his *solitary walking through deserts* he found God in a burning bush. It changed his life.
- On mount Sinai Moses was alone for 40 day – *solitary walking through deserts* – and he once again experienced a significant meeting with God.

The Bible teaches us that God also lives *in us* and therefore *when you are alone, his company is closer*.

## DEVOTION

What invitation comes to you when you think about your daily rhythm of life considering the word, solitary?

## PRAYER

Lord, help me in my solitary walking: I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****SOLITUDE**

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said...”*

**Matt 4:1–3a (NIV)**

From the Poem Meister Eckhart:

*One thing is necessary Martha, tell this to the sisters,  
and that is the solitary walking through deserts.*

These are challenging words from the poet: *One thing is necessary Martha... and that is the solitary walking through deserts.* The poet emphasizes that the pathway to perfection is the *solitary walking through deserts*.

He is referring to the experience of Jesus, Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-41. Martha represents the busy person that does not want to go into solitude. Mary represents the person that comes to a standstill and sits at the feet of Christ – a certain *solitary walking through deserts*.

We can certainly create our own *solitary walking through deserts*. Times of silence and solitude built into our daily or weekly rhythms. The early Church leaders taught that silence is like a pool of water next to the road. When the water remains still for a little while two things happen: You can see the bottom of the pool, and the heavens are reflected on the surface.

When we take the time daily, or from time to time to enter solitude, we get the opportunity to become aware of what lies at the bottom of our lives. We become aware of our deepest desires, our deepest pain or our deepest frustrations. It is here at the bottom of the pool where the Lord starts his transforming work in our life.

**DEVOTION**

Look at water in a glass. Imagine that you are the glass filled with water. In your solitude, what do you observe at the bottom of the pool of water of your being?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me in my time of solitude: I want to follow You.

**DAY 4****CLOSE**

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said...”*

**Matt 4:1–3a (NIV)**

From the poem, *Meister Eckhart*:

*God is in you. From him, nothing is apart  
and when you are alone, his company is closer.*

These phrases are important in this poem. Look at the poem in its entirety and see how the words *God is in you* occur right in the middle of the poem – lying in the centre of all the other words and ideas.

If God really lives *in us* as we read in Ephesians 4:5-6, then it means that we need to live with a deep awareness of this reality. But, to become aware of this reality, we often need the *solitary walking through deserts*.

Many people struggle to think about God as living *in us*. For many God is the One far away from us, and sometimes he decides to move closer. Of course, God is near and far and everywhere, but he is also as close as we are to ourselves: *in us*. When we start living with God *in us*, we can begin to understand why solitude and silence is such an important part of our journey, because then *his company is closer*.

When we live with the idea that God is far from us, we will experience loneliness and desolation when times of pain come across our path. When we live with the reality that God is *in us*, then we know that in every and all pain and suffering, God is close. Then we discover: *when you are alone, his company is closer*.

**DEVOTION**

Think about your day – where did you experience God being close to you? Where did you experience God as far from you?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to stay close to You: I want to follow You.

## DAY 5

## P R E S E N C E

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

**Matt 4:1 (NIV)**

From the poem, *Meister Eckhart*:

*Solitude is necessary, close to the Nothing and the Not  
where God is. And, do not weary yourself with up cheer,  
up to God. He will come towards you.  
He strives towards the human, his abiding place.*

The poet is so convinced that solitude brings one closer to God that he writes *Nothing and Not* in capital letters – in other words *that's* where you will meet God!

We should try not to see our *solitary walking through deserts* as something we can use to force or manipulate God in helping us on our journey to *perfection*. No, the efforts we make during our Lent-journey is a way to come to a standstill, to open ourselves to God so that he can do his work in us. *He strives towards the human, his abode*.

In the last stanza, the poet warns us that life is not about the desert, because *deserts grow until everything is still and cold and dead*. No, it is about God and the *perfection* God continuously works **in** us.

Because God loves you, He wants you to progress in the way of love, in the way to *perfection*. We, however, get so preoccupied with our responsibilities and worries that it is difficult to become aware of the reality that we are His *abode*.

## D E V O T I O N

Look at your abode. The place where you feel safe, where you dream, where you relax. What thoughts or associations occur to you when you think of yourself as God's abode?

## P R A Y E R

Lord, help me to make my home in You: I want to follow You.

**DAY 6**

**CHOOSE**

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”*

**Matt 4:1 (NIV)**

The heading of this week's poem is *Meister Eckhart*. Who was he? Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1328) was a well-known theologian. He was a popular preacher in Köln. Because he did not only write and teach in Latin, as was the practice of the day, but also used the language of the everyday folk, he had a great following and influence.

Here are two popular quotes from his writings:

**“What a man takes in by contemplation, that he pours out in love.”**

Jesus was in silence and solitude in the desert for forty days, and thereafter his ministry of love started – love up unto the cross.

**“To be full of things is to be empty of God. To be empty of things is to be full of God.”**

Jesus' forty days in the desert were a time of being stripped, cleansed, to become empty of anything and everything that kept him from God. There he was confronted with his desires. There in his *solitary walking through deserts*, he chose God.

**DEVOTION**

What is there in your life that makes it difficult for you to choose God?

**PRAYER**

Lord, more of You and less of me: I want to follow You.

WEEK 1 - *Reflection on the week*

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times this week where you felt close to God, consoled, what was life-giving or what interested you?
- When, this week, did you feel far from God, what felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.





