

06

SESSION SIX

Jesus' Temptation

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we witness Jesus' faithfulness in the wilderness of temptation. Unlike Adam and Eve in the garden and the children of Israel in the wilderness, Jesus refused to gratify His desires apart from God's will or to test God and His promises. Instead of taking the path of earthly exaltation, Jesus fixed His eyes on the cross and triumphed over the temptations of the Evil One. As Christians, we can resist temptation by trusting in the Savior who overcame temptation in our place.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 4:1-11

THE POINT

Jesus overcame temptation through the power of God's Word.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The spiritual life can be understood as a wilderness, as a journey through the desert. However, many Christians are surprised when their temptations seem to grow in intensity, even after they commit to Jesus. The story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness teaches us that struggle always follows commitment. Even more, struggle is the test of faithfulness.

When the first disciples dropped their fishing nets to follow Jesus, they probably never anticipated the struggles that would follow. Tradition says that all but one of the disciples would be martyred. Saying "yes" to God came with a cost, and the same is true of us today. Experiencing temptation and overcoming the Evil One is one of the ways we become stronger—able to continue saying "yes" to the great cost and great reward of following Christ.

- **What are some common temptations Christians struggle with today? Why are these temptations so common?**

Option 2

Create a list of options, such as "Would you rather eat ice cream or fruit?" Create enough questions for four rounds, making the decisions more difficult with each round. For example, maybe the last round's question would be something like, "If it was a given that you would be successful at whatever you tried, would you rather establish your own business or solve a major world problem?"

Ask four to five students to volunteer to answer these questions. After you have made it through all four rounds of options, explain that some choices are easy and some temptations seem easier to avoid. However, as time goes on, we often face more and more difficult choices and greater temptation to choose what seems best to us or will bring us the most recognition. When faced with some difficult decisions, Jesus made the right choice every time. He battled temptation by using the Word of God, and we can follow His example when faced with temptations and difficult choices in our own lives.

- **Think of your own school, church, or group of friends. List some difficult decisions young people often face today.**
- **How can we stand strong against temptation, especially in the face of difficult decisions?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Jesus overcame temptation through the power of God's Word.

CHARACTERS

- **Jesus** - the eternal Son of God; second person of the Trinity
- **Satan** - the Devil, the Accuser, the father of lies who's only desire is to kill, steal, and destroy

PLOT

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted. One of the things we see in this account is that, unlike Adam and Eve in the Garden and unlike the children of Israel in the wilderness, Jesus refused to gratify His desires apart from God's will or to test God and His promises. Instead of taking the path of earthly exaltation, Jesus fixed His eyes on the cross and triumphed over the temptations of the Evil One. As Christians, we can resist temptation by trusting in the Savior who overcame temptation in our place.

TIMELINE

JESUS OVERCOMES TEMPTATION

Where Adam and Eve and the early Israelites failed, Christ succeeded.

*Special session

WHO IS HE?

The disciples learn Jesus' identity and the purpose behind why He came.

THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

Jesus invites ordinary people to follow Him.

JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO SATISFY HIS DESIRES APART FROM GOD'S WILL

Many of us approach our reading of the Bible as if it were medicine we should take in small doses. We read a few verses, or perhaps even a paragraph, in the morning or at night.

There is nothing wrong with reading the Bible in this way, but if we only read the Bible in small blocks, we might miss some of the elegant connections between the stories. It is easier to see the connections when you read larger portions of Scripture in one sitting.

A great example is the story of Jesus' baptism, which we studied in the previous session, and Jesus' temptation. We must read one to understand the other. At the Jesus' baptism, the Father affirmed Jesus' identity as His beloved Son, and the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. The same Spirit who descended upon Jesus at His baptism led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. Not surprisingly, the first temptation had to do with Jesus' identity as the Son of God—a question of the affirmation He just heard at His baptism.

Keeping these two stories together the way the Gospel writers did, we notice the straight line from the Jordan River to the desert. The baptism represents the door to the wilderness.

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁴ But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”” (Matt. 4:1-4)

Satan's intent was revealed in the opening words of his first assault: He questioned Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In order to understand the strategy Satan used against Jesus, we must understand how his opening move was intended to lead Jesus to doubt His identity and to indulge an earthly appetite.

Jesus fasted for forty days, so Satan attacked Him at His weakest moment. Behind the temptation to turn the stones into bread was the assumption that physical food is the most important nourishment we need, but Jesus' response said otherwise. In each of the three temptations, Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy. His reference here, to Deuteronomy 8:3, noted the Word of God as the most needed nourishment.

