



THE WILDERNESS OF TEMPTATION

Course 4, *The Promised One*, Lesson 4

The Problem: How did Jesus overcome temptation? This question is important because Jesus' method of overcoming may be ours also. We tend to rely upon our own willpower as a means of conquering sin. When we are confronted by something that we like but which we know is wrong for us, we try by the sheer force of the will to resist, only to discover that Satan's power is greater than ours. When we rely upon ourselves in this way, we fall every time.

The Apostle Paul had the same problem before he learned the secret of overcoming. He wrote: *"For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it"* (Romans 7:18 RSV). He knew that he had the capacity to choose, but he could not put his choice into action. That is the universal human dilemma. We choose what is right, and we try to act on our choice, but find that "it is easier said than done."

Jesus knew that too! This is why He relied so heavily upon His Father. Although Jesus was both fully God and fully man, He chose to experience temptation as humanity does. In resisting sin, He did not rely on His divine power but instead depended entirely on His Father. Through prayer, deep engagement with Scripture, and a steadfast commitment to righteousness, Jesus triumphed over every temptation, setting a perfect example for us to follow.

The power of reliance on Him can be illustrated in many ways. A young boy, walking with his father one dark night, clutched his dad's hand as they stepped beyond the glow of home into the shadows. "We're not afraid of the dark, are we, Dad?" he asked. In the same way, we need not fear anything when our hand is in the hand of Jesus.

A high school student struggling to quit smoking found himself repeatedly failing despite his best intentions. Then, he learned to submit to the Lord and trust in divine strength for victory. In a short time, he had completely overcome his addiction.

A college student, frustrated by a lack of focus, struggled with thoughts that pulled her in a dozen directions whenever she tried to study. She discovered that Jesus could help bring order to her mind—but it required a conscious choice to invite Him into her struggles. When she did, He gave her victory. What a relief it was! No longer was she bound by distractions and impulses that had kept her from reaching her goals.

How did Jesus overcome temptation? To find out, let's examine His time in the wilderness and discover how His approach can become our own

Objectives:

- I. We consider the situation in which Jesus was placed immediately after His baptism. Why did He go into the wilderness?
- II. We study Jesus' first temptation and how He overcame it.
- III. We note how Jesus conquered the second temptation.
- IV. We consider the third temptation and the manner in which Jesus handled it.
- V. We ask, "How many we overcome temptation?"

I. WHY DID JESUS GO INTO THE WILDERNESS?

Jesus had just been baptized by John in the Jordan. He had heard His Father's blessing, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."* He had received the power of the Holy Spirit. The words of His Father at the Jordan were a constant source of encouragement throughout the wilderness experience. Satan also heard the voice of the Father claiming Christ

as His Son and was determined to lead the Savior to doubt the Father's love, protection, and care. But why did Jesus go into the wilderness? Did He deliberately place Himself on Satan's ground?

The Word

1. Who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted? Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12.
2. What did Jesus do for forty days in the wilderness? Matthew 4:2.
3. For how long a period did Satan tempt Jesus to sin? Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2.

Explanation: Christ did not deliberately place Himself on Satan's ground. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The purpose was twofold: Jesus needed a time for prayer and fasting as a special preparation for His ministry to follow, and He was to be exposed to Satan's fierce temptations as a special test of His dedication to and dependence on the Father. It was in the time of His greatest weakness that Christ was assailed by the fiercest temptations.

Satan's temptations occupied the full 40-day period during which Christ was in the wilderness of temptation. The three temptations referred to in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 were the culmination of a sustained effort to deceive the Son of God. As soon as Christ's 40-day fast began, Satan was at hand with his temptations. During that 40-day period Satan tried all his devices in an effort to overcome the Son of God. Luke records: *"And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season"* Luke 4:13. Weymouth translates the Greek of that text: "So the Devil, having fully tried every kind of temptation on Him, left Him for a time." Phillips paraphrases it: "And when he had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew until his next opportunity."

Relevance: The devil waits until we are tired, hungry, and lonely; then he moves in with his strong temptations. He will try to depress us by manipulating events, leading others to harass us, or directing our thoughts away from Christ. Then he knows that his time has come to confront us with masterful temptations. No wonder Jesus urged, *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"* Matthew 26:41.

II. THE FIRST TEMPTATION

Each of the three temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness urged Him to doubt His own Deity. Each of the three appealed to a human desire for satisfaction and relief from hardship. The first temptation was a demonic attempt to capitalize on Jesus' hunger.

The Word

4. What did Satan urge Christ to do as proof of His Deity? Matthew 4:3.
5. What were the first words Jesus spoke in His reply? Matthew 4:4.
6. What passage of Scripture did Jesus quote? Deuteronomy 8:3.

