

Jesus Is Tempted

Summary and Goal

Jesus publicly came onto the scene through His baptism. He was set up to kick off His ministry with prestige and popularity. But where did the Holy Spirit send Him next? To the wilderness to be tempted. The connections here between Adam and Christ, the Israelites' wilderness and Jesus' wilderness, and the forty days Moses spent at Sinai with the forty days Jesus spent in this setting should not be overlooked. While we are going to focus primarily on the connection between Adam and Christ, the others are nonetheless significant and relevant as well. Through the temptations of Christ, we will see not only how Jesus is the true and better Adam but will also get a powerful glimpse into the type of Messiah He is and will learn how to stand firm in the face of temptation.

Session Outline

1. The Son of God is tempted to use His power for His own needs (Luke 4:1-4).
2. The Son of God is tempted to pursue His reign apart from the Father's plan (Luke 4:5-8).
3. The Son of God is tempted to test His Father's promise of protection (Luke 4:9-13).

Background Passages: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

Session in a Sentence

The devil tempted Jesus three times, but Jesus overcame each temptation by the Word of God and succeeded where the first Adam had failed.

Christ Connection

Jesus stepped into our world and overcame the temptation to which Adam succumbed. Jesus showed He is fully obedient to the Father and He is the worthy One who would undo the consequences of Adam's sin and bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:3). Jesus' life of obedience led Him to the cross, the place where He conquered sin and death as our Savior.

Missional Application

Because we have been given a new identity and righteousness in Christ, we resist temptation by relying on the power of the One who overcame temptation in our place.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph in the DDG (p. 70) to discuss the reality of trials and temptation during seasons of transition and how Jesus demonstrated for us what faithfulness looks like in the midst of intense temptation. Share some examples from the writer of trials hitting at inopportune times, or share some examples from your own experience and church context.

Intense trials and temptations often occur during seasons of transition, even shortly after making a big decision to pursue God's call on one's life, whether that be in ministry or simply making a lifestyle change in order to better follow Christ. It's a pattern we see in Christ's life as well. Thankfully, He demonstrated for us what total dependence on the Father looks like and showed us how, through His Spirit and through His Word, we can be empowered to trust God no matter the trials or temptations we face.

- Trials and temptation always seems to strike as we enter into life-shaping seasons.
 - As a dear brother of mine was preparing to begin a church, he got a phone call that his older brother had been found dead (of natural causes) in his car.
 - Another brother of mine, as he prepared to start a new ministry and church, found out that his mother was being taken to the hospital and was in a coma.
 - Another family moved across the country to be a part of the church I pastor only to find out that their father had a brain tumor and would soon pass away.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why do you think trials and temptation seem like a normal part of human life? (because they are as a result of the fall and our sinful nature; because temptations arise from both outside of us and inside of us; because we haven't known any different throughout humanity's existence from the time of Adam, with the exception of Jesus)

SUMMARIZE: Jesus publicly came onto the scene through His baptism. He was set up to kick off His ministry with prestige and popularity. But where did the Holy Spirit send Him next? To the wilderness to be tempted. Through the temptations of Christ, we will see not only how Jesus is the true and better Adam but will also get a powerful glimpse into the type of Messiah He is and will learn how to stand firm in the face of temptation.

The additional commentary for this session is included on page 155 in this Leader Guide.

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Point 1: The Son of God is tempted to use His power for His own needs (Luke 4:1-4).

READ Luke 4:1-4 (DDG p. 71).

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 71) to point out that it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, which was for the purpose of His acting as the second and last Adam. *Apply* this truth to your group members’ lives with the encouragement that God never leaves us.

Right in the first verse of this chapter is an interesting and important point for us to note: The Holy Spirit was the One who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Often when we are in seasons of great trial or temptation, we don’t even pause to consider that God might have led us there for a purpose. While sometimes we might wander into the wilderness on our own, we should also consider in this passage that it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus into the wilderness.

- Remember, in context this is coming on the heels of Jesus’ baptism and initiation into public ministry. So He goes from a total ministry high—the audible voice of God the Father has just affirmed Him in front of the crowds, the Spirit descended on Him like a dove, John the Baptist confirmed He was the promised Messiah—to leaving the Jordan, a “mountaintop” experience, and heading straight into the wilderness for a duel with the devil.

