

## Lesson 8: Overcoming Temptation Part 1 Matthew 4:1-11

**Memory Verse:** “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

**Text:** <sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. <sup>3</sup>Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." <sup>4</sup>But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" <sup>5</sup>Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" <sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" <sup>11</sup>Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

### Monday

All of us are faced with temptation everyday. We wake up in the morning and we are faced with the temptation to roll over in bed and go back to sleep rather than spending time in prayer, thanksgiving, confession, worship and Bible study. We come to the breakfast table, our wife or child makes a snide comment, because they haven't spent time with God either, and we are tempted to respond irritably or ungraciously. One of the children starts crying or complaining and we are tempted to lose patience. We drive in the car, pass a billboard with a scantily-clad woman and we are tempted to lust. We arrive at work, the boss is a turkey and we are tempted to be angry, bitter and discontent. We come home and rather than spending time doing what is valuable, we are tempted to lose ourselves in mindless ungodly entertainment. All these circumstances come to us and when we are faced with them the sinful desires in our heart rear up and we are tempted to vent and give in to them. Daily, almost continually, we are faced with the crisis of temptation.

Sometimes temptation strikes with such force and power from an unexpected source and in a manner and at a time that if we give in to it, it threatens the very course of our lives. It offers pleasure and momentary satisfaction, but with effects that can utterly devastate your life. For example, during my freshman year of college I had been dating a beautiful “good Christian girl” from the Baptist Student Union for about two or three months. One day I was hanging out in her dorm room waiting for her to shower and get ready so we could go somewhere. She came into the room in a bathrobe, locked the door, took off the robe, stood before me completely naked and said, “What are you going to do Chris?” By the grace of God – He deserves all the glory – I was

filled with a sudden sense of shame, stood up and simply walked past her and out of the room, virginity intact. I look back on that day and many others at MU and shudder to think what my life would have been had God not been a daily source of help. At the very least, I know I would not have received the wonderful wife, children and blessing that I now have.

There was a story in the Focus on the Family magazine, 7/04, about a young woman, who had engaged in immoral living in college. She came to faith in the Lord Jesus later and met a godly man. They dated; he proposed and she accepted. She decided to have herself checked for STDs before they were married, just to be certain, because of her past lifestyle. Her tests came back positive for HIV. All hope of a normal life and family vanished. All hope of marrying the man she had come to love disintegrated as she had to tell her fiancé the truth. By God's grace she had found the Lord and been saved, but God still required her to bear the consequences of her previous sin in this life.

Failure in the crisis of temptation can rob you daily of joy; it can rob you of peace in your heart and in your home; it can rob you of the opportunity to influence your children, your family, your neighbors; it can rob you of the assurance of salvation; it can break fellowship with God and bring His discipline to bear, if you are His; and it can devastate the course of your life and possibly even life itself.

In our text for this week, God, through the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, gives us lessons about overcoming in the face of temptation, lessons that, if you will hear them, can strengthen your life, give you joy and peace daily, and draw you close to the heart of God in unhindered fellowship.

Do you have any temptations or sins in your life that you need God's help in overcoming? What are they? \_\_\_\_\_

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Spend some time in prayer right now, asking God to strengthen and help you. Ask Him to show you this week how to overcome your specific temptations.

## **Tuesday**

Yesterday we stated the problem. Today we will see the setting for the Lord's temptation.

The Lord Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness of Judea. This was an area running east to west between the Dead Sea and Jerusalem. It is about 35 miles long and fifteen miles wide. It's a region full of yellow sand and crumbling limestone. It has contorted strata, where ridges run in all directions like they are warped and twisted. The hills are heaps of dust, the limestone is blistered and peeling from the heat, the rocks are bare and jagged and the ground even sounds

hollow when you walk on it. Nowhere in all of Palestine is there a more terrible, uncomfortable, isolated and desolate place than the wilderness that Jesus went to be tested. The only inhabitants were wild animals and they weren't the friendly or cuddly kind.

