

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (New Revised Standard Version)

²Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. ³He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

¹¹Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

Luke 4:1-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

In his popular book, “Outliers”, Malcom Gladwell explains that it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to master/achieve distinctive expertise at performing a demanding artistic task well.

Researchers found that the best musicians, athletes, writers, etc., are able to develop that top level, only after focused practice 4 hours a day, 5 days a week for 10 years, which is 10,000 hours. Yes, natural talent is important, but talent alone may be overrated.

The 10k isn't a magic #, but it's hard to reach, so most people bail.
Practicing just enough to get by is easier and more convenient,
but just enough is to settle for less & miss out on being your best.

How unfortunate and wasteful, maybe even lazy and short-sighted,
**that sometimes we compromise and settle for less and easier,
and thereby miss out on the more & better blessings
that the Lord our God intends and desires for us.**

In the Deuteronomy text,
Israel has reached the end of their 40-year wilderness trek
and they are finally poised to enter the Promised Land.

Moses reminds them don't forget the lessons along the way, vs. 2, 15-16,
Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order
to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart,... He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed
you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, **to humble you and to test you, and in the
end to do you good.**

All along the way the Lord had provided for them,
and by God's steadfast loving kindness and care
they survived and thrived along their wilderness journey.

Because they had experienced God's faithfulness amid adversity,
they had grown, and they had learned to trust and rely on God,
and by their struggles and testing they had been blessed.

The wilderness served the useful purpose of preparing them
for their mission, for life together in the Promised Land,
for living faithfully in-sync with God's will and purpose.

And now as they enter to live in the Promised Land, Moses warns,
don't be distracted by the prosperity and comforts of the land,
or forget the lessons of God's provision and blessings
that they had learned along the wilderness journey.

**Stay attentive and in-sync with God, so that you can receive
the fullness and best blessings that God intends for you.**

Sometime ago I was part of a meeting being done using Zoom,
and partway through there was a problem with the connection.
It got very confusing & difficult to discuss and exchange our ideas
with the intermittent delays, with audio and video out of sync.

But it's not just Internet or video signals that can get out of sync.
**Sometimes we can get out of sync with God's will and blessings,
with God's perfect plan, purpose and intention for our lives.**

In contrast to you or me getting out of sync with God and God's plan,

in the Gospel of Luke, it describes how Jesus was always in-sync
with God the Father, with God's will, plan and purpose. vs. 1-2

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, **he was famished.**

The 40 days Jesus was tempted in the wilderness were preparation,
corresponding to the Israelites 40 years spent in the wilderness,
to the 40 days Moses fasted
preparing to receive the 10 Commandments at Mt. Sinai,
to the 40 days the prophet Elijah fasted in preparation
to confront and defeat the priests of Baal at Mt. Horeb.

The word, "tempted" has a meaning and connotation **in our culture**,
of being enticed to do something... ... like a bakery fan that
blows the smell of freshly baked bread out into the street
to tempt or entice those passing by to come in and buy.

But in the original Greek, the word for "tempt" is more like
a teacher testing to confirm what the students have learned,
or like a gifted musician performing a recital of their music,
**or as in Jesus being tempted or tested to demonstrate and reveal
his faithfulness and obedience to the will, plan and purpose of God.**

The first temptation Jesus faced was to use his authority and power
to turn stones into bread for his own hunger and benefit, vs. 3,
The devil said to him, **"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."**

**If you really are the Son of God, or since you are the Son of God,
show me your power, prove yourself and demonstrate your worth.**

Consider, that beyond his own hunger and the rumblings in his belly,
and how tempting it would be to feed all of the world's hungry,
by transforming lots of the stones into lots of bread
and making enough food to satisfy all the starving masses,
that would certainly prove his power as the Son of God.

What an opportunity to solve one of humankind's worst problems,
by providing enough food for everyone to eat and be fed,
but that's not why God sent Jesus, that's not why Jesus came.

God had a much bigger mission and intended purpose for Jesus,
far more than filling a few empty bellies for a while,
Jesus came to feed and fill hollow and empty lives,
so instead of making bread, Jesus was faithful to his mission, vs. 4,
Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

**Full of the Holy Spirit, and armed with God's word in Scripture,
Jesus would not be distracted from his true mission and call.**

Ironically, later and within God's will, God's purpose and timing,
Jesus did miraculously make bread to feed a huge crowd of 5000+
- not for his own benefit, but to teach about God's grace,
and so, it never supplanted his true mission and purpose.

In contrast, too often and far too readily enticed and seduced,
we can be distracted and tempted by lesser goals and objectives
other than our true mission as the Church, and as Christians,
**which is to faithfully proclaim the Good News and reflect
God's love and light into a world lost in the darkness.**

The second temptation, vs. 5-7

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

How tempting to accept the easy and painless quick solution.

Just accept Satan's offer by giving in to the temptation to gain
a little immediate power and success, without paying the cost,
and skip the more difficult way of obedience to God.

And yet, when it was within God's will, purpose and timing,
his glory was revealed at the transfiguration
and glorified when he ascended to our heavenly Father.

The next temptation, vs. 9-12

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

How tempting to take just a little short-cut, an easier path
and go for popularity, approval and the glitter of success.
Surely such an amazing show of God's miraculous power
would have impressed them and maybe even avoided
all the suffering, that crucifixion and dying thing.

Even his harshest critics and enemies would have been impressed.

**But Jesus came to accomplish God's love and plan for our salvation,
not to perform a magic show of his power, wonder and might.**

But yet, later on, in-synch within God's will and intended purpose,
Jesus did perform lots of very impressive signs and miracles,
and he did demonstrate God's power by those mighty deeds,
but they were done according to God's will and timing
and doing miracles never became his primary mission and purpose.

It's really a matter of focus & staying on target, as Jesus explained,

Luke 4:43, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God; for I was sent for this purpose."

In a hungry world, why not just make more bread?

In a world of brokenness, oppression and bondage,
why not just take over and rule with strong justice?

In a world apathetic and distracted,
why not just do the impressive to entice and attract?

It is tempting to seek the quick-fix, easy short-cut solutions.

**But instead, we are called to wait, to focus, listen and obey God,
just as Jesus refused to exercise power and authority**

apart from obeying the will, plan and timing of God.

I find those who relentlessly insist & rush even good ideas & goals
on their own **apart** from waiting & listening for guidance from God,
can do more damage & harm to the Church and people of God
than any persecution ever inflicted from the outside.

Satan, the tempter, is the embodiment of disobedience to God.

Evil, is usually the corruption and compromise **of good**, often
by taking shortcuts, or force, or by doing things our own way.

Evil, is taking control rather than trusting-submitting to God.

Another name for Satan is **out-of-sync willful impatience**,
“I’ll do it my way, and I’ll accomplish it right now!”

**Our call is to walk and grow in our faith, to journey with Christ,
and if we are faithful, through us, Jesus will change the world.**

Maybe not all at once, and not by the political power we wield,
but by showing love and compassion, one life at a time,
one hug at a time, and by one act of mercy at a time.

No one can be argued or forced into a relationship with Christ,
but rather, when they recognize the appeal of God’s grace in us,
people do want to share in that joy, peace, hope and blessing.

**Today we are at the beginning, the first Sunday of Lent,
our soul’s spiritual journey walking with Jesus toward Easter.**

Yes , it would probably be more pleasant, easier and convenient
if we could move right into the joyful celebration of Easter,
and just skip the unpleasantness and messiness
of betrayal, abandonment, crucifixion and death.

**But that’s not how it works,
for if there is no death, then there can be no resurrection.**

**Lent is our time to listen and seek to hear God's will and voice,
for self-examination and exploration so to deepen our faith.**

**Those are tasks for which there are no short cuts or quick fixes,
and we have to be patient and attentive to get in sync with God,**

and that’s a task for which we do need to be patient and attentive.
And anything else is to settle for significantly less
than the abundant grace and full blessings God intends.

The message of this passage is really deceptively simple:
it’s about the will of God, and making that alone our priority,
which is to say, “no” to any and all other gods & lesser goals.

So how do we live out our lives in sync with God and God’s will?

**We have each one been called and specifically set apart by God,
blessed and equipped to serve God’s holy & healing purpose,
by walking in-step with God as the Holy Spirit directs us.**

So how do we make the most of this season of Lent?

It begins with prayer, consistent & personal prayer on our own
as well as with partners in prayer who support one another.

It is critical to include regular feeding on God's word,
aided by a good and faithful devotional reading each day,
in order to focus our hearts and minds on the Lord.

And a healthy and growing walk with God **happens in community** –
a family for fellowship where we can connect and be known,
and as a place to bring our gifts in Christian service.

**Being in sync with God, with God's will, plan and purpose,
and knowing what to do or say is not always easy or obvious,**
but derives from abiding in the Lord with humility and gentleness,
which happens by **trusting that God will fulfill his every promise,**
by seeking to be **faithfully in-sync with God's purpose.**

Let Lent be about seeking our BEST walk of faith with our Lord
toward the blessed and meaningful life Jesus intends for us,
toward that beloved person God blessed and created us to become,
for that is the life, the purpose and task to which we are called.

Therefore, our call and task during this special season of Lent
is to abide faithfully in-synch with God's Spirit and grace,

as Jesus promised and explained, in John 15:4-5

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them
bear much fruit, **because apart from me you can do nothing.**