Application: God is not absent in the midst of our temptations. He is not absent in the midst of our pain and trials. He was as present with Jesus in the wilderness as He was at His baptism. And He is as present with us in our wilderness as He is on our mountaintops. Our emotions may tell us otherwise. We may not *feel* His presence in the same way, but that doesn’t change the reality of His promise or His character. God promised He would never leave us (Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5), and He doesn’t break His promises. God is working and active in the midst of whatever trials or temptations you are facing. You are not alone.

PACK ITEM 8: YIELDING TO GOD: Call attention to the **John M. Perkins quote** on this poster and ask group members the following question.



How should the belief that God might lead us into a trial or temptation change the way we respond to these experiences? (we can hold onto our faith knowing that God is in control; we can view these circumstances as opportunities to grow in our faith and to practice what we believe; we can know for certain that God is with us even when it feels like He is not; we can face the difficulty with a heart set on obedience to our good God)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 71) to show that Jesus succeeded where Adam failed by utilizing the Word of God against temptation, a feat that was a necessary part of His undoing of the curse of sin.

Even though Jesus was hungry and vulnerable, He succeeded where Adam failed. Jesus chose spiritual priorities over the desires of His flesh. He fought back against temptation using the Word of God. Do not miss the parallels throughout these temptations between Jesus and Adam. Where Adam failed and the curse of sin entered into the world, Jesus succeeded and would usher in a new era where sin is being conquered and death will be no more. We also see through Jesus' example that we too have the power of the Spirit and the Word to withstand temptation, no matter how vulnerable we are.

- Both Adam and Jesus were tempted with food: Adam with fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-6) and Jesus with bread after forty days of fasting. They were tempted to satisfy the appropriate desires of their flesh in sinful ways instead of maintaining their spiritual priorities. Adam and Eve listened to the devil, ate the fruit, and failed (and they weren't even fasting). They gave in and ate what looked pleasing to them rather than standing firm in obedience and trusting that what God told them was good. Jesus, on the other hand, found His strength and sustenance in the Word of God, quoted the Scripture in His defense, and obeyed His Father (see Deut. 8:1-3).
 - Don't underestimate Jesus' humanity here. He hadn't eaten food for forty days. He was *hungry*. Yes, Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully human, and His body needed food just like ours do. Also notice that Satan didn't approach Him on the first day of His fast. Satan came at the end of the forty days, when Jesus was *most* hungry and *most* vulnerable. Don't you wish temptation would come when you are most energized, least vulnerable, and in a strong place? But Satan is crafty and knows when it is most effective to tempt us, which is often when we are most vulnerable.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 71).

Sinlessness of Jesus: While the Bible affirms the full **humanity** of Jesus, it also affirms that Jesus was **completely** sinless throughout His earthly life. Nevertheless, because Jesus was fully human, He experienced **real** temptation of sin, as seen during His trials in the wilderness.

Essential Doctrine "Sinlessness of Jesus": While the Bible affirms the full **humanity** of Jesus, it also affirms that Jesus was **completely** sinless throughout His earthly life (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22). Nevertheless, because Jesus was fully human, He experienced **real** temptation of sin, as seen during His trials in the wilderness (Matt. 4). Yet even though His trials and temptations were real and similar to the rest of humanity's, Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus did not sin.

Point 2: The Son of God is tempted to pursue His reign apart from the Father's plan (Luke 4:5-8).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Luke 4:5-8 (DDG p. 72).

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

EXPLAIN: Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 72) as you compare the second temptation Jesus faced in Luke's Gospel to the temptation that Adam and Eve faced in the garden of Eden.

In this second temptation we see that Jesus was tempted to believe that God was withholding good things from Him. And again, isn't that exactly like a tactic Satan used with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden? In the wilderness, Satan told Jesus that if He worshiped him, then all authority would be His. Shouldn't Jesus have all authority? Of course! But here Jesus would have to shift His allegiance to get it.

