

## January 3, 2009 – Facing Temptation

Happy New Year everyone. Good to see you. This morning we are kicking off the new year by looking at a topic that everyone deals with: temptation. It can be easy to characterize what happens with being tempted... we've all seen the cartoons and the portrayals on TV in movies, with the little devil sitting on one shoulder, and a little angel sitting on the other... both trying to persuade us to their side. Those can make for funny entertainment...but I think most of us realize that there is more to this thing of temptation than what we see in movies.

The reality is that all of us feel drawn towards attitudes, actions, and patterns of behavior that on one level can be less than helpful, and on another level really destructive to us and to others. Sometimes we know about the destructive nature up front and other times it hits us after the fact. Either way, if we are wanting to live healthy and free and full lives, an essential piece is learning how to deal with temptation.

Thankfully, we get quite a bit of wisdom about this in the Scriptures – including the next passage we want to look at in the Gospel of Luke. Let's read the first part of Luke 4, and then see what we can pick up from this story about temptation and how to deal with it. *Luke 4: 1-13*

*1 Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.*

*3 Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'"*

*5 Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 "I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are mine to give to anyone I please. 7 I will give it all to you if you will worship me." 8 Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"*

*9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! 10 For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect and guard you. 11 And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" 12 Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"*

*13 When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came. **PRAY***

Last week, we looked at the story of Jesus' baptism and mentioned how that was the kickstart to Jesus launching his public ministry. Interestingly, the next step after his baptism wasn't preaching or teaching, or healing a bunch of people, the next step was being led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where Jesus was tempted by the devil.

We'll deal with the areas of temptation that Jesus faced in just a moment, but first, let me mention a few things about temptation and sin in general. As a baseline, here's how temptation and sin work: we look to meet legitimate needs and desires in illegitimate ways. Beyond the specifics of the wrong things that we do, sin consists of trying to meet our needs and live life outside of dependency on God. As I heard one pastor friend put it recently – we sin whenever we love something more than we love God... in large part, pointing back to the first commandment that we should have no other gods, besides God.

There is something in each of us that longs for our deepest needs and desires to be met. Where we get into trouble is when we turn our backs on God as the ultimate source for meeting those needs, and instead turn to other things to try to fill us up.

Wasn't that the basic scenario happening at the very beginning with Adam and Eve? There, Satan was pushing towards Adam and Eve to get their needs met outside of God and God's direction. God had told Adam and Eve that they could have full access to anything in the garden... but they should avoid eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And so what did Satan do? He went right at that... saying, in effect, "God is holding back good things from you... you can find life on your own... go ahead and grasp onto it for yourself." And, of course, if you've read the story from Genesis 3, you know that things don't turn out very good.

With all that in mind – let's look at a few pieces of wisdom that can help us as we face temptation. Because temptation is something that we all encounter - how do we deal with it? Here are some thoughts:

First, it can be helpful to **Identify your common arenas of temptation**, and maybe more specifically, to take note of ways that you are prone to believing lies about God, yourself and the world. Here in Luke 4, we see that Satan tempted Jesus in 3 arenas that we can also find ourselves tempted in. First, the enemy goes at the arena of provision. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus has to be desperately hungry, and so the enemy starts taunting him... "If you are the Son of God... why don't you just turn this stone to bread."

Next, the enemy tempts Jesus with power and position. In a flash, Satan shows Jesus the kingdoms of this world, and tells him that "all this can be yours... just bow down and worship me." He offers Jesus a shortcut to significance and authority.

The next place that the enemy tries to go at Jesus is in the arena of protection. In a backwards way, Satan tempts Jesus by quoting Scripture to him, and encouraging Him to test God's protection over His life.

Each of those temptations was a ploy to get Jesus to believe that God was not trustworthy, and to use illegitimate means to find life or sustenance. Again, it's the same trick that the enemy pulled on Adam and Eve - "You can't trust God to take care of you... He's holding out on you. Choose this shortcut to finding life."

Maybe you find yourself fighting battles in those 3 arenas of provision, power and protection. You might get tempted in the arena of provision when you're drawn towards consistent worry about money. Or you might be sucked into workaholism. Some of us might be resistant to giving, because we are deathly afraid that we won't have enough. Others of us might battle looking to material things to define our worth. Whatever the case – the lie is the same: "you can't trust God – you are on your own, and need to fend for yourself."

If power and position are essential to you, then that is going to drive your life... it could be through the stereotypical push towards climbing the corporate/workplace/academic ladder. It could be through measuring your worth through how much outside influence and pull you have.

The enemy lies to us saying that God doesn't have significance for us. So we're tempted to manipulate situations and people to try to get what it is that we want in life. And with the arena of protection, it's a similar thing... the enemy tries to lie to us that God is not trustworthy – we have to be our own protectors, both physically and emotionally.

Maybe you closely identify with those battles – maybe your common arenas of temptation are different than those. Again, the important piece is to uncover where you are prone to believing lies about God, about yourself, and/or about the world.

So, here's one for me. More intensely earlier in my life, but even up until now, I have battled temptation in the arena of approval. The lie that the enemy tries to get me to believe is that my worth, my value, my security is based on what I can do. Along with that is the lie that God is a taskmaster, hard to please and ready to condemn me at the slightest slip-up.

