



# WEEK ONE

# LENTEN SEASON

## Sunday: With Jesus in the Desert

Read the Gospel passage from Matthew 4:1-11, the devotional reflection titled "No Shortcuts," and respond to the discussion prompts in the Reflective Journaling section.

### THE MUSIC OF ASHES TO FIRE

Week 1: "Lead Me" (Track 2)

## Monday through Saturday of Week 1

### IN THE MORNING:

A personal daily devotional guide includes prayer, a reading from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospel for each day of the week.

This week's readings are from Deuteronomy, Hebrews, and the Gospel of John.

Inspirational quotes from men and women of faith keep us in contact with our shared Christian heritage.

### IN THE EVENING:

An evening psalm and prayer become preludes to nighttime rest and renewal.



# LENTEN SEASON—WEEK ONE

## With Jesus in the Desert

**A devotional reflection based on Matthew 4:1-11**

Read the Gospel passage first, then the devotional reflection that follows. The discussion prompts at the end will help prepare you for Sunday school and small-group sessions.

### No Shortcuts

Our first steps with Jesus on our Lenten journey take us to a desert wilderness far from his baptism by John the Baptist. The Spirit has led him away from the crowds and excitement. As we fall into step with him, he has fasted many days. Haggard and drawn, Jesus is confronted with evil offering what appear to be helpful suggestions. But the words have a suspicious ring. The temptation begins innocently enough.

“Make these stones into bread! You’re famished. This is the real world. You’re not going to survive at this rate! A dead Messiah isn’t going to do anyone any good.”

It isn’t that Jesus isn’t hungry. It isn’t that he can’t work a miracle. Later he will feed five thousand people with a little boy’s lunch. Survival isn’t the issue. For Jesus, taking orders solely from the Father is what he is all about, so he surely is not going to take advice from the Evil One.

“Man does not live by bread alone,” he says, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

The sympathetic tone continues, as the temptation steps to another level.

“What is this fasting and praying all about? Excitement is what sells! You need publicity! Put on a show! Do miracles! You can be famous!”

But Jesus is not a performer. He doesn’t do things for the effect. It isn’t that he can’t master the forces of nature. Later he will walk on the sea and calm storms. He will even raise the dead. But his greatest miracle is teaching us to

love, to love even the way of the cross. The way to eternal life has no flashy shortcuts. Jesus listens to one Voice only.

"Don't try to make God do tricks!" is his reply.

The third temptation is maybe the most insidious of all. It is the temptation to compromise. The tempter offers to join forces with Jesus, but on his terms.

"A cross is a terrible way to go! No one will see out here in the desert if you just bow down and kneel before me. What does the Father care? What does he know? You have to take charge of your life! Just worship me and you'll have no competition! Be powerful: you need to take charge! Assert yourself!"

Here Jesus, at his weakest, uses the defense that is available to us all as we learn to walk with him in the time of temptation. He doesn't try to reason with the Enemy. He reaches back into the Father's promises. He flees to the first commandment.

"Away with you, Satan!" he cries, "for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"

Satan has to leave. The angels come, there in the wilderness, and Jesus is refreshed. Then he resumes the step-by-step following of the Father's will that will take him to Calvary, to Olivet, and to the glory beyond. There will be no compromise, no shortcut.

With Jesus in the wilderness of temptation we learn to reject the false sympathy of the tempter and dare to be faithful, as he is faithful.

If you are a student, you want good grades. They open doors. They bring scholarships. The easiest way to good grades is to let someone else do your work for you. But there is no real shortcut to genuine education.

If you are lonely, you want intimacy and the good feelings of love and security. No one has to tell you those are good things. The easiest way to those feelings is the pathway of least resistance. But there are no shortcuts to real friendship. There is never an excuse to use people like things, no matter what the goal may be.

If you are ambitious, you want success and influence. Within the boundaries of genuine caring those could be very worthy goals. But in our world, all too often personal goals are reached at whatever the cost. But there is no shortcut to real integrity. Cheating is always wrong; adultery and fornication are always sin; betrayal of confidence is always heartbreaking.

Whatever the reason, remember: there are no shortcuts to finding and doing God's will. It is a wonderful thing to realize that in God's will we don't need



shortcuts! He is with us and will help us to do his will, if we only allow him. So there are no shortcuts in walking with Jesus.

A workman went to his big boss one day and said, "I'm tired. I think I'll take my retirement benefits and hang it up. It's been great working for you."

The big boss looked disappointed and said, "I really hate to see you go. I was hoping you could do at least one more big job for me. Will you, just one more?" Reluctantly the builder agreed to build a house for some important client of the big boss.

It was a big house, a big job, a lot of work. It was on a golf course, with a lot of detail. But the man's heart really wasn't in it. He threw the house together in record time and cut corners on material and labor wherever he could. He saved the boss a lot of money, but it wasn't really his best work and he knew it.

Imagine how he felt when he turned the keys over to the big boss and the boss gave them right back and fished around in his briefcase and gave him the title and deed to the property on the golf course.

"This is my gift for you!" he said. "Thanks for all your good work over the years!"

Then the builder wished he hadn't been in such a hurry. He wished he hadn't cut corners and taken shortcuts just to get the job done.

Life is like that. Exactly like that. We become the product of our own integrity in following after God—or our lack of integrity. Either we become exiles from innocence when we try to take shortcuts to being like God, or with the Holy Spirit's help, we walk with Jesus and use the promises and the commandments of God to resist the tempter's power and share in Christ's very life, living in his righteousness.

This is the first Sunday in Lent. The journey is under way. Today is a good time to ask God to give us grace to be like Jesus as we face temptations to cut corners, to take shortcuts, to compromise in any way with the known will of God. I don't know about you, but I don't want to try to get away with building a shoddy house. I know I'm going to have to live in what I build. —RFM

***After reading the passage from Matthew 4 and the devotional reflection "No Shortcuts," you may also want to read the following related passages:***

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; and Romans 5:12-19

The **discussion prompts** that follow will help prepare you to participate in your Sunday school class or small-group study. Use your **reflective journaling**

section to record any other insights that come to you as you read the Gospel lesson and the devotional reflection.

### DISCUSSION PROMPT #1: MATTHEW 4

Matthew describes three different temptations in this passage. What was the nature of each of the three?

## DISCUSSION PROMPT #2: MATTHEW 4

What might Jesus have gained by yielding to each temptation? What price would he have paid for giving in to each?

### DISCUSSION PROMPT #3: MATTHEW 4

How did Jesus overcome these temptations?

### DISCUSSION PROMPT #4: MATTHEW 4

Do these verses only apply to Jesus because he is the Messiah, or can they have meaning for our lives as well? Why?

### DISCUSSION PROMPT #5: DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

The writer of *No Shortcuts* uses an illustration to conclude the devotional reflection. How does that story speak to you? The last sentence?

## REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



**PSALM 41** ▪ **DEUTERONOMY 8:11-20** ▪ **HEBREWS 2:11-18** ▪ **JOHN 2:1-12**

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and all secrets exposed; cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

**PSALM 41:1-2**—Happy are those who consider the poor; the LORD delivers them in the day of trouble. The LORD protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land.

### **DEUTERONOMY 8:11** *Take Care; Don't Forget*

Take 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.

### **HEBREWS 2:17-18** *He Is Able to Help*

Therefore [Jesus] had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

### **JOHN 2:1-12** *Today's Gospel Reading*

Happy are we if we put into practice what we hear and sing. For our hearing is a sowing of seed and our actions the fruit of that seed

ST. AUGUSTINE, SERMON 23A, 1-4

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 41:4, 12-13**—As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you." . . . You have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever. Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.

**PRAYER**—Be present, O God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes of this fleeting world may rest in your eternal changlessness, in the name of Christ, I pray. Amen.

**PSALM 45 ▪ DEUTERONOMY 9:4-12 ▪ HEBREWS 3:1-11 ▪ JOHN 2:13-22**

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—Eternal and merciful Father, I give you humble thanks for all the spiritual and earthly blessings which in your mercy you have poured into my life. Lord, let me live only to love you and glorify your name. Amen. **JW**

**PSALM 45:6-7a**—Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness.

### **DEUTERONOMY 9:5** *God Keeps His Promises*

It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the LORD made on oath to your ancestors.

### **HEBREWS 3:6-8a** *Do Not Harden Your Hearts*

Christ . . . was faithful over God's house as a son; and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

### **JOHN 2:13-22** *Today's Gospel Reading*

From the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit flows into us, and through the Holy Spirit . . . faith is given to us, and through faith Christ dwells in our hearts

FROM BONAVENTURE'S BREVILQUIM

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 48:9-10; 14**—We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. Your name, O God, like your praise, reaches to the ends of the earth . . . our God will be our guide forever.

**PRAYER**—Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the fire of your love. Bring us rest and renewal through the quiet hours of the night, through Christ our Lord, I pray. Amen.