And the Lord was there without food, fasting for forty days and nights. I don't know much about hunger, but I know that there are in a fast like this two points in time that are the very worst, the very beginning and the very end. For the first week the body begins to shout for food. Then, the brain kind of shuts off the messages unless some food is taken into the body. The body will begin to break itself down and run on valuable tissues like muscle to keep going. Then towards the end, around forty days, a person comes to the point of starvation. The body at the point near death begins to scream out for food like never before. The desire becomes all consuming.

Not only is the Lord Jesus enduring this fast, the Greek text in Mark 1:13 and Luke 4:2 indicates that Jesus didn't just face the three temptations we have recorded here. These are the major ones at the end of the time period, but the verb tense in the original language indicates very clearly that the Lord was continually undergoing temptation after temptation from the Devil throughout the entire forty days and nights, over and over and over again. We probably can't even imagine the number and variety of the vicious and terrible temptations the father of lies, the most subtle and powerful of all evil ones, assaulted the Lord with during that time before the end, which we have recorded.

So that is the setting. Jesus is alone, undoubtedly very tired, on the verge of starving to death, battling thirst and intolerable heat during the days, surrounded by wild and dangerous animals in one of the most inhospitable environments on earth. Further, He is plagued by Satan himself for forty days and nights. But in all of that, He never sinned.

The Lord was led to this point by the Spirit for at least two reasons. First, He had just been publicly declared to be the Son of God by the Father at His baptism. He had just been proclaimed to be the promised Messiah, the great King, the Hope and Deliverer of Israel and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by God's herald, John the Baptist. This great time of temptation takes place, immediately afterward, to demonstrate and prove that Jesus is indeed worthy of these titles and worthy of that glory, that He was worthy of being our great high priest, who was tempted in all points just as we are and yet was perfect, pure and without sin. Second, the temptation teaches us the way Jesus had victory over sin, that we might follow His example.

In fact, there is much we could speak of from these verses. We could literally fill up a month of lessons from these eleven verses discussing truths about Christ, the character of His ministry, the difference between testing versus temptation, the motives and purposes of God versus the motives and purposes of the enemy, the working of Satan, the nature of temptation and so on. I don't feel led to do all of that, but what I do want to share with you are the keys this text reveals for overcoming temptation. These are important because the Lord Jesus overcame temptation with the same resources available to all the children of God. And I believe that if we take these

principles and implement them into our own lives, then we will be able to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness, not allowing sin to have dominion in our lives.

In the first two temptations we will see three keys each and in the third we will see four keys to overcoming temptation. But take some time right now to reread the text and write down the keys that you see to overcoming temptation: \_\_\_\_\_

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Many of us are quick to offer excuses for giving in to temptation and sin, particularly environmental excuses. How does the setting of the Lord's temptation speak to this issue? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Wednesday

In the first temptation, Satan comes to the Lord at the point of His greatest hunger and says, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." Now that phrase, "If you are the Son of God" is a first class conditional. There are four classes of conditional phrases in the Greek language and first class conditionals assume the truthfulness of the stated condition. So, Satan isn't questioning Jesus' identity at all in these words. He's assuming it, and the sentence could be faithfully translated, "Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." After all, the temptation only makes sense if Jesus truly does have the power to turn a stone into bread. You can't be truly tempted by something you know you cannot do.

So what is the temptation exactly? Think of it in these terms: "Since you are God's Son, should you starve in this desolate wilderness? How could the Father allow His Son to go hungry when He even provided manna for those rebellious unbelieving children of Israel in the wilderness for forty years? And after all, Jesus, doesn't the prophet Isaiah say of the righteous, 'His bread will be given him; his water will be sure' (Is. 33:16). God is not keeping His promise to you; the Father is not keeping His word. You need to take matters into your own hands. You the Lord of glory are too important to have to endure this hardship and discomfort. You were born in a stable, had to flee to Egypt for Your life, spent thirty years in an obscure family in an obscure village working as a carpenter for people that didn't care. And now, you're starving unattended, unrecognized, and unpitied in this wilderness. **You've got rights!!! You deserve better!!!** Not only that, you won't be able to fulfill your mission if you die out here!"