Bread is one of the sustaining foods for physical life. However, more important than bread is the life of the Spirit. Our spiritual lives are sustained by the Word of God. Jesus understood that although His body was starving, He had feasted on God's Word, spoken over Him at the Jordan River. Jesus knew He was the Son of God—not a starving beggar in the wilderness, but a Son who delighted in the Word of His Father.

- In what way did the Word of God sustain Jesus when the Devil tempted Him? How did this relate to Jesus' identity? (p. 40, PSG)

JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO TEST GOD AND DOUBT HIS PROMISES

With his second temptation, Satan escalated his assault on Jesus. The Son of God stood firm in the area of His physical desires, so Satan's strategy shifted. He wanted Jesus to doubt God's promises.

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple⁶ and said 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.””⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matt. 4:5-7)

Satan transported Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. Herod's temple was a marvel. One rabbi said, “He who has not seen Herod's Temple has not seen beauty.”¹ The 35-acre complex was surrounded by a colonnade. In the center of the splendor was the temple itself, fashioned from glistening white marble and also crowned with gold leaf. It is said that when the sun shone directly on the temple, one had to look away because of its brilliance.²

Satan took Jesus to the top of this magnificent building, and he altered his attack by adopting Jesus' method of warfare. Here, Satan also quoted the Bible—Psalm 91:11-12—which refers to God's tender provision of protection to the ones He loves.

Satan intended for Jesus to understand these two verses in isolation, apart from the larger context of the Psalm. But Psalm 91 speaks of a person who rests in faith and trusts in the Almighty. The psalmist wrote about why he was not afraid and why he had made the Lord his refuge. In short, the song is from someone who placed his total trust in God.

Trust in God? That is not how Satan wanted the verses to be understood. Lifted from its context of trust, the verses Satan quoted were mangled into an invitation to distrust God. For Jesus to throw Himself from the temple roof would be to test His Father. This would mean that Jesus was demanding a sign regarding His identity as God's Son, that the Father's affirmation at the baptism was not enough, and that God would have to prove the truth of His earlier statement. Again, Jesus turned to Deuteronomy in response, telling Satan that He would not test the Lord.

TIMELINE

BORN AGAIN

Nicodemus encounters Jesus and learns about the new birth.

THE ECLIPSE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

John the Baptist points others to Jesus.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Jesus reaches out to the outcasts of society.

Jesus' experience helps us understand our own struggle against temptation in our personal wilderness. God's Word provides the basis of our confidence. Our faith and trust in His Word provides the strength to resist Satan's continual lies. If Jesus had to rely on the Word of God, how much more should we?

Satan (the "accuser") always seeks to plant doubts in our minds—doubts that say God is not trustworthy. Jesus' life and obedience is a constant reminder that the Father can be trusted in every situation. Satan sows seeds of condemnation and confusion, but God's Word is rich in encouragement and clarity. Satan knows that if he can introduce the smallest doubt, he will have his foot in the door. But, if we continue in fellowship with God and walk with Jesus in the light of His Word, Satan is already defeated.

JESUS WAS TEMPTED TO EXALT HIMSELF APART FROM THE CROSS

With the final temptation, Satan offered a shortcut for Jesus to arrive at exaltation—through bowing down and worshiping him instead of choosing to fulfill His calling as the Messiah.

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (Matt. 4:8-11)

Jesus was taken to a high mountain. Mysteriously, here Jesus had a glimpse of all the kingdoms of the world at once. Satan's goal was for Jesus to worship him in order to receive power.

Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days and nights. Here, Satan abandoned his tactic of quoting Scripture. He had used the Scripture as a ploy, not because God's Word was a source of life.

However, Jesus knew who He was. He knew that His kingdom would be centered on a cross. He knew that His kingdom would be based on His self-sacrifice, not His self-exaltation. He knew that His glory would flow from His identity as the Son of God. And so, once again, He quoted Deuteronomy, saying that only God was deserving of His worship and service.

Jesus' sonship had been declared at His baptism and was demonstrated in the wilderness. In the desert, the Son of God displayed the ultimate worth of God the Father. In the desert, the Son trusted in God and fed on His Word. After being defeated, the devil left Jesus. Luke added that Satan's departure was until another time (4:13).

