

INTRO

- What's been your experience of Lent (if any)?

The Lenten season is a time of personal housecleaning of our interior world marked by reflection, repentance and returning to God with all our heart. This series aims to embrace that.

READ

Matt 4:1-11

REFLECT & RESPOND

The 40 days of Lent commemorate the time of testing Jesus experienced in the wilderness. In a series of three temptations (or tests) by the devil, Jesus is tested primarily around his newly-announced identity as God's Son fresh from his baptismal experience (Mt 3:17). There are many layers to this passage, but His wilderness experience offers us a masterclass on understanding and resisting temptation.

The Battleground

Like Jesus, temptation usually comes knocking when we're most **vulnerable**, like when we're hungry, angry, lonely or tired.

Qu: when do you feel most vulnerable to temptation?

The Nature of Temptation

Temptation is **deceptive** and **seductive** appealing to primal impulses within us for security & comfort (turn these stones into bread), control & approval (throw yourself down), power and success (I'll give you all the kingdoms).

Often times, these are legitimate needs, but the temptation is to fulfill them in illegitimate sinful ways (which are always presented as acceptable, attractive, and desirable, right?!).

The key is to discern the lie behind the temptation:

Being able to discern what each temptation was really about enabled Jesus to decisively reject false self solutions in favour of the spiritual opportunities to trust himself to God. With each response, Jesus abandoned himself more profoundly to the reality of God's providence and provision in the face of his most primal human needs and impulses—which is what the spiritual journey is really all about.

— Ruth Haley Barton

Qu: are you able to identify core legitimate needs in your life (e.g. security, approval, comfort, control, success, pleasure, power) that you're often tempted to satisfy through illegitimate ways? Discuss.

Resisting Temptation

Jesus is able to resist temptation in his humanness through reliance on God's power. But he's been able to access God's power through spiritual practices such as solitude, fasting, and scripture. This mystery of our synergy with God is best summed up in St. Augustine's words:

Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not.

This Lenten season is an opportune time to do some "internal housecleaning", reflecting and repenting, in order to stir up our love and loyalty towards God. To that end, consider intensifying one of these practices:

- **Solitude** creates space for God in an age of distraction;
- **Prayer & Fasting** deepens our longing for and dependency on God;
- **Scripture** helps us encounter the truth of God, ourselves and the world.

Qu: Where in your life have you gotten away from God? What posture and practice will help you find your way back?

RESPOND & PRAY

- Pray for a grace to enter a season of reflecting, repenting and returning (Joel 2:12)