

A FORTY-DAY JOURNEY of REPENTANCE

GET OVER
YOURSELF;
GOD'S HERE!

KATE MOOREHEAD



To the first century, Jesus proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" But what would he announce to the twenty-first century, to a world devoted to the cult of self? Kate Moorehead offers an evocative suggestion: *Get over yourselves! God's here!*

In this book of Lenten meditations, Moorehead reflects pastorally on the nature of sin and repentance in our contemporary context. Repentance is not about focusing more and more attention upon ourselves, upon our foibles, faults and failures. Rather, it is a process whereby we shift our attention away from ourselves to God. By focusing upon Jesus and his way of doing things, Moorehead offers a vision for a practice of repentance that helps us address all the ways we separate ourselves from God, while avoiding "the ruts of self-absorption and self-analysis that are so prevalent in our time and culture." In *Get Over Yourself; God's Here!*, we embark on a journey of repentance that saves us from ourselves and frees us for a vibrant life with God.

"This is a delightful book. Kate Moorehead firmly yet gently (and with considerable warmth and humour) encourages us to face head-on the pains, frailties and fallibilities of the human condition, in ways that prompt us into deeper engagement with the loving Creator Father whose arms are always open to receive us, the incarnate Son who shows us what it is to be truly human, and the life-giving and sustaining Spirit who desires to lead us further on the redemptive journey towards the fullness of the promise of Easter."

The Most Rev. Dr. Thabo Cecil Makgoba
Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa

"With her brisk mixture of stories, memories, questions and rueful musings, Kate Moorehead conducts her readers on a forty-day walk through an experience of repentance that is anything but bleak. Rather, it is soul-satisfying."

Barbara Cawthorne Crafton

*Priest, Author and Founder of
The Geranium Farm (www.geraniumfarm.org)*



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WICHITA, KANSAS

Get Over Yourself; God's Here!: A Forty-Day Journey of Repentance.

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This book is dedicated
to
St. James Episcopal Church
in
Wichita, Kansas.

For my eyes have seen Your salvation.
LUKE 2:30

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Jesus walked into the desert alone to face the devil. What does it mean for us that he confronted evil before he began his ministry? How can we face and defeat our own temptations? Before we can help anyone else, we must know ourselves and how temptation expresses itself in our own lives. We must face the bad stuff first.

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Author's Preface

God truly is here, just waiting for you to open your eyes. Take your mind off yourself and be free. I hope that this book gives you some help as you take your first steps into a life of repentance. It is a life of true beauty and gratitude as you move out of yourself and into God's presence.

May Jesus bless you as you turn these pages.

*Kate Moorehead +
October 2009*

So long, self,
Well, it's been fun,
But I have found somebody else.

FROM "SO LONG SELF" BY MERCYME

Introduction

When I use the word SIN these days, no one seems to understand what I'm talking about. People sit in my office and stare at me with blank expressions. Maybe they think I am telling them that God is angry with them for a particular behavior or, worst case scenario, that they are simply a lost cause. The word *sin* has been stretched to the point that we hardly know what it means anymore. It has been made to fit our inadequacies, our failures, our misdemeanors, and even our felonies. *Sin* carries so much baggage that I think some people simply shut down when they hear it. Believing that one word doesn't cut it, we've found lots of other words besides plain old *sin* to describe all the stuff that separates us from God. Let me describe a handful of these words for you.

Sometimes I talk to people about their ISSUES. Everyone has *issues*. That's a good word. I can just see people nodding and smiling in my office when I talk about our issues. Having issues is very palatable and acceptable in today's culture.

MISTAKES is another word used to talk about sin. Some mistakes are small; some are huge. Maybe we use this word to get ourselves off the hook, as in, "It was *just* a mistake." *Deliberate mistakes* might be a better way to put it. But still, mistakes doesn't cut it when we are talking about someone deliberately hurting another person.

ADDICTION is a popular word for a particular kind of sin, the kind that you know is wrong but are, nevertheless, almost powerless to stop. It's the kind of sin that is mainly against your own self or your own body but, in turn, wounds everyone who loves you.

