

This is the time of the year where we have renewed focus and drive to set goals, decide what we want to be about, and accomplish our resolutions. In doing research the last few days, I looked up the five most common resolutions for this year. They are exercise more, lose weight, save more money, spend more time with family and friends, and work toward career advancement. All those things are great. Who wouldn't want to be healthier and in better shape, have more finances, enjoy more quality time with the people we love, and do better at work? Those are wonderful! But we all know that the average resolution is broken within a week. Look at this sign that Dairy Queen put up yesterday. (View online sermon to see the photo.) Yeah—that happens to all of us.

The beginning of a new year is a natural time for us to decide what we want to be about, what priorities we are going to set. As we continue in our study in the book of Luke, today we begin a new series in which we will look at Jesus' one-on-one interactions throughout the gospel, and we get to see Jesus' interaction with Satan. If you have your Bible, turn with me to Luke 4. The context is relevant for us. Just like we are all beginning a new year and many of us want to make sure we set and keep the right priorities, Jesus was beginning his public ministry. He was getting ready to take his message public, but before he did, he spent 40 days in the wilderness praying and fasting, and throughout that time of dedication and preparation, Satan came and tempted him. This was a pivotal time in Jesus' life. The enemy came to test his resolve and character, to lure him away from his mission and purpose. Let's look at that interaction, and then we'll talk about the nature of temptation and how Jesus overcame it.

It's so relevant to talk about this now, because no matter what resolutions you may or may not have set, I can tell you this for sure: God wants to accomplish significant things in your life and through your life this upcoming year. God wants to fill your life with his love and goodness and presence, he wants to extend his kingdom through you and use your mission to bless others in his name—and we need to learn from Jesus how to keep our focus and resolve, how to be faithful and overcome temptation and distraction.

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-2a).

Let me pause right there and ask: who is it that led him into the wilderness? Satan met him there, but it was the Spirit who led him there. What does that tell us? God knows that temptation is going to take place in our life; it's not a surprise to him. This temptation took place before Jesus' public ministry, to prepare him for his public ministry. The same often happens in our own lives. Oftentimes we need to go through a season of testing and preparation before we are ready to be trusted with greater responsibility, leadership, and influence. Jesus says that it is those who have been faithful with a few things who will be put in charge of many things. Notice also how long he was in the wilderness—40 days. This is Jesus' way of retelling the story of the nation of Israel through his own life. How long was Israel tested in the wilderness? 40 years. Jesus is embodying the history of the nation in his life. Where they failed, Jesus will prove faithful.

“He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’” (Luke 4:2b-3).

The temptation took place the entire 40 days, but the devil waited toward the end of the 40 days of fasting to tempt him with food. Satan is opportunistic, always waiting for the most strategic time, when we are most vulnerable, to lure us into a trap. But I think it's more than just a temptation for Jesus to fill his empty stomach; it's also a temptation for the way in which Jesus will go about his ministry.

Do you know how ancient kings frequently got their thrones? If you read ancient history, you'll realize that ambitious and power hungry people would take out enormous loans from wealthy patrons, buy huge quantities of bread, and give it out for free to people. They would do that for weeks or months on end, and once they had the loyalty and devotion of the people, they would use that goodwill and social momentum to make a play for political power. Before Julius Caesar led Rome, he took out a \$500,000,000 loan from Marcus Crassus to buy food to give to all the people to get their loyalty and their votes. That's what people did.

With that in mind, do you remember what happened when Jesus took two fish and five loaves and multiplied them to feed 5,000 men, probably 10,000 people total? John 6:15 says, "They tried to make him king by force!" Turning a rock into bread isn't just about Jesus feeding himself—it's Satan trying to tempt Jesus to be the sort of king who gains his following by performing spectacular miracles, buttering people up, and creating a dependency state, rather than by preaching God's word and calling people to enter the kingdom through repentance and holiness, sacrifice and love. Jesus had the wisdom to see through Satan's scheme. Jesus answered with a quotation from the book of Deuteronomy, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone'" (Luke 4:4). Jesus knew what he needed and what people needed was not simply another meal, but the sustaining power that comes from the Word of God.

After temptation 1 was complete, there was a second.

"The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours'" (Luke 4:5-7).

Jesus is led to a high place where he has a great vantage point, but there is probably a supernatural visionary experience here, too. Jesus can see the worldly kingdoms that are near to him, and those around the world: Rome, Egypt, Parthia, Britannia, China—he can see it all. Satan says, "They'll all be yours—they'll worship you, adore you, follow you; all you have to do is bow down and worship me." We need to point out a few things. First, as is the case with all of Satan's temptations, he's lying. These aren't his kingdoms to give away. He has partial influence over the world right now, but not ultimate control or authority over worldly kingdoms. But Satan has never been interested in speaking the whole truth in the first place. Most of his deceptive power comes from twisting the truth, giving a partial presentation of the facts to deceive us. That's what's happening here.