WEEK 2



## LED INTO THE WILDERNESS

*Sunday*

There are many roads around us. There are some that are clearly marked, and others that are hidden from sight. Pathways for our feet, and pathways for our hearts. When our eyes are open, we will find them.

Jesus is confronted with many pathways in the desert – pathways of temptation, error, turning, calling, truth and ministry.

This week we are led into the wilderness with Jesus. The footprints are there. We can follow. And then, we can discover the path, and the One that is the Way, Truth and Life.

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:***

***"He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."***

***Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.***

***Matt 4:1–11 (NIV)***

## POEM

*Mysteries, Yes ...*

Truly, we live with mysteries  
too marvelous to be understood.  
How grass can be nourishing  
in the mouths of the lambs.  
How rivers and stones  
are forever in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.  
How two hands touch and the bonds  
will never be broken.  
How people come,  
from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.  
Let me keep my distance, always,  
from those who think they have the answers.  
Let me keep company always with those who say 'Look!'  
and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.

Mary Oliver, Evidence

**\* Mary Oliver is an American poet. Her work is described as wisdom, generosity and vision in a world that is exsessed with flurry and inattention. She invites her readers to look intimately at a world not of our making.**

**DAY 1****R O A D S**

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

**Matt 4:1 (NIV)**

The phrase “all roads lead to Rome” can mean a few things. Literally it means that all roads lead to one destination – which was the case in the time of the Roman Empire. Rome was a symbol of security, power and affluence. It also meant that no matter what you did, you would do it in honour, and the standard of the Empire. There is also the more popular understanding of the phrase which means that no matter what you believe, you will reach the same ultimate destination.

Although the phrase wasn't known or used in ancient history, Christ's followers would definitely not have agreed with this figure of speech.

Rome was not their symbol of security, power or affluence. They did not give their loyalty to Caesar. They also did not accept that all religions would bring you to God.

They believed in the way and life of Jesus.

They would rather have believed that all roads lead to deserts. You will not find the will of God in Rome, but rather outside in the wilderness. Albert Nolan writes:

*“If we wish to follow Jesus, we need to follow him first and foremost into the desert.”*

The word desert (heremon) means silence. It means to become silent to all the voices inside myself so that I can hear and respond to the voice of God. Jesus heard many different voices in the desert – voices that tried to convince him about other truths about his identity.

Silence helps us in understanding our inner world. It reveals our attachments, our desires and what makes us happy. Loneliness brings comfortability that causes us to want to attach to the noise of our lives, to people, sight and thoughts. Silence helps us to take a careful look at our heart and mind – and when we observe the two, we can discern which powers are controlling our inner world.

**D E V O T I O N**

Become aware of the voices that try to lead you on “the roads to Rome.” What do you observe in your heart and mind? Are they integrated? Separate? Which powers are controlling your inner world? Surrender them to God.

**P R A Y E R**

Lord, help me to become silent so that I can find the road that leads to You: I want to follow You.

**DAY 2****LISTEN**

*“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him a day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly! However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”*

**Luk 18:7-8 (NIV)**

I always believed that God comes in supernatural ways to our life. Today I also believe that God's presence comes and can be experienced in natural ways. The signs are not necessarily always in the skies and stars. Sometimes it is much closer.

Right in front of us.  
On earth, as it is in heaven.

Albert Haase says that our earthly existence acts like a megaphone through which God speaks. He talks about the nitty-gritty of our lives – pain, backache, my neighbour, and even in the noise of pots and pans in the kitchen – God comes to us.

We discover heaven in our earthly existence.

In Luke 18 we find a beautiful image of how God invites us to become familiar with his will. Jesus uses the story about the unjust ruler and the widow. She asks something from him, and he refuses. She does not stop asking, and later the unjust ruler gives in and grants her requests. Luke's interpretation encourages us to pray without ceasing (Luke 18:7). This does not mean that we need to pray harder and longer, because God is not manipulated. It rather urges us to think about God as the widow. The one that returns without ceasing. This is God's presence in our entire life – without ceasing.

We must listen.

When I ignore my life, I ignore God.

To “keep your ears on the ground” is not only a figure of speech. It touches on the heart of a life with God and obedience to the life He calls us to.

**DEVOTION**

What do you think God is busy with in your life right now? What is he inviting you?

**PRAYER**

Lord, give me ears that  
hear the heavens on earth:  
I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****B L I N K E R S**

*"...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*

**Heb 12:1 (NIV)**

Race horses wear blinkers. It helps them to focus on only one thing, and place their focus on one goal: the end.

When blinkers allow us to come into a new awareness - to only see how Jesus is leading us, it is a good thing. But when blinkers become the idea of how Jesus is leading us, it can be dangerous. My ideas about the will of God can prevent me from doing the will of God. Think about Paul, who was hampered by the Holy Spirit because his blinkers regarding his mission were keeping him from the roads God wanted him to follow (Acts 16:6).

Discerning the will of God with dangerous blinkers will take us to a place where we only think about right and wrong. But decisions are so much more. Choices include the periphery and the impossible. Sometimes the decision lies between good and better, and sometimes between better and best. When it only focusses on right and wrong, it excludes so many possibilities!

The temptation of blinkers is that they give certainty and security – straight lines and predictable guarantees.

Maybe that was exactly what the devil had in mind when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Blinkers that would cause him to miss the Holy Spirit by thinking that the will of God is embedded in security, acceptance and power. The decision Jesus made frees us from security, acceptance and power in this world.

