

May 11 , 2019 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Matthew 4:1-11 A Victorious Life Follow Jesus' Plan for Meeting Temptation by Andy McDonald

Last week I ended the message with these words:
Give up autonomy and self-will and treading water, and rest, float, and let obedience be the obligation of love not the response to a command.

This is what God is after, our hearts. He loves us and wishes for our love in return. All and everything he wants is our surrender and instead we want to offer obedience, and not the obedience of surrender but something we achieve and then offer to him.

There is no rest in Christ in that, no victorious life—only frustrated treading of water—and he invites us to come to him find rest for our souls and float, casting all our cares on him, float in his love. Let's pray.

Father, we seek an audience with you. We open your word delivered to us by your Holy Spirit revealing the ministry of Jesus. As we consider our passage for today teach us what we need to know about temptation and how to face it so we might enjoy a victorious life, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Matthew, in his telling of the story of Jesus, opens his gospel sharing Jesus' family tree, his genealogy. He shares the foundation of his human identity. This is immediately followed with a Reader's Digest condensed 7 verse story of Mary and Joseph. Chapter 2 abruptly moves the story forward, "After Jesus was born," and we get the story of the visit of the Magi. Then warned in a dream, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus are off seeking asylum as refugees in Egypt. After Herod's death the Lord sends them back to Nazareth. Then we have these decades of no story in Matthew's gospel. The next thing we know John is baptizing and the adult Jesus comes and is baptized, the spirit descends like a dove and the voice of the Father says, "This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

And then we arrive at the text we just heard Matthew 4:1-11 the heading for these verses is simple, "The Temptation of Jesus."

It begins with these words "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

When we think of the word "tempt" or "tempted" we infuse those words with bad meaning. We consistently think of them as an enticement to do wrong, to seduce a person into sin, a clever means of getting someone to take the wrong way. And these can be and are part of the meaning of tempt. But the Greek word used here is *peirazein* and it carries the meaning of to test.

In a test there are temptations to take the wrong way! If we take a multiple choice test and there's just one right answer to each question, in a sense the other options are temptations to wrong thinking, temptations to veer from the right answer.

I so wish we had the stories of Jesus' life between the return to Nazareth from Egypt and the baptism. In Luke we do have the young Jesus on the steps of the temple holding his own in discussions with the leading rabbinical teachers of the day.

But we aren't privileged to know his training. We don't get to look over his shoulder as he studies scripture. We aren't able to eaves drop on the conversations with his friends growing up. But there is no doubt, when we consider our verses for today, that there were years of preparation and a long practice of obedience getting him ready for the test.

Jesus had been home living with the family. There was the carpenter's shop to run, projects to build, customers to manage, books to be kept. He was part of the family, the clan, the tribe, the community and now there must be some separation.

The scripture is clear that this journey into the wilderness was Spirit directed, but also it was time.

Carl Sandburg put it well when he wrote: It is necessary now and then for a man to go away by himself and experience loneliness: to sit on a rock in the forest and to ask himself 'Who am I, and where have I been, and where am I going?'

And I believe that in a very real sense, Jesus journey into that land of devastation and desperation, the wilderness between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea was this escape from all of what had become his regular life, to contemplate the confirmation he received at the baptism, and to ponder, in a place of loneliness the big questions, "Who am I, and where have I been, and where am I going?"

When you and I step back from the crazy pace of 21st century life. When we step away from our computer screen, shut off the ipad, and turn off our smart phone, When we are led by the Spirit into the desert and ponder these big questions temptation will plague us and our answers.

It is fascinating what Jesus does in preparation to face the tests, the temptations of Satan. It seems counter intuitive. It's hard to imagine a mom suggesting this plan of action.

Jesus goes on a 40 day fast. Undoubtedly Matthew the Jew writing his book is looking for historical connections with his people. Moses 40 days of fasting on the mountain with God and maybe drawing connections to the Israel's 40 years in the desert.

The verses tell us he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Any mother knowing her son or daughter is facing a big test or enticing temptation would encourage them to eat healthy food and drink lots of water.

40 days of fasting is a long time. But freed from all the time and thought normally put into food and food preparation and meal times for food consumption and then clean up, Jesus had laser focus on time with his Father in contemplation of these three big questions, "Who am I, and where have I been, and where am I going?"

Now, the tempter knows a couple of things about temptation.

First he knows that we can't be tempted by something we don't want, wish for or desire.

Let's pretend we are all on a diet. We're all looking to shed a few pounds. Maybe to jump start our plan we decide to fast for a day. We plan to eat supper and then nothing the next day, sleep on an empty stomach, and then "break the fast" after not eating for around 36 hours.