And it's not only that Satan has made an empty promise. He's trying offer something to Jesus that belongs to Jesus in the first place. Psalm 2 is a passage about the Messiah, the Son of God, and in verse 8 God says, "Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." God is going to give the nations to Jesus anyway, but he's going to give them to Jesus years later, after he's suffered and died for the salvation of the world. The heart of the temptation is for Jesus to take hold of his desired future (1) before the appointed time and (2) through an illicit alliance with evil rather than through obedience and sacrifice.

Every single one of us faces temptations like this: there is something good that we desire, God plans to give it to us, but we want it now, not in God's timing or according to God's design. To get it now, we'll take short cuts and make choices we'll later come to regret. Jesus is enduring the same type of temptation we all do. But he overcame it. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'"'" (Luke 4:8), quoting again from the book of Deuteronomy. Jesus will not sell his soul to the devil. He will be faithful to God, and to God alone.

That's the second temptation, but there's one more to go.

“The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’”” (Luke 4:9-11).

Satan realizes that Jesus has been quoting Scripture, so he actually quotes from Scripture and says, “God’s word promises that God will protect his Son. He’ll send angels to protect you so that you’ll never get hurt. So why don’t you go to the top of the temple, and in view of all the people, jump off.” It’s about a 450 foot drop to the valley below. An ancient historian who visited the temple said simply approaching that peak caused people to get dizzy and weak in the knees. Satan says, “If you jump off and you’re able to levitate, or safely glide down without a thud, it will prove that you’re the Messiah. Everyone will know it, and they’ll flock to you.”

Henri Nouwen calls this the temptation to be spectacular. The temptation is for Jesus to be famous, praised, popular, applauded, esteemed, and fawned over. Interestingly, all the surveys show that these days, if you ask teenagers and young adults what a dream come true for them would be, they wouldn’t chose to be a sports star or the president or an influential CEO, as in generations past; the number one thing young people today want is to become famous, to have a million followers, to go viral, to be recognized and loved by their peers—in other words, to be spectacular, to do something that undeniably shows their worth and value to other people in a way that forces them to take notice. That’s the temptation Jesus is facing here, simply in a world without social media. But Jesus didn’t come to be the focus of people’s fascination, he came to point them to the Father, to preach the kingdom of God, and to give his life for the salvation of the world. This would take him irreparably off course.

Let me give you an analogy. Let’s say you’re a 25-year-old man who has inherited your father’s fortune. You are now worth a billion dollars. You’re also single and you want to get married, but you want someone to love you for yourself, not your wealth. What would you do on your first date? You could show up in a million dollar Aston Martin, drive her to your private plane, catch a flight to New York, dine at a three star Michelin restaurant, leave a thousand dollar tip. You could make an opulent show of your wealth, but how likely is it that your date would fall in love with you for who you really are? Do you want to be spectacular and show off all you have, or do you want a real relationship? That’s the temptation Jesus is facing with his ministry. If you jump, God’s going to save you, and everyone will fall in love with you. Once again quoting from the book of Deuteronomy, “Jesus answered, ‘It is said: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test””” (Luke 4:12). Jesus would rather be faithful than famous. He passed the test.

“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13).

He didn’t leave for good; he only left for now. Jesus will have run-ins with Satan throughout his ministry, most climatically in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Satan will try to convince Jesus to avoid the cross. No matter how many times Satan tries to derail Jesus, Jesus overcomes Satan; he is faithful in the midst of temptation.

This is one of those passages where I wish I had two hours to preach. To get the most out of this in the time we have, I want to define temptation and show how Jesus overcame temptation. Let’s begin by defining temptation. From what we see in this passage, we can define temptation this way: at strategic times, the enemy deceives us with the false promise that pursuing our selfish desires is better than following God’s will.

I want to spend a moment highlighting each aspect of this definition. We'll see how it happened in Jesus' life, and how it happens in our own lives.