Jesus chooses vulnerability, dependency and servanthood.

"...fixing our eyes on Jesus" means to remove the blinkers withholding us from God's will.

**D E V O T I O N**

Take both your hands and place them over your eyes.

Now open them bit by bit and focus on one object that catches your eye.

Remove your hands and take in the whole picture.

Ask God to help you turn towards him. Turning towards God means seeing the bigger/whole picture.

**P R A Y E R**

Lord, remove my blinkers,  
so that I can see You: I  
want to follow You.

**DAY 4****DISCERN**

*"...for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light ..."*

**2 Cor 11:14 (NIV)**

Little Red Riding Hood is a story that teaches about good and evil and how to make decisions. Daniel Louw speaks about evil as a cheating art. We are cheated into thinking that we can take the shortcuts to not go through the effort of a long journey. Little Red Riding Hood's mother warned her about the shortcuts and still she decides to choose it as the better option.

A lesson to learn: The shortcut is the long journey; the long journey is the shortcut.

We get to know the will of God at crossroads. For Little Red Riding Hood, it was the encounter with the hidden wolf (in sheep's clothing), and for Jesus it was the tempting devil that provoked him with Scripture.

The shortcut will always be the temptation.

Our instant-gratification culture makes it very difficult to discern. Our mind-set is focused on quick fixes. From designer Bibles to guaranteed Jabez-prayers. The self-help sector has come up with a DIY self-help step for almost every thinkable problem in life.

Discernment is a way of **being**.

Jesus refuses to take the shortcuts to security, acceptance and power. He exposes the lies of the evil magician. He refuses security by choosing the words of God for life. He refuses acceptance by others by choosing not to perform a quick miracle. He refuses power by choosing to acknowledge that every power comes from, is sustained and given by God alone.

**DEVOTION**

Think about the crossroads in your life. What are the things that create resistance to choose a path?

**PRAYER**

Lord, give me wisdom at every crossroad: I want to follow You.

**DAY 5****HEART**

*"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."*

**Matt 4:11 (NIV)**

We discover God's will in vulnerability. In the wilderness, Jesus gives himself to God in utter dependency. Even the angels had to help and take care of him. Jesus overcame evil not with fighting fists, but with surrendering to the words of God.

We do not hear God because we are strong, but because we are weak and vulnerable – stripped from everything that would guarantee a fake outcome. Paul gives the advice: "...for when I am weak, I am strong..." (2 Cor. 9:10).

In our culture, this is a strange concept. We are taught that being uncertain and worried are signs of weakness. We need to go at life with balled fists. I do not want to be weak before God, because then it might reflect how weak your God is! We want to be perceived as being in control and secure in our social and religious settings. Usually our strength is motivated by our fear. When we succumb to our fears our heart becomes hardened to anything we fear.

Once a student asked his Rabbi: "Why are we taught to place the Word of God on our hearts and not in our hearts?" The Rabbi answered: "Only God can place his word in your heart. It is only when our hearts break that the words of God can enter."

Our hearts are broken – not like glass in thousands of pieces, but like a glass turned over to receive. When we can let go of all we hold onto, we can receive new possibilities.

People who change the world, are people whose hearts are broken and whose hands are open. They receive to give. Think about Martin Luther King (Jnr), Dorothy Day, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks and so many others. Within their pain so many new possibilities became a reality for others.

**DEVOTION**

What are you holding onto? Remain in silence long enough to experience how God breaks your heart and opens your hands to receive new possibilities.

**PRAYER**

Lord, break open my heart so that I can receive your words: I want to follow You.

**DAY 6****RETURN**

*"In returning and resting is our salvation,  
in quietness and confidence is our strength.*

**Is 30:15 (NIV)**

Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. He didn't go on a quick retreat or received easy answers for his problems. He remains in the uncertainty, takes his time, reflects and patiently faces temptations to understand the will of God.

The image of a tortoise can help us in understanding the journey to seeking and understanding the will of God. By the way – no one ever chooses the tortoise as a good-luck charm or mascot on the sportsfield. We would rather choose the bull, lion or hare - images of strength and speed!

The tortoise retreats its head inside its shell, to defend itself. Tortoises inspired the Romans and they literally protected their armies in the shape of a tortoise shell with their shields. This army formation is called the 'testudo', which means tortoise.

To retreat inwards and listen to God is the safest place on earth. This is where Jesus seeks and understands the will and kingdom of God (Luke 17:21).

The path of retreat, or returning, is continuous. There are no shortcuts in discernment. The tortoise always wins. Every small step in a new direction might not seem big or fast or strong, but over the years will mean a completely new direction. It brings us to places we never thought we could reach or find.

**DEVOTION**

Find an image of a tortoise. Use it as a bookmark when you read Scripture. Slow, small steps might change the direction of your entire life.

**PRAYER**

Lord, teach me to return and retreat to find You: I want to follow You.

## WEEK 2 - *Reflection on the week*

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times this week where you felt close to God, consoled, what was life-giving or what interested you.
- When, this week, did you feel far from God, what felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.





WEEK 3



## WORDS IN THE WILDERNESS

### Sunday

When Jesus is tempted, and confronted, there is a specific way in which he works. He returns to the words of his Father. These words live in him, encourage him, strengthen him.

Throughout centuries, Scripture has been a source of hope for Christians... think about the Psalms – believers have used these for centuries to find inspiration, guidance and encouragement. The early church practiced memorising words from Scripture and using it in prayer. These words became reservoirs of wisdom that fed their heart, mind and soul.