**PSALM 119:49-72 ■ DEUTERONOMY 9:13-21 ■ HEBREWS 3:12-19 ■  
JOHN 2:22—3:15**

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—Lord God, send your Holy Spirit to be the guide of all my ways and the sanctifier of my soul and body. Save, defend, and build me up in your love, through Christ my Lord. Amen. **JW**

**PSALM 119:59-60**—When I think of your ways, I turn my feet to your decrees; I hurry and do not delay to keep your commandments.

### **DEUTERONOMY 9:18** *The Lord Listened to Me*

Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the LORD by doing what was evil in his sight.

### **HEBREWS 3:12-14** *Take Care*

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day . . . so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

### **JOHN 2:22—3:15** *Today's Gospel Reading*

Christ is the Word of God; but the Word was made flesh. . . Therefore Christ is both victim and priest according to the spirit. For he who offers the sacrifice to his Father according to the flesh is himself offered upon the altar of the cross.

FROM ORIGIN'S HOMILIES ON GENESIS

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 49:7-8**—Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice.

**PRAYER**—Father, grant me forgiveness of what is past, that in the days to come I may with a pure spirit, do your will—walking humbly with you, showing love to all, and keeping body and soul in sanctification and honor, in Jesus' name. Amen. **JW**

**PSALM 50 ▪ DEUTERONOMY 9:23—10:5 ▪ HEBREWS 4:1-11 ▪ JOHN 3:16-21**

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—O Lord, I thank you for all your daily blessings, for keeping me through the night, and providing for my health, strength and comfort. May I always praise your holy name and love you, my Redeemer, in Jesus' name. Amen.

**PSALM 50:1-2**—The mighty one, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

### **DEUTERONOMY 9:29** *God's Very Own Possession*

[These] are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.

### **HEBREWS 4:9-11** *Rest in God*

So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that none may fall through such disobedience.

### **JOHN 3:16-21** *Today's Gospel Reading*

Those who by God's gracious gift have become his children, born again from above of his Holy Spirit, possessing Christ within themselves to illuminate and recreate them, are guided in the many and varied ways of the Spirit as grace works in their hearts invisibly and in peace of soul.

FROM AN ANONYMOUS 4TH-CENTURY CHURCH THEOLOGIAN

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 46:4-5a, 10**—There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city . . . Be still, and know that I am God!

**PRAYER**—My Lord and my God, you see my heart; and my desires are not hidden from you. I am encouraged and strengthened by your goodness to me today. I want to be yours and yours alone. O my God, my Savior, my Sanctifier, hear me, help me, and show mercy to me for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. **JW**



PSALM 95 ▪ DEUTERONOMY 10:12-22 ▪ HEBREWS 4:12-16 ▪ JOHN 3:22-36

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**PSALM 95:1, 3a, 7b**—O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving . . . For the LORD is a great God . . . and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

**DEUTERONOMY 10:12-13a** *The Essence of the Law*

What does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God.

**HEBREWS 4:12** *The Living Word*

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

**JOHN 3:22-36** *Today's Gospel Reading*

The Apostle says that he who by the Spirit puts to death the deeds of the body will live. Small wonder that he should live, since he who has the Spirit of God becomes a child of God.

AN EXCERPT FROM A LETTER OF ST. AMBROSE

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 51:1, 10**—Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

**PRAYER**—Father, accept my imperfect repentance, have compassion on my infirmities, forgive my faults, purify my uncleanness, strengthen my weakness, fix my unstableness, and let your good Spirit watch over me forever, and your love ever rule in my heart, through the merits and sufferings and love of your Son, in whom you are always well pleased. Amen. **JW**

PSALM 55 ▪ DEUTERONOMY 11:18-28 ▪ HEBREWS 5:1-10 ▪ JOHN 4:1-26

## MORNING MEDITATIONS

**PRAYER**—Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and all secrets exposed; cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

**PSALM 55:16-17, 22**—I call upon God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint . . . and he will hear my voice . . . Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

**DEUTERONOMY 11:18a, 19** *The Lord Listened to Me*

You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul . . . teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away; when you lie down and when you rise.

**HEBREWS 5:7-8** *He Learned Obedience*

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

**JOHN 4:1-26** *Today's Gospel Reading*

Now Christ is formed in a believer through faith implanted in his inmost soul. Such a one, gentle and lowly of heart, is summoned to the freedom of grace.

AN EXCERPT FROM AUGUSTINE'S EXPLANATION OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

## EVENING REFLECTIONS

**PSALM 138:3, 8**—On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul . . . the LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.

**PRAYER**—Now to God the Father who first loved us, and made us accepted in the Beloved: to God the Son who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood; to God the Holy Spirit who fills our hearts with the love of God, be all love and all glory for time and for eternity. Amen. **JW**