And then there is the worst kind of sin. I'm talking about the kind of behavior that seriously damages your own soul, like murder and adultery and other really bad stuff. For these things, perhaps there is no better label than plain old SIN.

Beyond that use of sin, there are EVILS and HORRORS that defy words and understanding.

How can one word encompass all these distinctions? Surely there are different types and degrees of sin. Jesus also spoke of transgression, debt and unrighteousness, but these words have become obsolete to us. So we are left with the word *sin*. Why has it become so difficult to translate and understand what Jesus was trying to tell us? Should we come up with more words to describe the ways that we separate ourselves from God? No, this would only lead to a greater focus on the negative.

Instead, maybe God wants us to honestly acknowledge those things that we have done to separate ourselves and make a straightforward assessment of them, without turning each "sin" into a sacred cow that draws all of our focus and energy.

Harping on the intricacies of our sinfulness is not the best form of repentance. In fact, it can become its own kind of sin, an obsession with self. And we all know how seductive that can be. After all, we love to focus on ourselves. How much

time do you spend thinking about how you are feeling or how you look or what people think of you? Thinking about ourselves can take up a lot of our time and energy.

Jesus says that once we repent and turn toward the Light, God forgives us, and our sin is gone. Finished. Over. Poof! *It is as if the sin never existed.* So there must be another way of repentance besides this obsessive, backward-looking focus on what we've done wrong. Sure, we have to look at ourselves in order to make changes, but more importantly, we have to look ahead of us to where we're going.

Jesus calls to all of us with these words, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" (cf. Mark 1:15; Matt 3:2, 4:17). A few years ago, I began to spend serious time thinking about what repentance really means. I came up with a new translation that speaks to our current times. When Jesus talked about repentance, what I think he was really saying was:

Get over yourselves!

The Greek word used in the New Testament for repentance is *metanoia*. If *paranoia* is having a distorted mind that is preoccupied with self and how others view us, then *metanoia* is having a changed mind that turns towards God and away from ourselves. In other words,

Get over yourselves! God's here!

So here's my proposal. Since Lent is traditionally a forty-day period in which we are supposed to examine our sins, and since we are not even clear about what the word *sin* means anymore, and since we tend to focus on ourselves to the exclusion of God, let's try something new. Instead of obsessively analyzing what *doesn't* work about ourselves, let's look at what *did* work in Jesus. Maybe when Jesus told us to repent, he was not asking us to over-analyze our wrongdoings but, instead, to turn to him for guidance so that we could be renewed in God.

Jesus was the only man who was born and lived without sin. This was God's Son come down to earth to show us how to live. So let's talk about *Jesus*, and let's talk about what *Jesus* did right. Let's look at how he prayed, how he made decisions, how he communicated. Let's examine all that good stuff and see if it will change our lives. Perhaps instead of beating ourselves up for all the things that we do wrong, we could begin by seeing what Jesus did right and trying to imitate his way of doing things. Maybe this new approach could get us out of the ruts of self-absorption and self-analysis that are so prevalent in our time and culture.

So let's get over ourselves. Let's shift our focus to Jesus' way of doing things and get into a vibrant life with God. Let's begin a journey of repentance.

CHAPTER 1

Face the Bad Stuff First

Ash Wednesday to Saturday

ASH WEDNESDAY

Identify Your Temptations

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

LUKE 4:1-2

Britney Spears has everything: great looks, talent, and more money than some small countries. She has everything that we think we need. And she is miserable.

The actor Heath Ledger died at twenty-eight. His recipe for death? Great looks, incredible talent, and lots of money. Despite having “it all” he couldn’t sleep at night, so he started taking drugs. And he took too many.

It strikes me that human beings are like my dog Benjamin. Ben is a chocolate lab. He’s sweet, but dumb as a rock. If I gave him a fifteen pound bag of dog food, he would gorge himself to death. He would eat until he died. That dog has no idea when to say when.

When it comes to issues of money, good looks, and power, we don’t know when to say when either. We think we

would be happy if we could just get the fat off our thighs or erase the wrinkles from our eyes. If only we had more money, more influence, better looks, or more friends. If only people noticed us.