This week we focus on the Word of God in our wilderness experiences.

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: **'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word, that comes from the mouth of God.'**" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*

Jesus answered him, "**It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'**" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! **For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'**" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Matt 4:1–11 (NIV)

## P O E M

*Bible Study*

Open the text again to every question:  
Its lexicon of possibility,  
Its origin and form and Sitz im Leben,  
Its deep resistance and its clarity.  
Untwist the thread of prejudice that binds you,  
Pattern the fragments and reshape the shards,  
Be lost in reading till the reading finds you,  
Discern the Word that underpins the words.  
Begin at the beginning, make an end  
Of all your old evasions, make a start  
Counting the countless stars, the grains of sand,  
And find in them the fragments of your heart.  
Open the text again, for it is true,  
The Book you open always opens you.

Malcolm Guite

**\*Malcolm Guite is an English poet and preacher.**

**\* Sitz im Leben is a German phrase roughly translating to “setting in life.” Before the sources which comprise the Pentateuch were written, they were transmitted orally, probably within the context of worship (their ‘Sitz im Leben’).**

**DAY 1****SCRIPTURE**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

Long, long ago a large group of people lived in a shed. Every one of them was born in the shed. They grew up in the shed. They were happy and satisfied – all their needs were met and they knew of nothing better. The shed did not have a door to the outside. There was only a window near the roof of the shed. One day a group of children used a ladder to reach the window. One of the children caught his breath as he looked out the tiny window and saw the outside world. He thought: "Here we are. All these people. Looking upwards, staring at a ceiling. What would it be like for them to look up, see the sky, clouds and discover sun? "

Karl Bart uses this metaphor to describe what happens to us when we start reading Scripture. We encounter a world we were oblivious to. A world of love, forgiveness and freedom. Life in the shed could never prepare us for the life of God. We do not read Scripture to invite God into our life and find something we can use to our benefit. No, it is the opposite. We read Scripture to enter this life where He already was, is and will be. God comes to us, finds us, speaks to us through Scripture. This reality opens a world of desire for more of his Word. I do not read Scripture because I feel guilty, but rather because I long to find more of Him.

**DEVOTION**

Hold your Bible. Page through it. What is your attitude towards Scripture? What would change if you looked at the Word as God taking initiative to come to you, rather than you coming to God?

**PRAYER**

Lord, give me a desire for your words: I want to follow You.

## DAY 2

## WORDS

"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

In the wilderness, we discover the things that prevent us from receiving and hearing the Words of God. The Word comes to us, but we fail to hear and receive it because...

- the worries of life overwhelm us (think about the parable of the seed in Matt 13:1-9). We are so focused on our tasks and work, that we do not give it attention. We can call this **activism**.
- We can be so consumed with the ideas of the day, that we cannot receive or be open to new ideas or understanding. Jesus scolds Peter and tells him that he is consumed with the ideas of man and not the ideas of God. That is why he couldn't receive the words Jesus had for him (Mark 8:33). We can call this humanism.
- We can be so consumed with reading the words of God in the right away that it becomes dead right. We have the knowledge, but we cannot integrate it. Jesus warns us that the text itself is not the goal, but rather the means to the goal, which is God alone (John 5:39).

We are all tempted to approach the words of Jesus in ways that are not helpful. It might be beneficial to realise what the patterns are in your approach towards Scripture and then to talk to God about it.

## DEVOTION

What are things that hinder you from hearing Gods word? What makes it difficult to receive God's word?

## PRAYER

Lord, help me to move beyond the hindrances that keep me from hearing your words: I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****BREAD**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

Jesus said that just as we need food, we need the word of God.

Even if we can physically get through life, we will never experience life to the full. Many of us are severed from our inner world and live with a deep spiritual hunger. We have an inkling that there is something more that we need.

If we come in contact with that hunger, we usually interpret it incorrectly. We confuse it with a physical need or hunger and try to fill it with a new job, new person or new place.

The church father Augustine said that God himself placed this hunger in our heart and that it is ultimately a hunger for more of Him. Nothing, except his presence, can satisfy this hunger or restlessness. When we hear him, our hunger will be stilled. We realise that nothing can be a substitute and that we cannot live without his words.

**DEVOTION**

Read Psalm 63. Reflect on what you need most in your life. What is the deepest desire you have for your life, your family, your vocation? After you have found words to describe your desire, ask God if he has something more he wants for you according to his will.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to speak to you about my deepest desires: I want to follow You.

**D A G 4****R E A D**

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

**2 Tim 3:16–17 (NIV)**

One of the ways we hear the Word is by reading it ourselves.

His words come to us through Scripture and it is not only those who know something about Greek or Hebrew that can understand the Bible. It is not only important **that** we read the Word, but also how we read the Word. Jesus asks a young man: “How do you read?” (Luke 10:26).

Just after the birth of the church a way of reading Scripture was practised that can be helpful even today. This way of reading is helpful in hearing the Word of God.

The first important guideline is to be aware of our **attitude**. We come to Scripture in reverence and humility to receive. We live with an expectation that this Book allows us to hear the voice of God. We are not in control of what comes to us through Scripture. God reveals the Word he has for us.

When we read, we read slowly and attentively. We do not read in an analytical manner or to gather information. We do not read the same way we would read a novel or magazine. We are busy with the Word of God and ready to receive wisdom for our life. We read it rather with an attitude similar to reading a poem. It is not about how much we read. As we read we become aware of each word, phrase or idea that catches our attention. We become aware of what comforts and what disrupts our inner world.

