

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 22, 2026



TEMPTATION

and the need for discipline

by Drew Downs

American culture is actually counter-culture. Rebellion is normal here. Fitting in is square, uncool. We glorify revolution as the response to taxation without representation. With these as common ideals, it is hard to do discipline. "I don't want to," seems like a complete argument. "Who's gonna make me," does, too. It makes it hard to hear the word *discipline* without a desire to reject it. It is our associations with authority, power, and independence that rule us.

In the church, discipline isn't punishment. Nor is it militaristic rule-following. For us, it is about creating opportunity in our lives for reflection, for learning, and for communing with God. It is about actively participating in our lives with intention — to be the kind of people we want to be. Not because anyone is making us, but because we're missing out on something great when we don't. Because the practice of study and prayer can shape our lives in the very ways we want them to.

LENT

2026

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Ash Wednesday

Each year, the church invites us to a season of discipline and self-examination we call Lent. In liturgical traditions, it is most famous for being the time we give stuff up and eat fish on Fridays. In low-church traditions, if Lent is marked at all, it is taken as the Easter pre-season, like Advent is to Christmas. But for ancient Christians, it was a season of study for newcomers and reconciliation for the penitent sinners. And the whole body of the community prepared itself to be changed by all of this on Easter.

Ash Wednesday is set up to be the kickoff to the season. It is the time when we are reminded what Lent is for — that it isn't about the stuff we give up or about preparing for the death and resurrection of Jesus like it is happening for the two-thousandth time so much as tuning our body instruments to the love, grace, and mercy of God.

The way we start the tuning might seem odd — to remember our mortality, to talk about death and our wretchedness, and to sprinkle ashes on our foreheads. And to those who think it is weird, I really can't disagree. And yet it does speak to something base in us that many would rather ignore. These practices draw something out of us and we are often drawn to them in the first place. We connect with the ashes at the level of instinct and body. That it reminds us, not just of our finitude intellectually, but in our bones, our joints, muscle aches and bruising knees, that we are human, mortal, alive. And those around us are in much the same boat. And maybe, the work of redemption is something for all of us.

With love,
Drew+

LENT

2026

FOR SUNDAY

lent 1A

February 22, 2026

Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

LENT

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflection

Jesus leaves his baptism for a forty-day quarantine in the desert. This is the beginning of Jesus's ministry, before the disciples and the crowds, before the healings and the miracles. All he has is what he entered the time away with: his life, faith, and the promise. Words of God's faithfulness, of love and hope.

And here, at the end, when he can almost taste the food and the feel the blankets of his bed, the voices of loved ones calling to him, the adversary appears, to tempt him. To tempt him to stray. From his path. From belief. Tempt him with power. Security. Certainty. That he could be the master of his own fate. That he doesn't need God to protect him. He could have it all. Everything. Just take it.

This is the devil's bargain. It isn't satanic worship or doubt and disbelief. It is the self unmoored from dependent and reciprocal relationship. The exercise of power to dominate and oppress. To control the world around you. The things we call human greatness. Claiming them for ourselves. These are the things the devil tempts Jesus with because they are precisely not the things of Christ, of God. They aren't Christian.

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