



## session 4 group study guide

# the temptation in the wilderness

### message

Do you struggle with jealousy toward friends who always have the latest stuff? Are you prone to anger? Do you often find yourself gossiping? Guess what? Jesus struggled, too. Jesus Christ was perfect and sinless, but He still faced temptation just as we do. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

However, Jesus’ temptation was different from ours in one key respect: He always overcame it. And we can as well. Jesus does not promise that life will be easy for us as Christians or that we will be immune to pain, suffering or temptation, but what He does promise is that He will always provide us with the means to be victorious over temptation. Look up 1 Corinthians 10:13. What promise is found in this passage?

No temptation has seized you except what is \_\_\_\_\_. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted \_\_\_\_\_. But when you are tempted, he will also provide \_\_\_\_\_ so that you can \_\_\_\_\_ under it.

Open your Bible to Matthew 4. Just after being baptized, Jesus withdraws to the desert, where He spends the next 40 days fasting and praying alone. In this moment of physical and mental hardship, the devil—just as he often does with us—tried to ensnare Jesus in his trap.

As you read this passage, keep the following questions in mind: (1) What do you notice about the kinds of things the devil tempts Jesus with? (2) How does Jesus respond to the temptations?

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. 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.'"*

*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*Again, the devil 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," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

*Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him (Matthew 4:1-11).*

### dig

1. What is Satan called in Matthew 4:3?

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2. The biblical meaning of the word "tempt" is actually more closely related to the idea of being "tested." The wilderness temptation was a true test of Jesus' faith. As we investigate this story, we can find many insights that apply to our own lives regarding temptations and the testing of our faith. Why do you suppose Christ went immediately from His baptism to His 40-day experience in the wilderness?

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3. What types of things does Satan tempt Jesus with?

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4. Notice how Satan tailors his temptations to be specific to Jesus' weaknesses at that moment. How does Satan frame his temptations? What techniques does he use?

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5. In each exchange Jesus had with Satan, Jesus responded with a quote from the book of Deuteronomy. We can get a better understanding of each temptation by looking at why Jesus quoted each particular passage. On the chart below, write out what the three different temptations were and how Jesus refuted each.

temptation	Jesus' response
1. <hr/> <hr/>	1. <hr/> <hr/>
2. <hr/> <hr/>	2. <hr/> <hr/>
3. <hr/> <hr/>	3. <hr/> <hr/>

## apply

Most often, temptation does not motivate us to commit horrible crimes. Instead, it favors a more subtle method: compromise. Temptation asks us to make small compromises in what we believe, in what we know to be true, and in what we know is right.

In C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, a senior devil, writes to his nephew, a devil-in-training, about the ways of tempting. (Keep in mind that when "the Enemy" is referenced, they are referring to God.) Screwtape tells his young apprentice:

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.<sup>1</sup>

1. What does Screwtape say about the magnitude of the sin a person commits?

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2. According to Screwtape, what is the ultimate purpose of temptation?

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3. What advice does Screwtape provide to his nephew about the best way to get a person to sin against God?

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4. Satan used these same techniques when he tempted Jesus. He tried to convince Jesus to compromise His fasting for a piece of bread and His eternal purpose for momentary selfish power. Jesus showed us that compromise is not obedience. In what areas of your life have you found it easy to fall into compromise?

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5. Relying on God's infinite power is the only way to truly win the battle over our temptations, but there are often things in our situation that we can change, avoid or replace to help keep us from falling prey to Satan's snares. It might mean avoiding certain stores or websites, not hanging out with a particular friend, or not listening to certain kinds of music. What can you do or change that will help you combat your temptations?

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**reflect**

1. How does it make you feel to know that Christ was also tempted?

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2. Have you ever put the Lord to a test? If so, what did you learn from the experience?

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3. In thinking about this story of Jesus' temptation in Matthew, why is it valuable to memorize important passages from Scripture?

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4. Memorizing Scripture will allow you to call on God's promises when you need them most. Jesus used Scripture to respond to Satan's temptations, and you can rely on God's Word when you are faced with trials. Do you have a favorite Scripture passage? What makes it your favorite passage?

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5. The following is a list of Scriptures to help you win the fight against temptation. Circle the passages that best relate to the temptations that you are facing, and then share with the members of your group why you chose each particular Scripture.

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

**meditation**



Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

JAMES 4:7-8

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**Note**

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1976).