We look to the celebrities as if they are minor gods. We call them *the stars*, as if they are lights for us to see by. Kirk Franklin, the popular Christian artist, raps, “America has no more stars, now we call them idols.” But look at them, these stars and idols. They are miserable.

What are temptations? They are the urges that draw us away from God. Jesus had three archetypal temptations, but most of us have more like twenty-five (or 500). Jesus said, “No,” to his temptations. Most of *us* buy right into them and live according to their advice, . . . until we realize our lives aren’t working.

What are your temptations? Since I work and have three small boys, one of mine is this (and it’s a good one), “Poor me! I work *so* hard. No one works as hard as I do!”

Or, there’s a guy I know who’s a shopaholic. His temptation? “If I buy more things, I will feel better.” He had racked up enormous credit card debt buying little trinkets and stuff that he thought he needed. He ended up owing more than he could pay and was evicted from his apartment. A friend built him a wooden trailer that he stuffed full of his belongings. While he was on the road to his mother’s house, the trailer broke apart on the highway. It was so full of stuff that it literally exploded, and his things were scattered across the road. So he called me, and he said, “It’s not fair! Why is God so unfair to me?”

I have another friend who truly believes that she needs a man to make her happy. After years of failed relationships, she has decided that all the men who love her will leave her. And so they do leave her, and she gets sucked deeper into the vortex of her own temptation. Every relationship she endures only seems to prove her theory that all men will leave her. She finds herself alone, and her temptation becomes her reality.

What are your temptations? Do they tell you that you are not good enough? That you are stupid? That you are ugly? That you are a failure? Do they tell you that it's okay to drink alcohol even though your dad drank himself to death? Do they tell you that this person you've just met is *the one*, even though he hits you? Do they tell you that you can't make it because you haven't gotten *the break* that you need?

The best thing to do with temptations is to take them out and look at them. That's what Jesus did. He sat alone in the quiet, and he let the enemy speak to him. He listened to the devil, to the tempter himself. Only then could he clearly say, "No!"

Write down your temptations, and then read them aloud. Tell someone about them. Bring them into the light. You will be amazed at how ridiculous many of them are, and how easy it is not to buy into them if you just speak them aloud. Spend time alone like Jesus did and discover how destructive your thoughts have become. And then—only then—will they begin to lose their power over you. Oh, they will return, but next time you will be able to recognize them more quickly. You will not be so taken in.

If only my friend could realize the foolishness of her temptation. If only she could see how her believing that every man who loves her leaves her brings that reality to pass, she could be so incredible. She could be happy. Maybe she could actually find time to love herself. If only my shopaholic friend could realize that things can't make him feel full, he might begin to fully live. If only I could see that my job and my children are blessings from God and not busyness to overcome, I could enjoy my life in deeper ways.

We must get out of the muck of our self-centeredness if we are ever to truly live. The last thing that the tempter wants is for you to realize who you really are—a child of God, beloved and capable of infinite possibilities.

FIRST THURSDAY IN LENT

Lean on God

The tempter came and said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

MATTHEW 4:3–4

Of all the people to have walked the earth, Jesus was certainly the most capable. He could do anything for himself and for others. Just the sound of his voice or the touch of his hand could radically change lives. Imagine having that kind of power! No wonder temptation came to Jesus first in the form of self-reliance. What a great temptation for a supremely capable man. The problem for the devil, however, was this: Jesus knew that, for all his capabilities, he needed his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that his power flowed directly from the Father, which gave him the strength to overcome this temptation.

Unfortunately, most of us live our lives in total obedience to the temptation of self-reliance. Why should we ask God for help when we can be in charge of our own lives? Instead of recognizing our dependence on God, we opt for the do-it-

yourself life, believing that we can somehow control our universe. We fool ourselves into thinking that we can make our own success, solve our own problems, and create our own happiness. I think the wealthy and the young are the most susceptible to this kind of temptation.

We use a variety of means in our futile attempts to control our world. We schedule every moment of our lives, as if the order we create will keep chaos at bay. We alter our moods through drugs or alcohol. We try to influence the behavior of others, sometimes with manipulation.

Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker that says, "Jesus Is Coming. Look Busy." Among other things, I think that bumper sticker is poking fun at our belief that we control our lives and that Christ's coming might actually throw a wrench into our plans. In truth, a more accurate bumper sticker might read, "God's Here. Look Busy." That's what most of us do every day of our lives.

Everything about our culture tells us that we can be in control of our world. Buy this product, and you will be happy. Take this vitamin, and you will stay young. Make enough of an effort, and you will succeed in life. Take this vacation, and you will find relaxation. Buy this life insurance policy, and everything will be alright.

The antidote to this kind of temptation, ironically, is suffering. When our lives fall apart, the mirage of this temptation starts to crack, and we realize that we were never really in control of our lives. The truth is that we fall ill, loved ones die, stock markets crash, and we have very little idea about what is

going to happen to us tomorrow. The more we learn about the universe, the more we realize how fragile we are as a human race. We hurtle through space on this tiny planet, in a small area of atmospheric pressure. The very fact of our existence is truly miraculous. When compared to the Maker of the universe, we are insignificant. God says to each of us, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return” (cf. Gen 3:19).

The temptation to be completely self-reliant is a great one, but the truth is that you and I are fragile beings who cannot even breathe without God. Everything that we do, we do by the grace of God. We must remember this. We are not capable of living without God. Jesus knew it. And that’s how he lived every day of his earthly life.

FIRST FRIDAY IN LENT

Don't Worship Anything Else But God

Then the devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

LUKE 4:5–7

The second temptation was even more powerful than the first. In it, the evil one upped the ante. No longer was he talking about mere food. No, this was bigger and better. The second offer made to Jesus is one that is made to us every day of our lives, "Worship me and you can have everything the world can offer." But Jesus knew this: focus on the wrong thing, and you subtly but *powerfully* remove yourself from God.

The evil one takes many forms. Money is a favorite one, so is success, passion, popularity, and fame. In order to understand your own struggle with the tempter, ask yourself, "What is my first priority in life?" Is it God? If not, you've got an *issue!*

John joined our parish after he had a heart attack. He had gone to a top-notch college with the belief that his life's purpose

was to rise above the poverty that had enveloped his parents. He graduated with honors and went to work at a top-paying corporation. He married and had kids, but spent all his time working, telling himself this was his way of loving his family. “They will never be poor. They will never have to hurt like I did.” That was the thought that ran through his mind when he missed baseball games, family vacations, and time alone with his wife.

At forty-five, after pulling eighty-hour work weeks for years, he suffered a massive heart attack. Lying in the hospital bed, he woke up for the first time in many years. He realized that somehow he had come to worship success and, in doing that, had sold his soul and almost lost his life.

The transition from worship of the wrong thing to truly living was difficult for John. He realized he couldn’t simply cut back at work. He realized that, in fact, there was very little about his work that he found fulfilling. He resigned.

John and his family had to move into a smaller house. They had to reevaluate their lifestyle. John had to face that old demon that told him he was making his children suffer whenever he could not afford to buy them what they wanted. But he was also able to see that his children were happier. They may have had less stuff, but they had a dad for the first time in their lives.

John ended up resurrecting an old, childhood hobby. He remembered he had gifts that he had neglected for years. He became a master carpenter, and his wife, who was not finding fulfillment at home alone, found herself a job as a teacher.

They struggled a bit, but they also found balance and a level of fulfillment that they had not known before. And John began to come to church. He said to me, “I feel alive for the first time in many years. It’s as if I had handed my soul to that company. I am so grateful to have a second chance.”

Jesus asked, “What good is it if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?” (cf. Matt 16:26). Let me ask you this: Where are your priorities? Where do you expend most of your physical and mental energies? Are you worshiping something that ultimately brings death? Or, are your eyes fixed on the One who brings life?

FIRST SATURDAY IN LENT

Evil Is Muddy

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

GENESIS 3:6

There are too many tragedies, too much pain and needless suffering in this world, for us not to take seriously the existence of evil. There must be some other force, something antithetical to God, that lures us away. Eve did not come up with the idea of eating the forbidden fruit. That idea, that temptation, was introduced to her by a source outside herself. That darkness was somehow already in existence, waiting to be destructive.