On this fast day we're pretty ok skipping breakfast and then we get past that mid-morning hunger by drinking water. We get busy so as to not think about food. At the end of the day we head home and maybe all we can think about is the food we aren't eating. Now arriving at home we are really hungry. So imagine the food you really hope to never eat again. That food you really don't like. My personal list of foods I really just don't eat is short: melons of all kind, green bell pepper and cucumbers. I'm just telling you that no matter how hungry I might be a big cucumber and green pepper salad = no temptation. A chilled melon medley = no temptation. We cannot be tempted by something we don't want.

Jesus has been contemplating "Who am I," and he's ready to eat and Satan sort of joins the discussion. "If you are the Son of God." Jesus identity is questioned. There isn't just a question of who Jesus is but there's mixed almost a dare to prove it!

“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” 40 days no bread. Maybe already Jesus had been noticing how the stones of that area resembled little loaves of bread. He was hungry and he would enjoy the confirmation of who he is. Would he cave?

Every one of us has gifts.

We have natural gifts that come to us genetically.

We have natural gifts we’ve enhanced by development.

We have spiritual gifts poured into our lives by the spirit

And to all of us comes the temptation, “What can I make for myself out of this gift?” verses “What can I do for others with this gift?”

But maybe even bigger for Jesus was the question of who am I and how will I go about my ministry. The prophets had talked about a coming age when no one would hunger or thirst? If Jesus gave people bread they would follow him. And there was precedent in the OT of giving Manna!

Jesus had been fasting. Extra blood available for brain function. He recognized the doubt about his identity. He remembered that to cure a symptom without dealing with the actual disease wouldn’t be in his patient’s best interest and so his response is from God’s clear revealed will in scripture. “It is written: ‘People don’t live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Jesus wouldn’t cave in to materialism. Our need is greater than any material blessing we might be given, we need to learn the lesson of surrender to God.

Next the devil takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and again by implication questions his identity, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. (and now he quotes scripture too) For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Remember we can only be tempted by something we want. First Jesus was hungry and the temptation involved food. Next for 40 days he’s been alone in the wilderness, so he’s ready for some fellowship. Angels being with him sounds inviting.

But this temptation is more. It is the temptation to sensationalize the spiritual. Make a big splash. Pull the rabbit out of the proverbial hat. And you can get some followers. Just one problem. If the attraction is for the sensational, if the faith of the follower is dependent on signs and wonders that appetite is insatiable and there’s a constant need to, once again, prove it.

Presuming on God isn’t faith, its presumption and so Jesus quotes scripture to counter the misuse of scripture “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

One more test. One more temptation.

Again, the evil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.”

Here’s something that Jesus really wanted. His whole mission was to win the world back to God, to reconcile all things to God. So for me I see in this third temptation so much of the essence of temptation.

The temptation is to take the short cut. Compromise with the devil. Cut a deal. Look for the mutually beneficial sweet spot.

What other object of our worship tempts us? We all worship all the time. We worship what we value most. To discover where and what we worship all we have to do is conduct an

audit of how we spend our time, our affections, our energy, our money – to what or to whom are we loyal?

To all those things that might pull us away, Jesus response is powerful:
“Away from me Satan, for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”

What do we learn about facing temptation from Jesus’ experience?

I think the first thing we can learn is that temptation is custom made for each of us and it is most powerful when it is mixed with something that isn’t overtly evil. There’s nothing evil about being hungry, or wishing for some bread.

Desiring fellowship especially of the angels, and wanting to trust in God’s protection, nothing wrong with that.

Wanting to win the whole world back to loyalty to God is a high calling.
Temptation may be most effective when good and evil, truth and error are mixed.

The second thing is that preparation is important. 40 days of fasting focusing on God, prayer, and prior to that, years of letting the word of God penetrate our thinking.

Finally the third is that Jesus didn’t debate, or engage in discussion, or try and reason with temptation but simply used the power of scripture to face it.

The daily regular practice of the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, study, fasting, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration can be tools to put us in the presence of God where he can work in our lives that his promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 might be fulfilled.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”



What does "A Victorious Life" mean to you?

What do you think about God wanting surrender and we keep wanting to bring obedience?

If you could see one scene from Jesus' youth what would you want to see?

What difference is there for you between being tempted and being tested?

Why do you think Jesus fasted for 40 days in wilderness?

Starting his ministry what kind of wrestling do you think Jesus did over the questions, Who am I, Where have I been, Where am I going?

Which of the three temptations do you think was hardest?

What are some common mistakes when facing temptation?

How can you prepare to face temptation?

What do you think about 1 Corinthians 10:13?

What place does our surrender our floating play in resisting?



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