At strategic times—When did Satan come to tempt Jesus? Not when he was sitting down, eating a meal with his 12 disciples, not when he was in the synagogue on the Sabbath for worship, but when he was in the wilderness, all alone, for 40 days. It was a perfect time for the enemy to approach. Each of us needs to know ourselves well enough to know that there are specific times and even specific places where, on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis, temptation hits us with greater force. The temptation on Sunday mornings to make excuses and generate other plans rather than go to church and worship. The temptation around tax season to fudge some numbers. The temptation that hits late at night or when traveling to compromise purity and chastity. We must know ourselves and our seasons of vulnerability so we can prepare accordingly.

the enemy—The world has a spiritual enemy who is entirely real and 100% bent on evil destruction. His mission is to draw us away from a relationship with God and ruin our lives. This is why the Bible tells us again and again to be alert—because the enemy prowls around looking for people to devour. If you are at war, and the Bible says we are, you need to be aware of your enemy and how he works. Here's a simple analogy: if there is someone who wants to break into your house, rob your possessions, and violate your family, do you know what they want more than anything else? For you to be entirely naive about their plans so that you never take steps to protect yourself, your family, and your home.

deceives us with the false promise—The Greek words used for temptation are also words used for hunting and fishing. When you hunt and fish, you make a false promise to an animal: this worm looks delicious, go ahead and take a bite...so I can hook you. This decoy looks safe and happy, why don't you leave your place of safety and come over here, close enough for me to shoot you. Most hunting and fishing is about deceiving an animal with a false promise of food, safety, or mating, and then, in a swift moment, swooping in to kill that animal. Satan does the same thing. He tries to deceive, to lure us, but it's always a false promise, and his purpose is to kill us. He uses whatever is most appealing to each one of us—sex, power, money, pleasure, acceptance—but the essence of every temptation is clear:

that pursuing our selfish desires is better than following God's will—When you really stop to think about it, this is the core of every temptation. Sure, this is what God wants, this is what he said is best, but come on, is that really best for you, in this specific situation? Sure that's a good rule for most people at most times, but not for you in this situation. God wants you to wait until marriage, but go ahead and cross that line now; it'll be better. God wants you to always tell the truth, but in this situation, go ahead and lie; deceit will be better. God wants you to care for the poor, but it's so inconvenient and costly; this time, just do what you want to and pursue your own interests; surely someone else will take care of them. There are a thousand different temptations, but this is the core of it every time: do what you want, rather than what God wants.

That's the definition of temptation. Every one of us has battled it, and at times, given in to it, all throughout our lives. Let's look at the way Jesus modeled overcoming temptation.

For Jesus, overcoming temptation begins with knowledge of God's Word. Every time the enemy tempted Jesus, trying to deceive him, Jesus went to the unchanging truth of Scripture. On the last night of his life, Jesus prayed for us, his followers, and said, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Temptation disorients us, Scripture reorients us. Psalm 119:9 asks the question: "How can a young person stay on the path of purity?" The answer? "By living according to your word." Verse 11 says it this way: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Sometimes trying to navigate life is like trying to find your way on the streets of a city you've never been in before. God's word is like a GPS,

showing you the turns to take and the turns to avoid. This entire book can be a little intimidating at first. You don't have to begin by reading the entire thing. Take the 3-4 areas where temptation is strongest for you and memorize verses about that. Let's say you know gossip is an issue for you. Go to Google. Type in "Bible verses about gossip." These will be three of the first verses to pop up:

- "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).
- "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).
- "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless" (James 1:26).

Commit those three sentences to memory. Every time the temptation hits, recite those verses instead. I guarantee it will transform the way you speak. You overcome temptation through knowledge of God's will.

Next, Jesus overcame temptation through trust in God's character. Each time Satan came to Jesus to tempt him, he told him to take something for himself rather than to let God provide for him—take that bread, take that power, take that fame and notoriety. But each time Jesus said: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." In every situation, Jesus anchored himself in his confidence, in his certainty that God is good. Because Jesus knew that God is good and that he can be trusted, he was certain that following God's way was best.

Last, Jesus overcame temptation by contentment with God's provision. The enemy is only able to entice you to pursue something else if you want more than you already have. If you look around and say, "I have everything I need. I am satisfied. I'm content. I'm grateful," then temptation has no power. If you are grateful for and content with your spouse, the lure of adultery has no power. If you are grateful for and content with your possessions, the lure of over-shopping and over-spending won't have any power on you. Think about Adam and Eve—if they were grateful for and content with the ten thousand plants they could have eaten from, the lure of that one plant would have had no power over them. Cultivating a spirit of gratitude and contentment with what you have neutralizes the appeal. In your prayer life, instead of primarily asking God for things you want, thank him for things you have. Shift your mindset. Cultivate contentment.

After Jesus overcomes the enemy in this temptation, the Bible says that Satan left Jesus for a more opportune time. When did the enemy attack again? In the Garden of Gethsemane, mere hours before his death, Satan tried to convince Jesus to avoid the cross, to save himself, not the world. His faithfulness under temptation was our salvation. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:15-16, "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. 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."

No matter what season of difficulty or temptation you are going through, Jesus has been there. Look to him. He understands. He has not only been there, he has been victorious. And he will show you the path to freedom.