

Bishop Bill Ray



Lord I'm Serious  
this Lent





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Additional “Going Further” material available on line for these studies at [www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm](http://www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm)



To help your group gell quickly, there is a suggested outline members could fill out at [www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm](http://www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm) and this would form a care basis for the group during the Lent Studies. There is also a Leaders Guide.

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## Introduction

The liturgical season of Lent brings forth a range of responses and behaviours from people. Some Christians give up eating chocolate, others cease drinking alcohol, while others refrain from participating in some pleasurable activity that involves spending money on self. People then give the money saved to a mission activity or project. Other Christians like to take up certain activities such as reading a particular book, attending a mid week worship and/or, spending time reflecting on a particular aspect of their faith journey and how they might be more faithful in serving Christ. I know some people who spend time reflecting on the fruit of the spirit and their journey of faith with the purpose to live more fully in Christ. “..... the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

I remember when I was young referring to these two verses as the “fruits of the spirit”. A clergy person gently told me that it is the “fruit of the spirit”. He went onto say that as a Christian, you need to focus on all nine aspects, not just one.

We live in a changing world. Life in the Church also continues to change. Some of us were brought up to fast before receiving Holy Communion. Many of us know about Lent, but there may be others who may not have even heard of the word “Lent” in faith community circles. In the past, you could assume that study group participants had a certain body of knowledge, However that is not the case today. Also some of those who have come to the faith recently, their focus is Jesus and not the institutional Church. It is important that each member of the study group is sensitive to the needs of other group members. However, all are welcome and we can learn from one another.

For churches that use the Lectionary, this Liturgical Year is Year A. On page 22 of the resource “Using the Catechumenal Process in Australia” it states, “The Lenten gospels of Year A are the classic Catechumenal readings, traditionally associated with the days before baptism.”

In the early Church, people seeking baptism at Easter were known as catechumens. The catechumens attended the early part of the worship (Ministry of the Word) and then withdrew from worship. In the time of withdrawal the catechumens participated in an intense time of instruction based on the Gospel reading for that day. Catechumens were seeking new life in Christ. Likewise, Christians use the season of Lent as a time to renew their life in Christ.

In many Christian Churches on Easter Day, worshippers are invited to renew their baptismal promises. It is important that we also spend time during Lent focusing on the baptismal promises so that when we come to renew our baptismal promises, we do so with a deeper understanding and conviction. In this study there is a section in the group time each week to explore one of the baptismal promises and/or questions.

Each study has five parts.

First, worship at both the start and conclusion of each group session.

Second, “Let’s kick in as we .....”, also known as “On Board Time”

Third, exploring a particular spiritual discipline as a group.

Fourth, focussing on a particular baptismal promise or question.

Five, pondering two of the readings for the Sunday for that particular week in Lent.

This is a smorgasbord. There is far too much material for each session. It is up to the group to decide which areas of the study you would like to explore, but I encourage each group to explore the “Spiritual Discipline” together. This approach is a slightly different to previous years, but it

enables group members to hear where other people are coming from in their faith journey. We are all different and may our differences enrich not only our group life, but encourage us to reflect in ways that we may not have thought of before, as we continue to move through the six weeks of Lent.

The journey of faith is an adventure. It is important that Christians take the disciplines of Lent seriously. May God bless you and your group members as you continue your journey of faith.

Bill.

## Let's Prepare

Some things to be aware of before we get underway:

1. Some people need a chair with a straight/firm back. People will not come if they know that they will be not be comfortable. Also check on mobility issues of participants. This is important especially if you are meeting in homes of group members.
2. If you are meeting in the Church hall or meeting room, make sure the space is booked and people can access the facility.
3. You may choose to have a vacant chair to remind group participants that they can invite people to join at anytime during the six weeks.
4. Clarify where you are meeting each week and at what time. This is particularly important if you meet in a different homes/venues each week. Make sure people know the directions. It is much easier today with internet based maps.
5. If you are having refreshments and fellowship, either before or after the study, clarify who will supply food, tea and coffee each week. Also it is important to check to see if any group members have any dietary requirements. Every group member must be catered for so that they have a real sense of belonging.
6. Stress, that what is said in the group stays in the group. Confidentiality Is important.







Study One Theme: Temptation.