The motivations of people in this world are complex. I see parishioners hurt themselves and others, and yet, I would not say that they were fundamentally *bad* people. Many times they are very faithful Christians. But despite their efforts to control destructive behavior, these people succumb to temptation and do the very things they try to avoid.

I perform weddings that are nothing short of a battlefield, full of soap-opera drama and power struggles, the dreams of an

idyllic wedding, . . . lost. The children's home near our church is full of teenage boys who have been abandoned. Many arrive in police cars, their parents having abused them, the dreams of parents and children for a loving family, . . . lost. I know people who, after years of sobriety, begin to drink again, the dreams of a life of wholeness, . . . lost.

A few months ago a woman came to visit me. A Roman Catholic, she was married and having an affair, which she had no intention of ending. Somehow she thought that, because I married a couple who had each been divorced, I would understand what she called her *predicament* and encourage her to divorce her husband. The man she had been sleeping with was begging her to end her marriage, stating that her love had rescued him from depression. She told herself that she was actually helping this man, saving him with her love. She acted as if her affair was some kind of romance novel and that she was doing something wonderful by loving a man who was not her husband. The power of her feelings for her lover made her believe that leaving her husband was the loving thing to do. She had become so enveloped in the affair that she could no longer see the destruction that it was causing her soul. She was a very confused woman.

The devil is the personification of everything that ruins us. Why would a woman who described herself as happily married engage in such destruction? Why would she ever begin such an affair? And how could she have come to believe that the affair was good? I'm sure that there were a host of painful incidents in her past, but no matter what the circumstances, she was hurt-

ing herself and others.

The problem with the devil is that his existence is not as well differentiated to us as it was to Jesus. Evil exists for us; yes, of that I am sure. But it is woven into the fabric of our lives. The powers of darkness are so complex, so intertwined with our very being, that some choices are nearly impossible to make without choosing wrong. When it comes to the evil that surrounds us, we simply cannot see with the clarity that Jesus possessed. Sometimes avoiding sin is like trying to walk between the raindrops.

I think that is the reason we love action movies like Star Wars. We long for evil to make itself apparent. We love hating Darth Vader. As Vader parades across the set, the ominous music begins to play. He is so easy to identify, so easy to hate! If only we could have it so easy. If only life could be so crystal-clear.

On rare occasion, evil manifests itself with such potency that it is hard to avoid. Hitler is an obvious example. Just think of all the well-meaning Germans who were hoodwinked by him for so many years. Or think of those who averted their eyes because they were afraid or busy or avoided the truth for some other reason that seemed legitimate at the time. Hind-sight is 20/20, but even with Hitler standing before them, many people chose to cheer with the crowd rather than question his madness.

Think about this: the fact that Jesus was able to have a verbal, open battle with the devil himself is a sign of the immensity of his wellness. The devil could not inhabit him in the way

that he does us. He was forced to be visible. Jesus identified the evil one even before he began his series of temptations, and half the battle was won right there.

I wish that I could bring the devil out of hiding and describe him to you with clarity, but it seems that only Jesus could do that. The rest of us are left living in the muddy waters of the in-between time, when evil is subtly woven into the fabric of our lives, and we must pray before every decision we make and every action we take.

Reflection Questions for Chapter 1

1. What are some of your temptations? What thoughts and urges draw you from the love of God? Write them down. Speak them aloud. Bring the darkness into the light.
2. Evil is muddy and difficult to describe, and yet we are called to state clearly when we are tempted or inclined to turn away from God. Think of times in your life when you turned away from God. What were those times like? How can you learn from them?

Additional Praise

“Kate Moorehead’s insights into sin offer a refreshing mirror in which we can see ourselves, not in some punishing, medieval fashion—but as precious children of Christ’s redemption. She looks deeply into the reality of sin, faces it squarely and produces fresh insights that are both positive and life changing for those whose lens for seeing God is Jesus Christ.”

The Rev. Dr. Mark S. Anschutz

Parish Consultant, Clergy Coach, Preacher and Teacher