Explanation: Imagine how Satan must have approached Christ. He certainly would not have appeared as an ugly demon. That would have put Jesus on guard right away. He appeared as an angel of light and brought the suggestion that Jesus was self-deceived. If Jesus were really the Son of God, He would never have been left to suffer in His present state. Christ's very emaciated condition, said Satan, pointed to the fact that an angel had fallen from heaven, and he was that angel. Then Satan added, *"If thou be the Son of God..."* Weakened and weary as He was, Jesus might have questioned His own sanity and attempted to prove to Satan that He was the Son of God.

"Command that these stones be made bread. Work a miracle and prove to me that you are the Son of God," Satan said. "If you have the power, use it! It is your right and your privilege."

Jesus had the power to work a miracle, as he demonstrated time and again during His ministry, but never was He to use that power to save Himself from suffering or temptation. If He had done that, He could not have been our example, for

He would have been using a power that we do not have. Moreover, Jesus must never deign to prove His Deity to a doubting devil. To satisfy His hunger by turning some of those stones into bread would have been simple enough, but that would have been to doubt His Father's Word and His love and protection. It would have demonstrated a momentary acceptance of Satan's doubts as to His divine claims.

Jesus began by saying, "*It is written.*" That is always an effective answer for Satan. He has no power to overcome the Word of God. Jesus added, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" Matthew 4:4. Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. He knew the Scriptures well and used them to defeat Satan. The things of the body are subordinate to the things of the Spirit, Jesus was saying, and His Father's Word called Him to trust and obey.

Relevance: When we reflect on God's commands and wield Scripture to counter Satan's temptations, we experience the power of God intervening on our behalf. Jesus devoted Himself to prayer and deep study of the Scriptures, ensuring His mind was spiritually fortified for the challenges He faced.

III. THE SECOND TEMPTATION

"In response to Christ's unwavering faith, Satan shifted his strategy. He subtly praised Jesus for His steadfast trust in God, but then sought to exploit that faith by tempting Him to misuse it. If Jesus' faith was unshakeable, perhaps He could be enticed to rely on divine protection in a perilous situation of His own making. Such an act would have constituted the sin of presumption—an arrogant testing of God's promises. It would be akin to someone attempting to walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls while presuming upon God's protection.

The Word:

7. Where did Satan take Jesus? Matthew 4:5.
8. What did Satan urge Jesus to do? Why? Matthew 4:6
9. How did Jesus answer? Matthew 4:7

Explanation: Since Christ trusted in His Father in the first temptation, Satan now tries to pervert that trust into presumption. He urges, "Cast yourself down. You trust your Father; He loves you, and He will protect you. That will be sure evidence that you are the Son of God." Once again, the devil tried to implant doubt into Christ's mind as to His true identity. The simple way for the doubt to be dispelled was for Him to put the Father to the test. The Father promised protection, so He was bound to give it to the Son. Satan even had a Bible text to support his argument. He quoted the promise of divine protection recorded in Psalm 91:11-12. Satan will misapply Scripture and urge his followers to do likewise, as a means of destroying unwary believers.

Jesus' answer again came from Scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, which denied Israel the right to test God. The Lord wanted them to believe and trust Him on the basis of His past leading and the present conviction of the Holy Spirit. It was wrong to doubt God's love and then concoct tests to see if He would measure up.

On the other hand, when He says, "*Prove me now,*" (Malachi 3:10), He is speaking of the blessings He will pour out on those who love and trust Him, and who demonstrate their love by following His will. Satan wanted Christ to act on the basis of doubt of His Father's Word. This He could never do and remain sinless.

Relevance: The sin of presumption is very common in our world. People create problems for themselves, blame God, and expect Him to solve everything to their satisfaction. They don't really trust Him, because they blame Him for that of which He is not responsible. When He does not give them what they want, they often become very bitter and condemnatory of the Lord. Thus, Satan succeeds in persuading people to commit the very sin that Jesus refused to commit. The solution is to surrender to God and trust Him whatever the circumstances of life. See Hebrews 11:6; Romans 8:31-39.

IV. THE THIRD TEMPTATION

Now Satan again changes his plan of attack. He has failed to induce Jesus to display a lack of faith, and to pervert faith. Now he drops his disguise and poses as the god of this world. If he can only have Jesus momentarily accede to his demonic claims, the game will be over, Jesus will walk from the field the loser, and Satan will triumph over God's attempts to win back the lost world.

The Word:

10. Where did Satan take Jesus next? What did he show Him? Matthew 4:8.
11. What did Satan require as payment for the gift of the world to Christ? Matthew 4:9.
12. How did Jesus answer him? Matthew 4:10.