It was a subtle and frightening temptation in many ways, playing to the kinds of thoughts of self-gratification and pride that we have every day. It was a temptation to dependence on self rather than dependence on God's provision and plan. It was a temptation to unbelief and rebellion, to

physical and spiritual discontent. Jesus answers, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

So we see in the Lord’s words the first Key to overcoming temptation: **1) Exalt the spiritual over the physical** (v. 4). “Satan,” Jesus says in effect, “There is something more valuable than my physical comfort. There is something more important than easing my hunger. God has led me out into this wilderness. He has led me to this fast. I will accomplish His desire. It is greater than my physical need. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

How often do we fail in this area? How often do we exalt what is physically comfortable or pleasurable for us over what is spiritually right and good and necessary. “It feels so good to lay in this bed. I don’t want to pray. I’d much rather watch this movie and have a little eye-candy than read my Bible tonight. I can’t make the time to exercise myself towards godliness. I’m just too busy. I know God wants me to fast, but fasting is hard. I know I should give my tithe and offerings but it would make me financially insecure. Besides, I need to get a new T.V. and computer and eat out every week. Witnessing frightens me; I don’t want the tension. Someone else really needs to serve or do that job. After all, I’m tired.” Or the wife, “I just don’t feel like meeting his sexual needs tonight no matter what God says.” Or the husband, “I’d rather watch football than love my wife with conversation or cleaning.”

But God has taught us in the book of Job that we are to treasure His word more than our necessary food. It is His word that leads us and commands us to do these things. To fulfill His desire is to actively treasure His word, to place the spiritual over the physical. **Seek first the kingdom of God**, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you!

Beloved, when we fail in the above ways and give in to the temptation to exalt the physical, we are not even failing at the point of need. We are not even close, but we are failing at the point of fluff, at the point of the superficial. **Jesus was at death’s door**, and He was still exalting the spiritual over the physical. Set your mind on things above. Put the spiritual over your physical desires, needs, and wants and you will go a long way towards overcoming temptation in your life.

In what ways are you tempted to exalt physical things over spiritual things in the church, at home, at the workplace or with your finances? \_\_\_\_\_  
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How do spiritual disciplines relate to this question? Do they help you make the right choices? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Thursday

The second key to overcoming temptation that we see in these verses is this: **2) Trust in God over self** (v. 4). As I said before, there is in Satan's temptation this idea of "You deserve better; you should have something better. God is not holding up on His side of the bargain. He's withholding good from you." This is similar to the temptation we see in the garden. It is a call to distrust and to become dissatisfied with God's provision.

When Jesus came into this world, He came as a bondservant, Scripture says. He came to do His Father's will and His Father's will only. In what theologians call the humiliation of Christ, He willingly set aside the privileges of His divinity according to Philippians. One of the privileges that He set aside was the outward display of His glory (John 15:5). Jesus came to place Himself in perfect submission, and the simple truth was that at this point in time it was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer hunger. It was His Father's will for Jesus to wait on and trust in God's provision for His need, and Jesus knew that submission to God's plan was far better than striking out on His own.

How does this come home to us? Many ways, but an example might be on the issue of abortion. God is the author of life. He alone gives conception (e.g. Ruth 4:13). But, people don't trust His decision or the result of that decision. So they take matters into my own hands and terminate the life of the child. Or how about this example: You have a fight with your wife in the morning. You go to work and talk with a co-worker in the break room. She's nice, she smiles, laughs at your jokes, listens to you, seems interested in what's going on in your life, and makes you feel better. You start spending more time with her on breaks and lunches, just talking. It's nothing physical; she's just a friend. But, you take an emotional bond that rightfully belongs to your wife and you transfer that to another woman. That's sin. Proverbs 5:15-17 says, "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth." More than just improper physical attachments there are improper emotional ones, and a man ought not to turn his back on the wife of his youth to find joy and satisfaction in another woman's company. Or how about this? The emotional attachment isn't to a real woman, but to a fantasy, and you are so drawn in, that you would rather spend time in a fantasy world, than loving your wife and building up your marriage in the real world.