And those lies can cross over into relationships – as I touched on last week – it is easy to fall into this trap of looking to other people to tell us we're okay, that we're loved and accepted, rather than looking first to God for that sense of security. And when I let those lies creep in, then I find myself gravitating towards any number of attitudes, actions, and patterns of behavior that are counter-productive.

Again - how about you – what lies are you prone to believing about God, about yourself, about the world? What ways does the enemy try to get you to turn from God and choose stark independence. Those lies are often clues to the arenas that you'll most often face temptation.

Here's a second thought about facing temptation: **Embrace trust and truth.** These are the two things we see most clearly in Jesus' response to temptation. When the enemy was coming at Jesus with these taunts, Jesus embraced trust and truth. There is a deep sense of security that Jesus exhibits that the Father is going to take care of Him, to meet all His needs. So he doesn't have cave to the lies of the enemy – but instead he trusts.

And in large part, that trust is birthed out of experiences of truth. Truth about about who God is; truth about what God has said; truth about who we are in Him. I don' think that Jesus was just randomly throwing out Bible passages to fight off the enemy. Jesus was leaning into what He knew about God and what that meant for His life. And that was key to Him facing the temptations the enemy threw at him.

Here's how that might work out for us: building truth and trust into our lives comes through several means. As is pretty obvious, we want to get the truth of the Scriptures into our lives. This time of year, many people make a renewed effort towards reading the Bible. More than just filling our heads with Bible stories and random Scriptures, when we read the Bible, we are invited into an experience of knowing God, and knowing who we are in Him. The same thing goes with times of prayer. We're not just logging minutes and hours to somehow win points with God. The point of prayer is to connect with God, to know Him and to be known by Him.

As it relates to facing temptation – those pieces are key... as we experience who God is, and know who we are in Him, we can draw from that well to fill us up with life... and like Jesus refuse the false shortcuts the enemy tries to throw at us.

Here's a third bit of wisdom: When you're facing temptation, **Remember that you are not alone in the battle:** A few weeks ago I referenced this passage from Hebrews 2 – thought it was worth revisiting today. *17 (Jesus) had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

A common pitfall for many of us is to assume that it's up to us to conquer this temptation stuff on our own. But it doesn't work, does it? I think that's why so many people through the years have found such amazing help through 12 step programs like AA, NA, and through more specifically Christian based programs like Celebrate Recovery. Here are the first 3 of the steps – that all go at this pitfall of trying to do it on our own.

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our lives and will over to the care of God.

The first steps towards freedom are admitting that we can't do it on our own and that we need God's help. At first, that might be hard to acknowledge - but isn't it encouraging to know that you're not alone in facing these kinds of challenges in life? That Jesus has walked the road ahead of you, and is ready and willing to help walk you and me through the journey towards health and healing? That is amazingly encouraging.

Here's a next tip: **When you fail – run to God, not away from Him.** In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve buy into the lies of the enemy and they take the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... Adam and Eve go into hiding. They're ashamed and so they try to hide.

That's a pretty normal reaction for us, isn't it? Inevitably, there are times when we give in, where we believe lies and we eat the fruit of them. And then, the enemy often hits us with the second round of attacks. As we know we've failed, the condemnation and shame get heaped on, and the enemy tries to wedge a deeper and deeper divide between us and God. Satan's goal is not just to get us to sin – it's to separate us from God. As Jesus says in John 10, the enemy's mission is to steal, and to kill, and destroy... to rob us of life. And there is no better way to do that than to try to cut us off from the ultimate source of life – God himself.

But, it doesn't have to be that way... we don't have to wallow in shame and condemnation. Listen to what it say later in Hebrews, in chapter 4, we read this: *Since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Folks – the good news is that when we fail, when we fall, we don't have to run from God, we can run to Him. We can approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we can receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

That's what repentance is all about: we turn from these false things that we looking to for life, and we turn to God. God doesn't gloss over our sin or excuse it or push it under the rug – he forgives it. And that experience of forgiveness, in turn, helps to empower us to face the next challenges of life and specifically with temptation with Jesus.

Here's the final bit of wisdom for today about facing temptation: **Remember that is about Jesus being powerful enough – not you.**

Maybe this is a way to reiterate everything that we've said already today. But again, our hope is not in us being strong enough to overcome everything that comes our way. Our hope is in Jesus. Jesus has conquered sin, death and the power of the devil. Jesus has all power and authority. Jesus has purchased our forgiveness and freedom. Jesus is the one that we look to empower us to live the full and vibrant lives that we long to live. It's about Him. It's all about Him.

In just a moment, we are going to open up the communion table. Jesus gave us communion as a vivid reminder of what He has done on our behalf. That he went to the cross, bearing our sin and our shame upon Himself, so that we might experience this thing called eternal life. As the famous verse, John 3:16 says: God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

Friends – today is a good day to acknowledge our need of Jesus. Maybe today, you need to acknowledge your need of Jesus to face a particular struggle. Maybe you're realizing that you've been believing lies about God or about yourself, and you need real power to overcome them.

Maybe today is the day that you do what step 3 of the 12 steps says... where you turn your life and will over to the care of God. That is a great place to start in beginning a relationship with God.