

The idea of a Lenten Season can be traced all the way back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

The 40 days of Lent, starting with Ash Wednesday began around 600 AD.

Today, Lent is still observed, in varying degrees of discipline, by Orthodox, Catholic and some Protestant denominations; including Lutherans.

The Evangelicals largely ignore the season.

If you would go out on the street and ask people about Lent, the responses would mostly have to do with,

### **What did you give up for Lent?**

If that is what Lent is all about, denying yourself something for a period of time, then you need to consider your motivation for doing so.

Are you attempting to earn God's favor by making a sacrifice for your sins?

If so, then leave Lent in your past. The sacrifice for sins was paid by Jesus Christ!

### **By grace are you saved, through faith!**

### **And that it not because of anything that you have done!**

If Lent gives you a reason to boast, then I advise you to give Lent itself up.

John Smith was the only Protestant to move into a large Catholic neighborhood.

On the first Friday of Lent, John was outside grilling a big juicy steak on his grill.

Meanwhile, all of his neighbors were eating cold tuna for supper. This went on

each Friday of Lent. On the last Friday of Lent, the neighborhood men got

together and decided that something had to be done about John. He was

tempting them to eat meat each Friday of Lent.

They decided to try and convert John to Catholicism. They went over and talked to him. John decided to join all of his neighbors and become a Catholic, which made them all very happy.

They took him to church, and the priest sprinkled some water over him, and said, "You were born a Baptist, you were raised a Baptist, and now you are a Catholic."

The men were so relieved, now their biggest Lenten temptation was resolved.

The next year's Lenten season rolled around. The first Friday of Lent came, and, just at supper time, when the neighborhood was settling down to their cold tuna fish dinner, the smell of steak cooking on a grill came wafting into their homes.

The neighborhood men could not believe their noses! What was going on?!

They called each other up and decided to meet over in John's yard to see if he had forgotten it was the first Friday of Lent. The group arrived just in time to see John standing over his grill with a small pitcher of water. He was sprinkling some water over his steak on the grill, saying, "You were born a cow, you were raised a cow, and now you are a fish."

If, however, Lent is a time for you to focus on all that Jesus did for the salvation of your soul, then by all means, carry on!

Which is what we're doing right now. I have created a series for this Lent called the ***Whys of Lent***. We observe Lent as a spiritual exercise, to grow the faith God has given us as a gift. But, there are many question we need to ask about why Jesus went about this the way he did.

We consider the whys of Jesus':

### ***TEACHING***

**MIRACLES**

**BETRAYAL**

**DEATH**

**We begin today with the why of temptation.**

Jesus said, Matthew 18:7

*“Woe to the world for temptations to sin!*

**For it is necessary that temptations come,**

*but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!*

***Why is it necessary that temptations come?***

Did you know that a reason many give for staying away from church is they feel they have been hoodwinked?

They have attended a church that presented a message that goes like this:

- "It is possible to arrive at a set of beliefs and/or practices that will ensure that your struggles will be over.
- Life will never hurt you;
- the rug will never again be pulled out from under your feet;
- the bottom will never drop out;
- and you will never again experience the pain of failure, uncertainty, 'lostness' or temptation."

***So, if that is the gospel, they are doomed to failure!***

***Scripture and life both tell us that is not the case!***

We are fallen people living in a fallen world in which:

- Pain
- Betrayal
- Failure
- Uncertainty
- Lostness and
- Temptation will come!

So, we need to consider why that is the case and what we're going to do about it!

For the why we need to return to the Garden of Eden, to the Paradise created by God that has been lost.

- In the beginning, all was good, and people were very good!
- In the beginning, people were right with each other and with God!
- Since people were made in the image of God, there had to be a choice.
- That choice was to continue in the perfection of God's creation or reject him and grasp for equality with God.
- That was the 1st temptation and, in truth, it remains the 1<sup>st</sup> temptation today.

Are we happy? Are we content with the way God made us and the world or do we want to make it over in our image, with me at its center?

If we were to worship and love the Lord our God, there had to be the possibility for us to reject him.

**That is the main why!**

***The secondary why of temptation*** is that it is required for us to grow to be the kind of people God wants us to be.

Anyone here ever hit a tennis ball?

You could drop and hit thousands of balls and get so good at it that you could place it anywhere in the court.

***That doesn't make you a tennis player!***

You have to learn to hit the ball that it is coming at you from the other side of the court, not dropped into the perfect hitting position.