Explanation: Claiming that the world is his, the devil offers to call off all this conflict by handing the world back to Christ, if only He will give him one little act of homage. In the first place, the world did not belong to Satan; he was a usurper. In the second place, for Christ to worship Satan would have been a supreme act of blasphemy and idolatry. Christ's answer from Deuteronomy 6:13 was the only honest one. Even so, the struggle was very intense. Remember that Jesus was suffering in view of His long fast. Moreover, the 40-day struggle with the devil had undoubtedly taken its toll. It was as though Satan had dug his demonic claws into the neck of the Son of God and refused to let go. But the *"Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"* Hebrews 4:12. The Word won the battle, where mere human nature would have recoiled in confusion and defeat. The Father would not refuse to deliver the tempted one when His Word was trustingly appealed to.

Relevance: People worship Satan when they revere things or other people more than the Lord. When any person or thing stands between you and God, that something or someone becomes your god. That is the essence of idolatry. There is only one God who has a right to our worship. Satan suggests many substitutes, acceptance of which amounts to demon worship. Our only safety is to remain in complete union with Jesus Christ, allowing His Word to live in our hearts!

V. HOW MAY WE OVERCOME TEMPTATION?

A careful analysis of the manner in which Jesus overcame, reveals how we may also be victorious. Certainly, it is His will that we share His victory. He inspired John the Revelator to write: *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne."* Revelation 3:21.

The Word

13. What is the role of prayer as we seek to overcome temptation? Matthew 26:41. Compare 1 Chronicles 16:11; Matthew 7:7.
14. How important is Bible study to the Christian seeking victory? II Timothy 3:15-17.
15. What two main steps in conquering Satan does James emphasize? James 4:7-8.
16. How important is faithful dependence on the Lord for strength to overcome? 1 John 5:4; John 15:7; Philippians 4:13.

Explanation: Jesus' victory resulted from four main factors: 1) Fasting and prayer; 2) Study of the Word; 3) Faithful submission to His Father and total reliance upon Him; 4) Resisting the devil. By answering Satan with a passage of Scripture, Jesus demonstrated His choice of His Father's will and His dependence on divine power. Jesus would be involved in resisting Satan, but He knew that without His Father's intervention, He would fall.

The bottom line in the battle with sin is dependence on the Lord. Faith is the victory (1 John 5:4) because faith admits that only God can overcome for us. As Jesus relied upon His Father, so we rely upon Him. He promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). He assures us that He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24). Jesus is true to His word. You can trust Him!

Relevance: When you are tempted, pray three prayers: 1) Lord I am helpless! I like this thing, but I don't really want to do it; 2) Please Lord, give me the victory; 3) Thank you, Lord, I believe you have heard my prayer, and I have the victory. That third prayer is very vital; that is faith! You thank the Lord immediately when you ask. Jesus says He will give you what you want if you "*ask anything according to His will*" 1 John 5:14. It is always His will to give us victory over sin; so, we can ask confidently.

Do you have victory in your spiritual Life? Are you willing to depend on Jesus as he depended on His Father?

Review Questions

1. True or False?
 - a. Jesus deliberately placed Himself on Satan's ground when He went into the wilderness of temptation
 - b. Jesus overcame sin by depending upon His Father.
 - c. Jesus did not have to exert His own will to overcome.
 - d. We overcome as we depend on Jesus and resist the devil.
2. Discuss: Since it is always God's will to give us victory over sin, and He promises to keep us from falling, there is no reason why we should fall into any sin. The same power that is available to overcome one sin is available to overcome another. Through Christ, we can live without committing sin.

Further study:

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 114-131.

Overcoming Addictions: Addiction is a chronic condition characterized by a strong and often uncontrollable craving for a substance or behavior, despite harmful consequences. It involves both physiological and psychological dependence. Substances like drugs or alcohol can cause physical addiction by altering brain chemistry, while behaviors such as gambling, gaming, or overeating may lead to psychological addiction, where the activity becomes a compulsive need.

Addiction affects the brain's reward, motivation, and self-control systems, making it difficult to quit without intervention. Recovery often requires a combination of medical, psychological, and spiritual support, depending on the individual's needs. While spiritual support is a vital and transformative element in overcoming addictions, people often need a holistic approach that addresses their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being as well. Addiction can deeply impact all aspects of life, and recovery often requires a combination of resources and strategies, such as professional counseling or therapy; medical support; support groups; healthy lifestyle changes; family and social support. Spiritual help can certainly serve as a foundation, offering hope, purpose, and resilience, but integrating other forms of assistance often leads to a more sustainable and successful recovery journey.