The two Emmaus disciples in Luke 24 became aware of their inner worlds when Christ talked to them about Scripture – this is the same awareness we seek.

**D E V O T I O N**

Begin your time of prayer with asking God to speak to you. Read Matthew 4:1-11 slowly, attentively and repetitively. Write down the words/phrases/ideas that caught your attention. Thank God for his words in your life.

**P R A Y E R**

Lord, help me to read your Word in expectance: I want to follow You.

**DAY 5****MEDITATE**

*“The tempter came to him... Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

**Matt 4:3–4 (NIV)**

Read Jesus' wilderness experience again. After reading it, meditate on the word, phrase or idea that grabbed your attention.

By meditating on the word of God we move past the text and into the world of the text. The world of the text is greater, richer and more real than our own thoughts, ideas and experiences. The Hebrew word for meditate (nagah) is used to describe the process of an animal re-chewing its food (Isaiah 31:4).

This implies continuously mulling the word or phrase or idea and receiving it into our entire being. It includes our rational, descriptive actions; and also, our imagination, senses and emotions.

**DEVOTION**

Read Mark's description of Jesus' encounter (Markus 1:9-13).

Imagine how Jesus was meeting the wild animals. Notice his emotions.

Notice your own emotions. Talk to God about your experience.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to open my imagination and senses to receive your words: I want to follow You.

**DAY 6****HUNGRY**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

In Jesus' wilderness experience it is obvious that Scripture was important to him. He knew the words and had a way of recalling them.

As his followers, we also want to follow him in his relationship with Scripture. We also want to be fed and led by the Word of God as he was.

We are invited to eat the Word. This was the invitation to the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and John on the island of Patmos. The metaphor of eating was important in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Something physical happens to us when we engage with Scripture.

Benedict said that by reading and hearing the Word, we are placing it in our mouth. When we think about the Word we savour the nutrients of Scripture. When we pray the Word, we swallow it like a nutritious meal that builds and sustains us. As we eat the Word, we become the Word.

This is a way of life and a way that we can follow Jesus. When we taste this Way, we realise how hungry we have been and that nothing can satisfy us except the Word of God (John 6: 68).

**DEVOTION**

Prepare a meal. Smell, taste and eat. Reflect on the Word of God and the metaphor of eating the Word. In which ways are you fed by Scripture?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to live from every Word that comes from You: I want to follow You.

## WEEK 3 - *Reflection on the week*

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times this week where you felt close to God, consoled. What was life-giving or what interested you?
- When, this week, did you feel far from God? What felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.





WEEK 4



## TEMPTATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS...

### *Sunday*

Jesus was tempted three times. The word temptation means to be tested, to try, to experiment with. When we enter the wilderness, we are invited to recognise the temptations in our life.

With Jesus, we enter the wilderness to discover the source of wisdom that leads us to the reality of the temptations we face in our life.

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.  
Matt 4:1(NIV)***

## POEM

*In silence*

Be still  
 Listen to the stones of your wall.  
 Be silent, they try  
 To speak your

Name.  
 Listen  
 To the living walls.  
 Who are you?  
 Who  
 Are you? Whose  
 Silence are you?

Who (be quiet)  
 Are you (as these stones  
 Are quiet). Do not  
 Think of what you are  
 Still less of  
 What you may one day be.  
 Rather  
 Be what you are (but who?) be  
 The unthinkable one  
 You do not know.

O be still, while  
 You are still alive,  
 And all things live around you  
 Speaking (I do not hear)  
 To your own being,  
 Speaking by the Unknown  
 That is in you and in themselves.

'I will try, like them  
 To be my own silence:  
 And this is difficult. The whole  
 World is secretly on fire. The stones  
 Burn, even the stones  
 They burn me. How can a man be still or  
 Listen to all things burning? How can he dare  
 To sit with them when  
 All their silence  
 Is on fire?'

Thomas Merton

**\*Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk who was well-known as a social activist, writer, and poet. He asks if we dare sit in the silence and risk everything we know dissolving into thin air. We are not, after all, who we think we are.**

**DAY 1****CONFESS**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

Let's be honest. We don't find it easy to talk about our temptations. Very few people know us as tempted human beings. From the outside, our lives often seem to be free from any kind of inner conflict. The reality is quite the opposite. All of us have evil thoughts, or dark passions and longings, or subtle forces that threaten to undermine our walk with God. These experiences are bound up with our spiritual journey, yet we struggle to speak about them. Each one of us is a tempted human being.

How different it was with Jesus. Go back again to his own wilderness experience when he was tempted by the evil one for forty days. (Luke 4:1-2) Has it ever struck you that we are only able to read about this very personal experience because he shared it with his close friends? When he returned from the desert he must have called a few of his close friends together and said to them something like, "I have been through a tough time of temptation. Let me tell you about it..." As a result, we know today what took place in the intimacy of Jesus' heart two thousand years ago.

Perhaps this Lent, we can take seriously Jesus' example. Our temptations do not have to make us feel alone. Like Jesus did, we can find someone whom we trust and be honest with them about some of the struggles that go on in our heart. Not only can this sometimes be a great relief, it can open our lives to a powerful experience of God's overcoming grace. We also feel less isolated in our struggles, more connected with others and more open to the power of God's Spirit. Let us therefore break the silence around our temptations!