**Opening Prayer and hymn:**

**Say together:**

Almighty God,  
whose Son fasted forty days in the wilderness,  
and was tempted as we are, yet did not sin:  
give us grace to direct our lives in obedience to your will,  
that, as you know our weakness,  
so we may know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen

(If the group decides you could sing this hymn together - Forty days and forty nights". You will find the words and music file you can sing along to at [www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm](http://www.grassroots.com.au/Lent2023.htm)

**The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

## Let's Get Started

1. Introduce yourself - who you are - what interests or hobbies you have - which service of worship you usually attend and how long you have been worshipping here at .....?
2. Share your involvement or interests in this Parish/Church/faith community.
3. Share any hopes you have for this study as you journey through the season of Lent.
4. Share a memory of either of your baptism, or another baptism you attended that excited or challenged you.

**NOTE:** There is no compulsion to respond to questions if you are not comfortable. Please say “pass” and your response will be respected.

### **The Spiritual discipline for this week - Fasting:**

For some the concept of fasting is new, while for others it is a discipline they have undertaken on a regular basis. While people may not understand fasting from a faith perspective, they understand fasting from a medical point of view. People fast before surgery and often before certain medical procedures and some blood tests. Medically, fasting has a specific purpose. Fasting from a faith perspective also has a purpose. Fasting for faith reasons is not just a physical activity to impress others but rather an inner transformation of the person.

Fasting to draw closer to God and not for the purpose of an outward show - Matthew 6:16-18)

*“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”.*

During Lent some people fast on Wednesday and/or Fridays. However, “A Prayer Book for Australia” (APBA) on page 450 states, “Ash Wednesday and



Good Friday are intended as days of fasting and abstinence”. Some people use these days to fast from the main meal and reduce their food consumption at other times during the day. When I was young we did not eat red meat on Good Friday. Other traditions include no red meat on Wednesday or Fridays. While it is important to fast, it is also important that we are sensible. As I have commented in other Lenten booklets some people must NOT physically fast for the sake of their health. However, each one of us can fast from certain behaviours such as arrogance, gossiping, apathy, envy, jealousy, laziness, negative thoughts and making negative comments.

There are some behaviours/attitudes that each of us can or should address in our life of faith this Lent.

1. Do you fast? If so, share how this has benefitted your life of faith or how fasting has challenged you as you seek to live out your faith.
2. Which of the four Scripture passages above speak to you the most? Share your insights.
3. Have you ever thought of fasting for a particular cause? Recently at St John’s Cathedral in Brisbane a priest fasted for nine days, highlighting the plight of refugees who have been held in detention. Does this action inspire you to undertake a fast?
4. Have you thought about fasting from certain negative behaviours? (I have sought to fast in this way and I have found that you have to be very disciplined and honest with yourself.)
5. The Matthew reading states that we are not to make a show of ourselves when we fast. How do you respond/react when you see people promoting themselves rather than focussing on our Lord?

### **The Baptismal Promise for this week:**

Do you turn to Christ?

**I turn to Christ.**

What does this promise mean to you?

If someone asked you to explain this promise, what would be your reply?



## Scripture Readings for the First Sunday of Lent:

Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-7

Matthew 4:1-11

### Points to ponder

A group member reads the into to each section

As individuals, we all face temptation. From time to time we are tempted to have that something extra that we do not need whether it is food or an item when shopping. At times we are tempted to cut corners and that can get us into trouble. I enjoy watching sport on the TV. However, I am horrified at the number of advertisements that are running at the moment to encourage people to gamble. It is made to look so simple; just go to this app and enter your details. Also the impression is that, if you are not involved with this gambling app, you are missing out on something important. What I find more frustrating, is that during and after the advertisement you then have a message that runs across the foot of the TV screen saying “Gamble responsibly”; along with the gambling help line number. I was heartened to hear recently that there are five possible statements about the dangers of gambling that may be included on gambling material. However, as Christians and as a Church it is important to address root cause of gambling. Recently on “Q&A” (ABC TV) Tim Costello stated that “Australians have the highest rate of gambling in the world”. He went onto say “that poker machines are built for addiction.” While families/households face gambling issues, it is important that the Church/our faith communities seek to love our neighbour and reach out to those who are struggling with gambling issues.