- Time and time again, Satan tempts us to distrust God and begin to question Him in two primary ways: **1) Did God really say that?** and **2) Can we really trust Him?** These were Satan's sly questions and inferences to Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:1-7). He said if they ate of the forbidden tree, then they would become like God. He tempted them to believe God was withholding good things from them.
- Sin has a way of enticing us with the promise of a better life now—taking sinful shortcuts to get a bigger stage, a better promotion, more power, more comfort, more money, more... —all for a better price and a faster timeline than you could get without giving in to sin. Sin tempts us to circumvent God's plan and timeline to get the result we want without walking the path God has for us. We need to be on guard and recognize the ways we are tempted to distrust what God has said, and we need to believe that His plans are good and that He withholds no good thing from those who walk with Him.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 72).

Temptation and Sin: 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**. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin, and we pray for God to **deliver** us from evil.

Essential Doctrine “Temptation and Sin”: 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).

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 72) to show how Jesus trusted in God’s plan rather than engage Satan in a battle of rational argumentation. Then *apply* Jesus’ example to the lives of your group members.

We can learn a lot from Jesus’ response to Satan’s temptation here. He did not try to reason with Satan or argue with him. He didn’t try to explain why He trusted God’s plan. He didn’t get into an argument with him about it. He simply stated God’s command and left it at that. He shielded Himself completely behind the Word of God, allowing God’s words to speak for Him when He was tempted in this vulnerable place.

Voices from the Church

“Unbelief, just like Satan, will always take the easy way out. It will tell us to eat the fruit in exchange for knowledge, instead of fearing God to gain real wisdom. Unbelief will unravel our perceptions of both suffering and the blessedness of life and beckon us to skip self-denial at all costs with the faux promises of comfort that can’t extend beyond the grave.”¹

–Jackie Hill Perry

- Jesus chose to trust that God’s plan was better than any shortcut Satan could offer. Jesus rejected immediate gratification, even for a good thing that was rightly due Him. Jesus knew that Satan’s shortcuts always come up short and that God’s word and plan will always prove faithful and best.
- Once again, don’t underestimate how real this temptation was for Jesus. Satan was offering Him an opportunity to get the results of the resurrection without the agony of the cross. Yet Jesus still chose to trust God, even when it meant He would endure every ounce of pain, shame, and punishment on the cross. Jesus trusted that God’s character would remain true, that His words could be trusted, and that circumventing the process God puts in place never gets us to the place we actually want to go.

Application: The temptations we face can feel subtle at times. They might be expressed like this: “I know I shouldn’t cheat, but everybody here does it, and if I don’t, I won’t be able to provide for my family” or “I know it’s not good to do _____, but I’m the exception; I need to do it this way.” We begin to justify the shortcuts based on the standards around us. But just as with Jesus in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit can enable us to trust God’s character and God’s Word no matter the severity of the temptation we face.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some satanic shortcuts that lead people away from God’s good plan? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

Point 3: The Son of God is tempted to test His Father's promise of protection (Luke 4:9-13).

READ Luke 4:9-13 (DDG p. 73).

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ ¹¹ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” ¹² And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 73) to note two aspects of how Jesus resisted this third temptation in Luke's Gospel.

Jesus resisted this third temptation, **first, by staying secure in His identity.** Jesus knows who He is—the Son of God—and He doesn't feel the need to prove it to anyone, not even Satan. So, He stayed out of the ego battle and power struggle altogether. **Second, Jesus didn't hold God hostage to meet His expectations.** Rather than be presumptuously self-righteous, Jesus didn't demand that God act in a certain way to meet His own desires. You trust and obey God; you don't test Him.

- People may think that because they are stepping into a new way of obedience that they can essentially throw wisdom out the door. Take this mind-set, for example: “I'm going to follow God, so I'm quitting my job without any thought to where I might get income to care for my family, but God has to provide for me since I'm obeying Him in this new way now.” This mind-set is simply foolish entitlement. Yes, God sometimes asks us to take financial risks, and yes, He will provide for our needs. But just because we're obedient to the Lord in a hard area of life does not mean that God owes us something in return.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some reasons we should not treat our relationship with God as transactional, as if He owed us for our obedience to Him? (our obedience should be based on gratitude for God creating us and saving us in Jesus; our righteousness is like filthy rags compared to the holiness of God; God owes us nothing, but we owe Him everything because He gives us life, breath, and everything we need; a transactional view of our relationship with God puts us up on a pedestal and pulls God down to our level or below)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 73) to show how Jesus, as a human, demonstrated absolute reliance upon God (the *illustration* below helps to flesh out this point). Then *apply* Jesus' perfect resistance to temptation to your group members: Because He obeyed on our behalf, we can flee to Jesus, our Great High Priest, for refuge when we face temptation.

