

## Interactive lesson



*picture from MMMS collection*

Do any of you play a musical instrument?

When I was in fifth grade, I signed up for band. My parents bought me a used clarinet, and I took lessons for the year. How well do you think I played at the start?

How well do you think I played by the end of that year?

Does practice make a difference?

I did not take any lessons or practice regularly after fifth grade. How well do you think I play now?

Well, let's see... I'll try a verse of "Amazing Grace," because that's what I'll need to get through it without hurting your ears...

Annie has played clarinet pretty consistently over the years. How well do you think she would play this hymn?

Does it help to have someone join in with you? Why?

Do they have to be playing the same instrument and same notes?

What happens when a lot of people who are serious about what they are doing join in with you?

Does it help if you all follow the same conductor,

playing your parts from the same composition?

Do you claim to be Christian?

What do you do to practice your faith?

Does it help to have someone join in with you? Why?

Do they have to be worshipping the same way or doing the same ministries?

What happens when a lot of people who are serious about their faith join in with you?

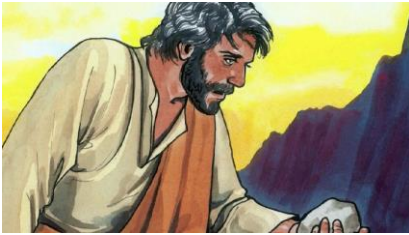
God has given each of us gifts that we can use in faith to make the world a better place. Some have similar gifts, some have very different gifts, but we can use them in harmony if we follow our great conductor God's direction, to bless the world more deeply than we might individually be able to do.

Pray for guidance this Lent as to what your part is in our Christian community, then practice it - we all need to practice to get really good! Practice your faith to the best of your ability so that we can truly let God's glory sound through us, both as individuals and as the band of God's community.

### **Gospel lesson**

Last week we heard about how, on the mountaintop, God said about Jesus, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased." Just prior to today's Gospel reading, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, and God said about Jesus, "This is my Son, the Beloved,

with him I am well pleased.”



picture cropped from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-014-jesus-temptation/>

### Matthew 4:1-11

NRSV

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

<sup>2</sup>He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

<sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

<sup>4</sup>But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,

<sup>6</sup>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.'"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;

<sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" UMH #269

## Message: If You Fall Down



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/learning-to-live-inside-out/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-in-lent-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Eternally patient Lord,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may turn to You without hesitation when we run into trouble, and to be Your grace-filled hands

helping others when they stumble too. Amen.

We get into our Lenten series “Learning to Live Inside Out” today with “If You Fall Down”:

“If we endeavor to work in the world around us, we will fall down. From time to time, we will fail; our efforts will not be received in the spirit intended; the fruit will be slow in coming.

So, if we must fall, let us fall down in worship of the one who redeems us.”



*picture cropped from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/father-and-daughter-doing-ice-skating-6289772/>;  
credit: cottonbro studio*

When we first took our younger son, Jonathan, to an ice skating rink, he was enthralled with the idea of sliding so smoothly over distances. He put on skates and took off – only to crash shortly thereafter. Undeterred, he got up and tried again.

He fell frequently at first, bumping into someone he did not notice, catching his skate on a rough patch, or just getting his feet too close and tripping himself.

I was amazed at how resilient he was after all those falls, because he kept getting up and going for it again. He wanted the joy of gliding across the ice

and knew we were there to help if he needed it.

Later, through the school, Jonathan tried snowboarding. Again, he fell a lot at first, but he loved the sport so he kept getting up and going more. Eventually, he got pretty good at it.

Trying to live as a Christian can feel like that. We start out in faith, excited, and try to live like God says. Then we run into other people, or rough situations that other people have left behind, or just trip over our own wants, and wind up faceplanted from sin.

People are tempted in all kinds of ways. It is our response to those temptations, our choices, that determine how we move forward from there.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/fn-adam-eve/>

Adam and Eve were given a choice in the garden, to trust God to lead them in life, or to take control for themselves and lose their path in life. Their sin of self-indulgence was evident in three areas:

- Care of self - ashamed, they cover their nakedness; **God** had called them good
- Relationship with God - ashamed, they hid from God; **God** walked in the garden to be with them

- Community – ashamed, they blamed others to make themselves look better, avoiding responsibility; **God** held them responsible as 1<sup>st</sup> humans setting example for generations to follow



picture cropped from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-014-jesus-temptation/>

In Jesus, we see a reversal of these responses to temptation from the Gospel reading today:

- Care of self – making bread from stones was self-indulgent, not healthy; **God** provides nourishment for body, mind, and soul, and Jesus sought that
- Relationship with God – making demands of another (let alone God!) is rude and self-centered; **God** offers exchanges of love, and Jesus sought that
- Community – ruling the world and worshipping Satan not only further destroys the relationship with God, it [irresponsibly misleads others away from what is good and healthy for them] and [elevates the individual's wants over the people's needs]; **God** calls us to make the world better through serving others' needs, and Jesus sought that

Paul describes to the Romans what a fundamental shift Jesus's righteousness was in the face of a world filled with the aftermath of the original sin. Christ reversed the choice of self over God to put God

first, enabling all relationships to be restored.

We see Jesus's example and think, "Yes! That's what we want to do!" and set off trying to glide through life, only to let our egos get in the way and cause us to fall again. But God is there to help when we need it, to get us back on our feet and gliding again.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/learning-to-live-inside-out/ash-wednesday-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/ash-wednesday-year-a-graphics>

Lent is a time for us to refocus on God, to listen to Jesus's lessons, to take the hand offered by the Holy Spirit and get back on our feet so we can be ready for the celebration of Easter. So what do we do?

- First, try not to sin. Like John Wesley's 1<sup>st</sup> rule – Do no harm – this is easier said than done!
- John Wesley's 2<sup>nd</sup> rule – Do good. Try to live better through dedication to God, because of Jesus.
- John Wesley's 3<sup>rd</sup> rule – Attend upon all the ordinances of God – is usually expressed as "Stay in love with God." If you love someone you try to please them, to do better for them.
- Commit improvement to God, to Jesus, for the rest of Lent – it is not too late to start!
- If you stumble or fall, ask the Spirit for help, ask Jesus for help, take the offered hand, and then



get up and keep trying!

Practice makes perfect, and as Wesley described our Christian journey in grace, we should be striving to reach Christian perfection – such complete alignment with God that sin is no longer even tempting.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-tattooed-woman-helping-her-teammate-9517934/>;  
credit: Anastasia Shuraeva

If we are going to fall, is it not better to do it somewhere that you can have help getting up again, rather than getting [trampled or abandoned] and lost? Who better to practice with than others following Jesus's example?

Practice in harmony with fellow Christians, making use of all of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon our community, to let God's glory resound throughout this world!

One way to practice our faith is to tell others what we believe. Let us work on that now through reciting:  
**The Apostles' Creed, Ecumenical Version** UMH #882

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\*\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*\*\*universal*