### Questions:

1. Is gambling a concern for you? If so, what do you believe we as Christians should do about this addiction in our community? In what ways can we put pressure on our Governments to address this social issue?
3. While we may be aware of AA, (Alcohol Anonymous), are we doing enough to make people aware of Gambling Anonymous (GA)? What can we do to make GA more accessible to people?
3. What are some of the ways parents and grandparents can help their children to address the issue of temptation in their lives?



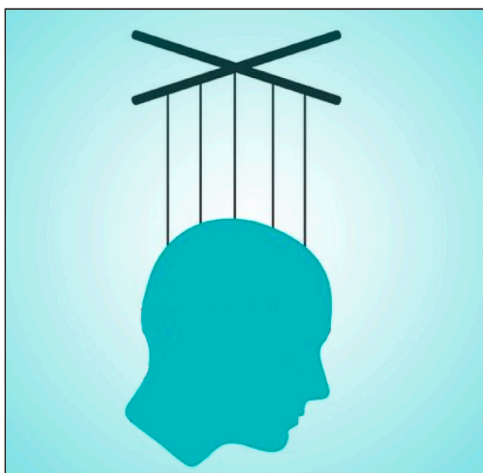
When I was a student teacher, I recall my classroom teacher saying to a group of students who had not done the right thing: “every action has a consequence”. I was impressed with how the teacher made sure the students understood this reality.

The account of the man and women in the garden of Eden is also about consequences that resulted from their actions. The Lord placed the man in the garden of Eden, with a very clear instruction, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge, the tree of good and evil you shall not eat”. Enter the serpent. The serpent is described as “more crafty than any other wild animal the Lord had made.” The result was, both the woman and man ate of fruit from the tree of knowledge. As they ate this fruit in the middle of the garden, their eyes were opened and they realised they were naked; their reality. The tree of knowledge represents the fullness of knowledge that belongs to God alone.

Even though the word “sin”, is not used in this passage, it is this passage from which theologians and others have developed the concept of “original sin”. “Original sin” is a doctrine that states that humans, through their birth, inherit a tainted nature. However, there is also “Original Righteousness” that states that Adam and Eve were without sin until they realised they had not obeyed the Word of the Lord”.

You and I were created with free will. We can respond to the love and grace of Christ or we can ignore that blessing. It is very easy to focus on self and not on God.

### **Further Questions:**



4. In what ways can we make sure we focus on God and not on self?
5. How helpful are the doctrines of “original sin” and “original righteousness” to your understanding of the Christian faith.
6. As a Christian, how do you understand “free will”?

**Matthew 4:1-11:**

Matthew's account of the Temptation of Jesus is the most detailed account in the synoptic gospels. (The passage is also found in Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13).

After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the devil three times. The three temptations were; turning stones to bread, going to the Temple and throwing himself down and being granted the kingdoms of the world.

On each occasion Jesus responded by quoting Scripture; Deuteronomy 8:3 "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"; Deuteronomy 6:16 "do not put the Lord your God to the test" and Deuteronomy 6:13 "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only".

We all face temptation. Jesus addressed temptation by quoting Scripture. It is important we live by Scripture when we face temptation in our own lives. As we journey on in faith we must never forget that Jesus is always with us, upholds us and sustains us, in all situations of life. While we know Jesus is always with us, the big question is for each of us a disciple of Christ is, "Are we with Christ?"

**Further Questions:**

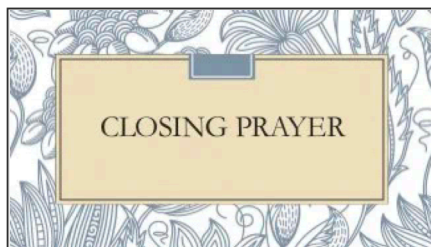
7. Jesus stood his ground with the Devil. What are some of the challenges you face in standing your ground when it comes to temptation? How can we make sure our life and activities are in keeping with the Gospel?
8. Should the Church provide more teaching in regard to the devil and evil? Share your thoughts.
9. What answer would you give your child or grandchild who asks "What is evil?" or "Do you think the Devil is real?"
10. What does the text, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him", mean to you? What do think this text might say to us as a community of faith?







Consider our wilderness this Lent



O Lord, who for our sake fasted forty days and forty nights:  
give us grace to use such abstinence,  
that, our flesh being subdued to the spirit,  
we may ever obey your godly will  
in righteousness and true holiness;  
to your honour and glory,  
who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, world without end. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all evermore. Amen.



**Sharing time and a cuppa to end this week's study.**