**DEVOTION**

Think of one trusted person in your life who walks with God, someone from outside your family, with whom you can share the temptations you experience.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to find words to confess my temptations to You: I want to follow You.

**DAY 2****TEMPTATION**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

As we saw yesterday, we are all tempted human beings. Every day brings with it temptations and evil influences that seek to sabotage our relationship with God. None of us are exempt from this experience. Usually, these temptations take the form of thoughts or feelings that pull us away from following the way of Christ. More often than not, when we struggle with these inner pressures towards wrong doing, we end up feeling bad about ourselves. Somehow we may even think that we have sinned because we have been tempted..

This is not the case. The Bible comforts us with the good news that Jesus had been tempted just like we are, yet was without sin. Here is what the author of the Hebrews writes: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with us in our weaknesses; but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15) Jesus reminds us that temptation is not a sin. Nor do our temptations surprise him, since, as Hebrews reminds us, he has already experienced every one of them himself.

This means that we certainly do not need to be ashamed about the dark thoughts and impulses that assail us. Jesus himself knows about them from his own experience. Nothing human is alien to him. Nothing at all! He was fully human, just like we are. Temptations only become sinful when we indulge them in our thinking and act them out in our behaviour. This is where the risen Christ comes to our aid. He who has been tempted like you and me, yet did not succumb, comes to us as we call out to him in our temptations and empowers us to overcome them.

**DEVOTION**

What does it mean to you that Jesus, our risen Lord and Saviour, has been tempted just like you and me?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to overcome, like You, the temptations of my life: I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****A D M I T**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

During those forty days in the desert Jesus did something that we all need to do from time to time. He made a conscious decision to align himself with how God wanted him to live. This meant that he had to face those specific temptations that sought to draw him away from God's path. It can be an eye-opening moment when we realise that Jesus actually listened to what the devil was saying to him. He knew that he could only resist his temptations when he faced them head on. Only then could he make sure that his life would be lived in tune with the Father's will for his life.

This is true for us as well. If we genuinely choose to live according to God's way, we must be willing to face our temptations, whatever they may be. Whether they are our power motives, our lustful thoughts, our vain ambitions, our selfishness or our greed, our laziness or our tendencies towards deceit, we need to confront them in God's presence. We cannot renounce what we do not acknowledge. We cannot cast the log out from our eye until we see it. If this kind of self-confrontation was essential for Jesus, then it will be all the more important for you and me.

However, this can be a disturbing process and this is perhaps why we avoid it. We would much prefer to see ourselves as well-meaning, decent and respectable. But this is not helpful in the long run. When we refuse to admit our evil thoughts and tendencies, they have a way of ambushing us. Then we find ourselves doing things that go against our deepest values. We hurt the people that we love the most. This is why it is so important for us, by God's grace, to honestly face our temptations.

**D E V O T I O N**

Sit in front of a mirror and look at your reflection. Connect with what you cannot see outwardly. What is the greatest temptation you are facing at the moment?

**P R A Y E R**

Lord, help me not to deny the temptations I am facing: I want to follow You.

**DAY 4****SILENCE**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

How do we go about facing our temptations? Here again we must take Jesus' example seriously. He faced his temptations in the solitude and silence of the desert. We also will need time alone if we intend to follow him in this regard. We can seldom face up to our temptations when we are always on the move. That's why the devil likes to always keep us busy! If we want to face and overcome our inner evil, we must learn to stop. This could have been the primary reason why the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. It was the place where the evil one could be faced and overcome. Solitude in God's presence is nearly always our place of greatest spiritual strength.

After we have found some quietness, we can ask for the grace to be as specific about our temptations as Jesus was. His temptations were threefold: He was tempted to focus on material things at the expense of the spiritual, to become a religious superstar, and to exchange his allegiance to God for worldly power. We need to become as clear as Jesus was about our temptations. One simple way of doing this is to write them down on a piece of paper. Doing this can really help us to overcome them with Christ's help.

Our temptations will probably not be as dramatic as those of Jesus. Instead we may be tempted to be uncaring towards a colleague, or possessive of our children, or thoughtless towards our partner, or dishonest at work. Sometimes they may even come in religious dress like the temptation to always be at church in the evening rather than at home with the family. Whatever they may be, the principle remains the same: Taking time in the solitude and silence to specifically name our temptations enables us to live more freely in the power of the risen Christ.

**DEVOTION**

Where is my "desert place" of solitude and silence to be alone with God?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to silence my inner world: I want to follow You.

**DAY 5****INADEQUATE**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

Few of us will have to wrestle with the kind of temptations Jesus faced. They are usually the kind of temptations that only the very gifted and very competent amongst us wrestle with. Most of us, however, are very ordinary human beings, living mundane lives in ordinary settings. As a result, it could be that one of the most common temptations you and I will face is to think too little of ourselves, to regard ourselves as unimportant to God and not vital to what God is doing in the world. One writer calls this, "the temptation to be inadequate."

Both kinds of temptations- those that Jesus faced and those of inadequacy- have similar outcomes when we succumb to them. They keep us from knowing deep down that we are God's beloved. They block us from living faithfully as God's people. They get us seeking to make a name for ourselves in unhealthy and damaging ways. However, when we know we are deeply loved by God, we begin to think much more correctly about ourselves. We realise that we are important to God. We see that we do have a unique part to play in God's unfolding story. In our inadequacy, we begin to experience the adequacy of God's grace.