In Jesus we see what absolute reliance upon God looks like. Rather than take it upon Himself to demand a specific type of provision or blessing from God, Jesus chose to trust the plan and provision God gives. He chose to trust that regardless of how God's provision is displayed, it wouldn't change His identity and it can't change the character of God. God can be trusted even when we don't understand the ways He chooses to provide. Jesus rested in that promise, once again using the Word of God as a shield to protect Him from the enemy's temptations.

Illustration: Have you ever seen a little kid who *refuses* to leave his or her parents' arms? They cling to them like their lives are on the line. If you try to pull them away, they will scream and hold on even tighter. They refuse to leave their place of security. They refuse to put their trust in someone they don't know. They refuse to let go of the one with whom they have the closest relationship. While this can be a very difficult situation for parents to navigate, it displays a beautiful childlike faith. The child's desperation to cling to his or her parent stems from an exclusive trust and reliance upon the parent to provide whatever safety and security he or she needs, regardless of the situation.

Application: "Our primary application is 'Jesus is God's Son; trust him.' The Lord endured temptation in our place. So in our temptation, we must flee to Christ! He conquered our adversary. The Son stands in our place to defeat the temptation that often defeats us. He does *not* do this to say, 'Okay, now, that's how you do it.' As Jesus endures this temptation, he becomes our Great High Priest. That's what Hebrews 4:15 teaches us. He 'has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.' Right now Jesus reigns in the heavens as a priest who can 'sympathize with our weaknesses' (v. 15) and who now makes it possible for us to 'approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need' (v. 16). Our Lord didn't endure this merely so we would have a *model to follow*. He absolutely did this so we would have *mercy when falling*. Christ delivers us. He stands in as priest for us, offering both a sacrifice and righteousness for us."²

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some things that help you trust God's character even when you can't see or understand His provision? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: As difficult as it is for us to understand, sometimes God uses trials to test us. In every temptation that Satan brought to Jesus, we see Him overcome temptations where Adam failed to obey. Jesus chose spiritual priorities over physical desires. He rejected the temptation to pursue the “right” thing in the wrong way. He resisted the temptation to presume upon God in order to serve His own agenda. Jesus trusted the character of God and used the Word of God to fight every temptation used to attack Him. Jesus is the Messiah who stood firm in the face of the enemy and whose obedience culminated in the ultimate display of love on the cross and the ultimate display of power through the resurrection.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 74), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have been given a new identity and righteousness in Christ, we resist temptation by relying on the power of the One who overcame temptation in our place.

- **What steps will you take to cling to Christ in your fight against the temptation not to believe in the sovereignty and goodness of God?**
- **What role can your group play in supporting one another in the face of trials and temptations?**
- **How can your past or present temptations and trials help you to show non-Christians that the gospel of Jesus is true and worthy of our faith?**



Voices from Church History

“A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart ... That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”³

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, the promises of Your Word are sweeter than anything with which Satan can tempt us. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to live as the last Adam who endured temptation obediently and was faithful even unto death. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to endure our trials and temptations as we carry forward the gospel message into the kingdoms of this world. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 75-77), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 78) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 75-77) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 78) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 75-77) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 1** as a part of point 1 in the session: **Often the things that satisfy our hungers aren't bad things. But they can be good things used in the wrong time, in the wrong way, and for the wrong purpose.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 3: "God's faithfulness cannot be measured by our circumstances."**
- **Day 5: "Anytime you are faced with temptation, there is a way out. Every single time. God promised."**



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 78) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to share ways they have found to resist temptation and how identity in Christ informs this resistance.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.