But even if you succeed at that, ***it doesn't make you a tennis player!***

The person on the other side of the court isn't trying to make it easy for you to hit good shots. That other person is your ***opponent!***

That person is trying to hit the ball so that you can't return it.

Once you master that, then you're ***sort of a tennis player.***

How do you become a real tennis player?

***You have to compete and deliver under pressure.***

***Now, let's apply that to life and temptation.***

When everything in your life is perfectly ordered,

When everything is going great,

It's like dropping the ball in the perfect hitting position.

***That's not real life!***

If everything you need in life is given to you, what are the chances that you will develop as a person? What kind of person would you be without overcoming challenges and difficulties?

### **Deuteronomy 8:11–14**

*Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments which I command you today,*

**lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them,**

*and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied,*

**then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...**

The challenges of life enable us to grow and become strong!

But then we must also consider that in life we have opponents, in fact, we have enemies!

When Jesus tells us that it is necessary for temptations to come, he is being real with us.

***1<sup>st</sup> of all, he reminds us that this is a fallen world!***

### **Matthew 24:6–10**

*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.*

**nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.**

*“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.*

**And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.**

- You and your kids are going to get sick.
- People who are close to you are going to die.
- Government will never be perfect, and it may be downright destructive.
- You will be the victim of a crime sometime in your life.
- The world is going to be slamming the ball at you, trying to get you out of your game!

***2<sup>nd</sup> – our own bodies will try to betray us!***

**Romans 7:18–19**

*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.*

**For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.**

*For I do not do the good I want,*

**but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

We have the natural tendency to do what we want rather than what is best for us or what is right.

And the world joins in the conspiracy by throwing gasoline on the fire!

***“Lead me not into temptation. I can find it all by myself.”***

That line, taken from the country music song "Lead Me Not," evokes smiles because it underscores a truth: The struggle against temptation is universal.

A new survey, however, gets specific about the type of temptations most Americans battle against.

Christian research firm Barna Group, discovered that most Americans are too worn down or distracted to get snared by sex, drugs and rock and roll.

The survey said, the top three sins seducing most Americans are:

- procrastination,
- overeating and
- spending too much time on media.

60 percent of Americans admitted that they're tempted to worry too much or procrastinate;

55 percent said they're tempted to overeat, and

41 percent said they're tempted by sloth, or laziness.

The sex, drugs and rock and roll-like vices fell dead last in the temptation categories at around 10%.

All the way back in the early 1500s, Martin Luther said this,

*Young fellows are tempted by girls,*

*men who are thirty years old are tempted by gold,*

*when they are forty years old they are tempted by honor and glory,*

*and those who are sixty years old say to themselves,*

***“What a pious man I have become”!***

***3<sup>rd</sup> we have an opponent, an enemy who seeks our destruction.***

**1 Peter 5:8**

*Be sober-minded; be watchful.*

**Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**

***You’re not paranoid if they really are out to get you!***

Jesus knows the reality of the world we live in.

**Hebrews 2:17–18**

*Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

**For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

He is not going to deceive us into thinking that everything will come up roses. He tells us the truth about this world we live in and then promises that he will be with us to help us through whatever trials and temptations we face.

Throughout the Bible, people did not show heroic faith by moving from ***uncertainty to clarity.***

They moved, rather, ***from uncertainty to trust.***

They moved not from ***failure to success,*** but from ***failure to faithfulness!***

Luther is famous for this quote:

***“You cannot keep birds from flying over your head  
but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair”***

This whole Lenten thing goes back to the very beginning of Jesus’s ministry.

**Luke 4:1–2**

*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan*

**and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.**

Jesus' temptation is ordered, directed, not by the devil, but by the Holy Spirit.

And since God's Spirit is love, then we have to conclude that it's for the sake of love that he's sent deep into the wilderness of Judea.

### **Why?**

- Because there were things Jesus needed to discover about himself that could only be discovered in the wilderness.
- There were things he needed to struggle with that could only be experienced there in the wilderness.
- There were things he could only discover in the struggle, in the fight, in the wrestling.
- There are things we can only discover about ourselves when we, too, have been thrown into the wilderness.

We, like Jesus, need to be pushed up against our limits; our limitations must be exposed.

And it is there that we will find:

- God's grace and mercy,
- The need to rise and pray so that we can overcome temptation in spite of the weakness of our flesh,
- And the fulfillment of God's promise that...

### **1 Corinthians 10:13**

*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*

**God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**