Perhaps, right now, you can think of one situation where you are being tempted to give in to inadequacy. It may be related to a work challenge, or a responsibility as a parent, or a sense of calling to do something for God, or a course of study to which you feel drawn. Whatever it may be, as you think about it, there is a voice in you that says: "You will never be able to do it. Who do you think you are? You don't have what it takes." It could be that, as you wrestle with these thoughts, God is inviting you today to discover a new sense of adequacy in the light of what he thinks about you!

**DEVOTION**

In what situation right now do you struggle with the temptation to be inadequate?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to see myself the way that You see me: I want to follow You.

**DAY 6****PERSONAL**

*"The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

**Matt 4:3-4 (NIV)**

The temptation experience of Jesus in the desert reminds us that what goes on in our hearts is always as important as how we behave. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that, as long as we are seen to be doing the right things in public, all is well with our lives with God. This thought is the same dangerous voice that Jesus heard when he was in the wilderness. How we respond to our inner evil thoughts and dark impulses is as critical as our outward actions performed in front of those around us.

Why, you may wonder, is the personal as important as the public? The gospel answer is straightforward: The main arena for the Spirit's work in our lives is in the unseen arena of our hearts and minds. It is the main source from which all our behaviour and actions spring. It follows that God wants to transform us, not from the outside in, but from the inside out. The risen Christ longs to meet us and to help us in the most intimate parts of our lives. If we allow the Holy Spirit to work with us here, then our lives will naturally begin to flow in the direction God wants them to go. We can be sure of this.

Therefore, it is never a waste of time for us to face our temptations. More than almost anything else, they can open us to experience the transforming work of the Spirit, provided we face them and name them. They only become an obstacle to our journey with God when we fail to turn to the God who is able to help and deliver us. Imagine beginning to see our temptations as the place where we can most deeply experience the grace and mercy of Christ. The person who does this is the one whose life will be increasingly formed into the image of Christ.

**DEVOTION**

How do I see the relationship between the personal and the public, the unseen and the seen, the inner and the outward?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to integrate my inner and outer world: I want to follow You.

## WEEK 4 - *Reflection on the week*

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times this week where you felt close to God, consoled. What was life-giving or what interested you?
- When this week did you feel far from God? What felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.





WEEK 5



**FASTING IN THE WILDERNESS***Sunday*

For the next few days we will be focusing on fasting.

Fasting has been a discipline in the life of Christians for centuries. Jesus himself fasted for 40 days in the wilderness.

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.***

***Matt 4:1–2 (NIV)***

When we practice spiritual disciplines, we are not trying to save ourselves through deeds. We are saved by grace alone. It, however, does not grant us permission to become passive. Through spiritual disciplines, like fasting, we place ourself before God. In the words of John Wesley: Spiritual disciplines are grace-channels – practical ways through which the grace of God flows through our life.

## P O E M

*Prose*

"Yours is a hard life, Father. I too want to be saved. Is there no other way?"

"More agreeable?" asked the ascetic, smiling compassionately.

"More human, Father."

"One, only one."

"What is that?"

"Ascent. To climb a series of steps. From the full stomach to hunger, from the slaked throat to thirst, from joy to suffering. God sits at the summit of hunger, thirst, and suffering; the devil sits at the summit of the comfortable life. Choose."

"I am still young. The world is nice. I have time to choose."

Reaching out, the old monk touched my knee and said:

"Wake up, my child. Wake up before death wakes you up."

I shuddered and said:

"I am still young."

"Death loves the young," the old man replied. "The inferno loves the young. Life is like a lighted candle, easily extinguished. Take care – wake up!"

\* In his autobiography, *Report to Greco*, Nikos Kazantzakis recounts a conversation he once had with an old monk. Kazantzakis, a young man at the time, was visiting a monastery and was very taken by a famed ascetic, Father Makarios, who lived there. But a series of visits with the old monk left him with some ambivalent feelings as well. The monk's austere lifestyle stirred a certain religious romanticism in Kazantzakis, but it repelled him too; he wanted the romanticism, but in a more palatable way.

\* Mount Athos is the name of a mountain in the province of Macedonia in Greece and a world heritage site which consists of 20 monasteries.

\* The Orthodox tradition places a great emphasis on the ascetic life – as practice of abstinence.

**DAY 1****JESUS**

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1-2 (NIV)**

Abstinence entails fasting from a certain desire or need for a specific set time. It can include food, entertainment, sex, sleep, et cetera. It does not mean that the desire one is fasting of is evil or wrong, but the attitude is rather to abstain in order to let God satisfy the specific desire. It is a practice in many religions and has always been part of the Christian tradition. Jesus fasted and teaches us to fast.

The church father Tertullian emphasises the importance of fasting by referring to the 40-day fasts of Moses (the Law), Elijah (the Prophets) and Jesus (the New Testament). In all three occurrences, God shared his presence with them in a very remarkable, intimate way. This is our desire when fasting – to have a remarkable, intimate encounter with the presence of God. The goal is not trying to see if we can abstain for a specific period of time, it is rather coming closer to God (Matt 6:16-18) .

There are many physical, emotional and social advantages to fasting but these are all incidental. It is all about God!

In your desire for God, you are invited to fast. Wilson said: "Those who deny themselves will be sure to find their strength measured, their affections raised and their inward place continually augmented."

**DEVOTION**

What are your feelings about fasting? Speak to God about your perceptions and ideas.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to give up \_\_\_\_\_, so that I can give myself wholly to you: I want to follow You.