The man says, "But she doesn't treat me right. I have rights in this marriage too. I deserve better than that. Our marriage was a mistake and I'm going to start looking for bread somewhere else in this stinking wilderness." Oh, but what is a man (or a woman) really saying when they say that? He is really saying, "God has made a mistake. I cannot depend on His provision, and if I follow His rules in the situation and stay committed to my spouse, it won't work out for the best in the long run. I deserve better. I'll be cheated somehow, if I don't get out." Lies, lies, lies.

If we want to talk about what people deserve, then here's one for you, for me and everyone: the

pit of hell. And if you have been saved and you keep the right perspective on what you really deserve, then you ought to be able to receive everything in this life with thanksgiving just as God commands you, even a faulty spouse. (Oh by the way, you're a faulty spouse too).

When a person turns away from the plan of God for his or her marriage, that person is not trading up, but trading down. Such a person will definitely not do better in the long run and definitely not when he or she stands before God to give an account. When David rejected God's provision for him and committed adultery with Bathsheba, what did God say to him in 2 Samuel? He said, **"You have despised me!"** (12:10, Emphasis added). David's discontent that led to that sin was not ultimately because he was disappointed in the circumstances of his life or other people. It was because he had despised God, Himself, in his heart. That wasn't a pleasant day for David. [Even in this life, secular statistics show that if a couple is just plain miserable together, and they gut it out, within five years over 95% of them are happy in marriage, at peace and glad about their decision. If they divorce, however, over 80% regret their decision and begin a downward spiral into multiple broken relationships, broken marriages, loneliness and depression, as they repeat the mistakes of the past over and over again. One hundred percent, even the Christians, will regret it when they stand before God and realize what it has cost them to not follow His plan. Trust God and His word over self. Live by the words that proceed from His mouth and you will not fail in the face of temptation; you will have ultimate joy.]

So Jesus says in effect, "I will submit to God's desire. I will trust in His provision for me and be content with that even when it is painful. I will not exalt my own physical needs or my own wants and desires over His plan and my spiritual need to be in submission to Him."

Where do discontent, grumbling and complaining come from? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Are such sins ultimately a statement against others or a personal referendum on God's plan and working in your life? (Jude 15-16: Note the words "against Him.") \_\_\_\_\_  
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How should a correct view of your "rights" and "just desserts" help you when you are tempted to act out of discontent? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Examine your heart. Do you find that you trust in God more than yourself? Why or why not?  
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## Friday

A third key to overcoming temptation: **3) Know the word of God; write it on your heart (vv. 4, 7, 10).** It is obvious in every single one of these temptations, that the Lord countered it by quoting Scripture. In Psalm 119:11, the Psalmist says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Reading and memorizing Scripture is absolutely critical to overcoming temptation.

I don’t know how many times I’ve been tempted to lash out with my tongue and Eph. 4:29 pops into my head, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Or how useful would it be to know Proverbs 6:25-26 when you are tempted to lust after a seductress: “Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread;...” Lust after a seductress in your heart: lose all spiritual dignity, lose potency and fruitfulness, be reduced to **a crust of bread** in the eyes of God. Or how about this one, “Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death.”

Beloved, Scripture memorization is not a nice idea that you take or leave according to your own preference or convenience. It is a matter of war. It is a matter of war in the battle for your own heart and life. To leave it off is like running into the battle with your M-16 and grenades sitting back in the tent. You will find yourself in the middle of the fight with ... nothing. Too many of us men, myself included, have spent far too many days in the house and kingdom of God as little more than cast off “crusts of bread.” We have done so, in part, because of our refusal to embrace the truth of God’s word and write it on our hearts. By the way ladies, especially young ladies, remember not to play the seductress to draws the eyes of men to yourself. While that might make you feel empowered, good, flattered and desirable, in God’s eyes you will be far worse than a mere crust of bread: “bitter as wormwood, unstable in your ways, your steps laying hold of hell.” Live in a way designed not to draw the eyes of men, but live so that you draw the eyes of God. You will have true joy in the end and along the way. If God decides to give you a husband, you will get a far better one than you would have fishing for one on your own.

Can you think of a time when Scripture memorization helped you overcome in a time of temptation? What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

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What’s your plan for writing God’s word on your heart? How’s it going? \_\_\_\_\_

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