

## “SO ...”

I Lent  
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Mark 1:12-13  
Emmanuel Church

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*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

As Oscar Wilde said, “I can resist everything except temptation.”

One of the great things about Mark’s gospel is its brevity, which makes it easy to sit down and read the whole thing through. If you’re a slow reader, give yourself about two hours—even if you’re constantly stopping to look at your text messages. Read it this Lent, preferably in one sitting.

“[Jesus] was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan...” (Mk 1:13) We don’t need to relate to the particular temptations Jesus experienced because mercifully Mark doesn’t tell us what they were. An old friend of mine, a Methodist Army chaplain, liked to say about preaching, “Select a text—and depart from it.” Mark provides the outline and allows us—I like to think encourages us—to depart from it, letting us provide the details of our own temptations. What constitutes significant repentance for you and for me? How can this Lent make your life better?

Last week, I attended a talk on an important and potentially interesting topic, compost. The speaker ruined it for me because he began every sentence with the same 2-letter word: SO. Where did this annoying habit come from? Listen to cultural icons, NPR—Terry Gross is a gross offender—and PBS. The talking heads begin every answer with SO.

SO WHAT?! I want to scream at the radio or TV screen. It seems more prevalent than LIKE—and that’s saying something. Everyone—and I’ll be listening during announcement time—needs to give up SO for Lent, right now! End of rant.

That’s an easy one for me since I don’t think SO has yet crept into my vocabulary. Since it’s not my sin, it’s easy to call out.

SO ... where do we need to focus today?

Our grandsons like what their parents call “screen-time,” primarily playing games on the iPad. Wisely, Mary and Tom limit how long each day the boys can zone out. Sam, the younger one, almost 7 years old, never gets enough. The last time we were at their house, I told Sam I thought he needed to go to rehab. “What’s that?” “It’s where they give you an electric shock every time you pick up a device?” “I don’t what to go to ‘hab-hab!” We all laughed about it, even Sam. More recently, Sam was sneaking screen-time, and the hammer of home justice came down on him.

Almost 30 years ago the psychiatrist Gerald May wrote a book called *Addiction & Grace*. May spent much of his career treating the addicted, but towards the end of his life he joined the faculty of the Shalem Institute, a center for spirituality.

One of May's points, as I recall, was that addiction comes from a lack of faith in God. It's not unlike sin, a part of the human condition. We aren't confident about tomorrow, so we want to get as much as we can now.

I gave up drinking 40-plus years ago. I gave up cigars—I used to smoke 4 or 5 per day—30 years ago. In both cases, I was probably the first person to know I had a problem, just as Sam knows he has a problem with screen-time.

I can't give any one of you a list of what your own addictions are, though email, texting, Facebook are likely among them. You know. Anyone look at your phone during this sermon? Save that for the announcements. You know what temptation you can't resist. You know what isn't helpful for you. You know what gets in the way of living a good and faithful and loving life. 2500 years ago Lao-tzu said, "A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step." This Lent, take steps. You might just avoid hab-hab!