## DAY 2

## FOOD

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1-2 (NIV)**

Fasting from food allows us to connect our physical hunger to our spiritual hunger. When we resist food because of a physical goal, it is called a diet. When we resist food because of a political goal, it is called a hunger strike.

There is so much that happen to, and in, us when we fast. The background music of our life, and often also our frustrations, come to the fore.

One of the most important things that can happen to us, is to connect with our deep hunger. A hunger for God. Our hunger for Him is even greater than our hunger for food. Even though we can **survive** without a relationship with Him, we cannot **live** without a relationship with him. Fasting does not only help us to connect with our deepest desire, longing and hunger for him, but also helps us to open ourselves to receive his Word. It is remarkable to see how many people in the Bible received word from God while fasting and praying.

There are many layers to fasting. It is helpful to start with small steps, like fasting food for only a mealtime or two. It is also helpful to read a book on fasting and to share the experience with someone who has fasted before.

You are invited to fast from food for a specific timeframe that suits your lifestyle today.

## DEVOTION

Observe your eating routine. What meal(s) can you fast to help you become aware of your hunger for God?

## PRAYER

Lord, help me to give up \_\_\_\_\_, so that I can give myself wholly to you: I want to follow You.

**DAY 3****TECHNOLOGY**

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1–2 (NIV)**

Even though the digital age has enhanced our lives tremendously, it has also created challenges. There is not a lot of "inter" on the "net." We need spaces without disruption to connect with God. Today, we use the internet 30 hours per week, on average, and watch television 7-9 hours per day. Technology has consumed our life.

A first step that can be helpful is to reflect on the influence technology has on our life. How much of our life is dictated by technology – work, pleasure, relationships? Which temptations do technology bring to our life? To acknowledge the reality of the effect of technology is the first step to freedom, wholeness and life. It is here that the desire to fast from technology is birthed.

Some suggestions:

- A day without sending emails
- A specific time of day that no emails or text messages are checked – for example after dinner-time
- Write a letter by hand
- Make personal contact with someone in the office, rather than sending an email.
- A day without television/music/ social media.

As with any form of fasting, it is not only about the abstinence, but also about the replacement. The time usually spent with technology can be replaced with a time of reading, prayer, silence or fellowship. The goal is to practice fasting as a regular rhythm and establish balance in your life.

**DEVOTION**

Look at your messages and call register for the day. Become aware of how technology has influenced your relationships. Ask God to give you insight in next steps.

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to give up \_\_\_\_\_, so that I can give myself wholly to you: I want to follow You.

**DAY 4****PEOPLE**

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1–2 (NIV)**

To fast from people, means to take a specific time and withhold oneself from personal interaction. It involves solitude and isolation with the goal of spending time alone with God.

When we engage in this practice, two main things might occur:

In the first place, we become aware of the nature of our relationships. All our relationships are trademarked by patterns, emotions, thoughts and actions. It is only when we create distance in these relationships that we become aware of the dynamics that are unhelpful, unhealthy and keeping us from a deeper meaningful life.

The second thing that happens is that we come in contact with our true self. We become aware of what we are really feeling, thinking and wanting to say. By being constantly stimulated, we become ignorant to ourself, our experience and God. Our conversations are the first to show signs of this – negative comments, uninspired talk and flat interactions are the result. Henri Nouwen said that true community happens when solitude meets solitude.

**DEVOTION**

You are invited to spend an entire day in solitude and silence. What are you invited to when you reflect on your experience?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to give up \_\_\_\_\_, so that I can give myself wholly to you: I want to follow You.

**DAY 5****THINGS**

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."*

**Matt 4:1–2 (NIV)**

A few years ago, one of my friends decided not to buy new clothes for a year. He felt that clothing had become too important in his life and that he spent too much money, energy and time on his appearance. We were very happy when the year had passed and he was wearing new clothes! What he had tried to practice was moderation and to abstain from spending money on things that he does not really need.

Moderation is a virtue in the Christian tradition. Early Christians believed that surplus and greed harmed the soul and those that one loves. Moderation might be a strange concept in today's culture. But when we look at the high levels of debt, how our self-awareness is influenced, how we approach poverty and need in our world, the idea of moderation seems a road we need to get to know.

**DEVOTION**

In which areas of your life are you living in a surplus – with more than enough? How can a mind-set of moderation impact the way you plan your weekly planning regarding shopping for groceries, clothing and other products?

**PRAYER**

Lord, help me to give up \_\_\_\_\_, so that I can give myself wholly to you: I want to follow You.

**DAY 6**

**NEXT STEPS**

Throughout the past few weeks, we have been on an inner journey. We have been intentional about creating spaces and time to connect with our deepest desires, temptations and longings. We have responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him – also into the wilderness. It is not necessarily an experience that brings transformation in our life, but rather the reflection on an experience.

## *Reflection on the journey*

Reflect on the last 40 days. You might want to read through the notes you made at the end of each week/

- Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the times in this journey where you felt close to God, consoled. What was life-giving or what interested you?
- When did you feel far from God, what felt like life-taking experiences and where did you feel resistance?
- What do you feel is the invitation in this reflection?
- Talk to God about it.

Use the space below to write down what you want to ask God as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter Weekend.

Lord, for the grace to...

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This week we prepare ourselves for Paasfest with Holy Week that starts on Palm Sunday. We share in the last days of Jesus' life – his crucifixion, death and resurrection. You are invited to join us on our formation journey:

**<https://www.youtube.com/user/MosaiekKerk>**