The battle was over for the moment. Angels came and served Jesus. At Jesus' birth, the angels praised God for His goodness. In this passage, the angels did not fight for Jesus, but fed Him and ministered to Him.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Temptation and Sin (p. 42, PSG)

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet He never sinned but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus' triumph over the temptation to turn stones into bread brings to mind two other biblical scenes. First, Adam and Eve were placed in a Garden filled with all the food they would ever need. Yet, even in that paradise, the serpent drew them to the one tree that was forbidden. In seeing that the tree's fruit was good to eat, they disobeyed God and were exiled from the garden into the wilderness.

Second, the children of Israel wandered in a literal wilderness. Even there, God's provision was everywhere. They were given manna from heaven and quail to eat. They had water to drink, miraculously provided from a rock in the desert. When their enemies threatened, God intervened to protect His people. Even with all this provision and protection, the Israelites grumbled against God and were forced to remain in the desert instead of entering the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

Like Adam and Eve and the children of Israel, we must also recognize our tendency to be faithless in spite of all God has given us. The temptation of Jesus shows us the One who remained steadfast and committed to trusting in the provision of God. We benefit from His victory and walk in His steps.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is knowing who you are in Christ so important in the fight against sin?**
People tend to live and act in accordance with what they believe to be true about themselves. When people come to a deeper understanding of who they are in Christ and of the Spirit who now lives in them, they will take the war against sin more seriously.
- **What are some ways Christians attempt to battle temptation and sin and fail? What was Jesus' approach?**
Often times people only address the physical act of sinning and not the source of the sin, namely the heart. Sure, Christians should be smart and intentional about avoiding situations where they know they will be tempted. However, it is vital to remember that the battleground for sin is in the heart, and if people are committed to hiding God's Word in their hearts, then they will be more successful overall in the battle against sin.
- **Satan tried to manipulate the true meaning of God's Word in his attack on Jesus. What does this teach us about our need to properly understand God's Word? Answers will vary.**
- **Do you hunger for God's Word just as much as you hunger for food? Why or why not? What are some ways you can begin to increase your appetite for God's Word in your life?**
Some people don't recognize they are malnourished until they begin to live a life of healthy eating and exercise. Likewise, our hunger for God's Word will increase not only when we begin to taste it for the first time, but also as we continue to feast from it daily.

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption,
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES

HEAD

The wilderness is the place God uses to establish our identity as His sons and daughters. In the Old Testament, God called His people to the wilderness so they could learn His worth and learn to truly worship Him. Pharaoh was told to let the people go to the wilderness to worship God. In the wilderness, Israel learned the words of God. The same can be said of the wilderness temptation of Jesus. Jesus' sonship was declared by the Father at the Jordan River, and His relationship with the Father was strengthened by His obedience in the wilderness. There Jesus demonstrated what it truly means to be a child of God.

- **When have you had a “wilderness” experience in your life spiritually? Did it seem like a test? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this account change the way you view difficult times in your life? What are some important lessons we can learn through times like these?** *Answers will vary.*

HEART

Jesus' struggle in the wilderness is our struggle, and His victory there can become ours, too. As we study the Scriptures, we come to realize that the hunger of temptation in the wilderness can only be truly satisfied by trusting in the promises of God's Word. The identity we have received from God, as His sons and daughters, must be stronger than the false identities that Satan and the world may offer us.

- **When have you been tempted to “put God to the test”—to see if He would keep His promise to you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does Jesus' victory over temptation give you confidence when you are in the wilderness?** *We can gain confidence by knowing our Savior understands us because He experienced temptation like we do, and He has the same source to fight against sin that we have today—God's Word.*

HANDS

When talking about the armor of God in Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul mentioned only one offensive weapon—the sword of the Spirit—and identified it as the Word of God. Jesus' wilderness experience clearly illustrated Paul's point. When looking at how Jesus countered the temptations of the Devil, we see a perfectly good example of what it looks like to use Scripture in the fight of faith. Thus, instead of trying to overcome temptation or fight sin through self-strength or clever tactics, Christians are to unsheathe the Word of God by believing God's promises in the fight for faith.

- **Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn the stones into bread? What does Jesus' answer teach us about the importance of God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How might you become equipped to use the power of God's Word in your own fight against sin? How equipped are you?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item # 7, which contains an artistic quote poster related to the session.

SOURCES

1. Paul Barnett, *Jesus & the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 76.
2. Nancy M. Tischler, *All Things in the Bible: An Encyclopedia of the Biblical World, vol. 2, M-Z* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 607.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPRescueSpr17)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject