

The Temptations of Jesus Devotional

Day #1 - Connect

Big Idea:

Connection to God is imperative to our spiritual success.

Verses for Reference:

Matthew 4:1

Mark 1:12

Luke 4:1

Devotional:

Let's think for a minute about the word, "Connected". If you're a Christ follower at any point in the journey, you would likely agree that you have some level of connectedness to God. But let's also think for a minute about the perimeters we put on the idea of "connectedness". Would the word, "Connected" really describe your relationship with God, regardless of where that "connectedness" leads?

According to Matthew and Luke (NLT), Jesus was "led" into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mark (NLT) says that Jesus was "compelled" to enter into the wilderness. Regardless of word choice, we get the idea that Jesus was well connected to His Heavenly Father. The concept of "connectedness" probably isn't a new idea if you've been following Jesus for any length of time. We get this idea, we understand that it's God, through the work of the Holy Spirit that guides us, leads us and compels us.

We've all heard amazing accounts of people who felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to reach out or talk to someone in need. We know people who, under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit have come back to right relationship with God from a lifestyle of sin.

Often, our understanding of "connectedness" centers on God drawing us "away from" or "out of" something that's not good for us. God delivers people from addiction, from pornography, from a multitude of lifestyles that don't bring glory to Himself. These are all true statements, however as He often did, Jesus gives us an example that challenges our status quo line of thinking when it comes to interacting with His Heavenly Father.

Jesus was led, compelled and prompted to head into trouble. That doesn't even make sense right? Why would God lead Jesus into temptation? Why would God subject His only Son, the Savior of the World to such struggle and temptation? Why wouldn't God, who was certainly capable of doing so, wrap Jesus into a little cocoon and keep Him safe until He could fully fulfill His purposes for humanity? Why? Because not only was Jesus purpose to save humanity but He was also to provide us with the ultimate example of what we are to strive for in our lives.

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As we'll discover, Jesus lived His earthly life with perfection and in doing so, He left us an example to follow. Not only are we given an example to follow in how Jesus faced temptation, we're also shown what connectedness to our Heavenly Father should look like.

God has no desire to wrap you and I up in a spiritual cocoon and protect us from the big, bad world. He placed Jesus here to get in the mix, get dirty and help usher people into right relationship with God. He is calling you and I to that same mission as well.

Too often we desperately search for avenues by which to stay connected to God but ignore the avenues of greatest connectedness by which we can heavily lean into God in the midst of struggle.

Questions for Reflection:

- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your level of connectedness to God right now?
- When is the last time that God led you "into" something?
- Do you ever feel like your #1 concern is staying spiritually protected?
- What would it look like if you opened yourself up to being "led" into something difficult?
- What other Bible verses come to mind as you reflect on God "leading" you into struggle and His promises to stick with you?

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Day #2 - Invest

Big Idea:

Spend the necessary amount of time with God for the breakthrough you need.

Verses for Reference:

Matthew 4:2

Mark 1:13

Luke 4:2

Devotional:

The number 40 is significant all throughout Scripture.

- Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness before launching His earthly ministry.
- God caused rain for 40 days to flood the Earth.
- Moses spent 40 days on the mountain as he heard from God.
- The Israelite spies spent 40 days mapping out the plan to capture the land God promised them.
- The Israelites endured 40 days of taunting before David showed up and received Goliath of his head.

Countless breakthroughs occurred after the 40 day mark. It was after the 40 day mark that God delivered Jesus from temptation. It was after the 40 day mark that God cleansed the planet and began with a fresh start. It was after the 40 day mark that Moses descended the mountain having heard directly from God. It was after the 40 day mark that the Israelite spies returned (sort of) convinced that God would provide. It was after the 40 day mark that God put an end to the Philistine intimidation tactics.

Whether we focus on the number 40 or not, we get the idea that God shows up when we put in the time and invest on our part. Over the years we've managed to boil our faith down to quick moments with God, short devos (like this one) and whispered prayers just before the big test or the big pitch. We have fostered a 40-second faith more than a 40-day faith.

God desires investment. This principle is mapped out time and time again in Scripture. God is looking for the Moses' of our day who desire to serve over the long-haul. God is looking for the Paul's of our day who are willing to endure trial after trial and yet chooses to stay committed. God is looking for men and women who are ready to put in the time to get close to Him.

"Well, I'm strapped for time." you say? Hardly. Let's be honest, we make time for the things that are important to us. We seldom miss a game we're excited about. We've made it to work on-time everyday for the last 20 years. We find time for the things we care about. Let's make the conscious decision to invest more hardily into our relationship with God. Where's the sacrifice? Where's the time spent? Where are the 40-day experiences? Too often we long for 40-day experiences when we only choose to invest 40-seconds at a time.

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Questions for Reflection:

- What are you really good at investing in right now?
- Would you describe your faith as, “40-second” or “40 days”?
- Can you think of some “40-day” experiences you’ve had with God?
- What would need to change in your life to start developing a “40-day” faith?

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Day #3 - Trust

Big Idea:

God will not always provide what we want, but He will always provide what we need.

Verses for Reference:

Matthew 4:3-4

Luke 4:3-4

Devotional:

Satan comes to Jesus with the first of three temptations after Jesus had gone without food for 40 days. Jesus was certainly hungry. Being fully human, He experienced an emptiness in his stomach. As He stood listening to satan's first proposal, He heard the grumbling and growling of his own stomach. He felt dizzy and faint. His head throbbed. He found it difficult to concentrate on the words being spoken to Him as He battled through the pain of hunger. He was certainly in need at a physical level.

Perhaps His vision blurred as satan pointed to the rocks in front of Jesus as he suggested that Jesus could quickly rectify his predicament.

“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

In other words, let's end this struggle. Let's cut this corner short and get this thing over with. Let's take charge of the situation and bring about the result that we both know is needed. You're hungry, you're in need and you have the power to do this. Let's finish this.

The temptation must have been strong. Jesus was weak and hungry. The thought crossed His mind. He found Himself at a crossroad. End this now or wait for my Father in Heaven to provide? It was at that moment that Jesus laid down the first of many stones that would provide the ultimate foundational example for you and I as His followers.

“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

It was at the moment the scales tipped and Jesus' desire for bread was outweighed by His belief in the trust-worthiness of His Father. We too long for bread when what we really need is belief. We need to believe that God will provide what He's promised to provide. We need to believe that God is who He says He is, and He can do what He says He can do. We need to believe Jesus' words in Matthew when He says...

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“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.” - Matthew 6:31-32

God will always provide for you. He knows your needs, the ones you’ve voiced and the ones that you’re not even yet aware of yet.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what areas do you struggle to trust God?
- How have you taken your “well-being” into your own hands and out of God’s hands?
- What “bread” have you been seeking?

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Day #4 - Proof

Big Idea:

The understanding of others shouldn't determine our belief.

Verses for Reference:

Matthew 4:5-7

Luke 4:9-12

Devotional:

Remember when you were a kid and one of your friends would show up to the lunch table claiming something ridiculous? Whether it was a new, expensive toy that was coming their way or an unbelievable physical feat they could now accomplish, everyone in the circle was in awe until someone uttered the ultimate push back: "Prove it". Suddenly the table grew quiet and the kid was forced to put up or shut up.

That's really the heart of the second temptation that satan throws to Jesus after His 40 day experience in the wilderness. If you are who you say you are then "prove it". Jesus was God's Son and could have done what satan was suggesting (that would have been awesome to see). However Jesus understood a deeper principle that we're called to understand as well.

"Understanding by others shouldn't determine our belief."

Sometimes in our faith journey we become tempted to "prove it" to those around us. If our version of "success" doesn't match what other's "success" looks like, if we're not, "progressing" like everyone else is progressing, if we're not, "having fun" like everyone else is having fun then we feel the need to "prove" our success, progress and fun-level in an effort to find validation.

We long for the opportunity to show our disbelieving friends and family that God is real, that we aren't talking to thin air and that we're not crazy for believing in Him and His plan for our lives. We long to have some sort of "proof" that what we've been saying is actually true.

What's our motivation in this desire? Does God desire that your entire family network and your whole social circle be in right relationship with Himself, of course He does and we should desire that as well. But the question is "why?" Why do we desire that? Do we desire that so that we can finally feel justified in all of the things we've been saying and doing that have appeared crazy to those around us? What's our heart level reason for wanting "proof" that Jesus is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do?

Everything you truly need is supplied to you by your Heavenly Father. Even though we have convinced ourselves otherwise, we don't need to "prove" anything to anyone. We don't need validation from people with no eternal perspective.

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Jesus understood that all He needed was sourced in what His Heavenly Father could provide. He didn't need physical food or water or a legion of angels to swoop in or anything else for that matter more than He needed the approval of God Himself. He could have dropped some serious, "proof" in that moment that He was truly the Son of God and yet He chose not to take that step.

Here's the interesting part of the outcome of Jesus' choice to not display His divinity and drop that high level proof that Satan was tempting Him to drop: He was still God's only Son and still the Savior of the World. His choice to not "prove it" didn't change who He was, who God was and what God was doing in His life. The same is true for you and I as well.

Be confident in whose you are and what God is doing in your life. Fight the temptation to "prove" God's trustworthiness to those around you.

Questions for Reflection:

- Have you ever felt like you had to "prove" God's work in your life to those around you?
- Do you think you have "God's heart" for the salvation of your friends and family?
- What's your motivation to see their salvation become a reality?
- What effect does other's disbelief have on your belief in God's truth for your life?

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Day #5 - Shortcuts

Big Idea:

Shortcuts generally prove to provide more struggle in the end.

Verses for Reference:

Matthew 4:8-11

Luke 4:5-8

Devotional:

Everyone loves a good shortcut. In fact, one of my favorite moments in life is when I'm driving and an alternate route pops up on my GPS that will save me several minutes. It feels like I'm using the "bomb feature" on Zelda. We love shortcuts because they save time, they save energy and they allow us to get what or where we want more quickly and seemingly more efficiently.

While shortcuts in driving can be beneficial, shortcuts in life can be hazardous. If you're anything like me, you're sometimes tempted to take shortcuts. We consider shortcuts at work, with family, with our integrity, with lots of areas. We've bought into this idea that we can somehow short circuit the process, albeit generally when no one is looking. We think things like:

- No one will notice the difference.
- It's basically the same outcome but less effort on my part.
- What's it really matter if I do this or if I don't do this?
- This isn't a big deal, it's just a minor detour.

Do we really believe these lies? Do we really think that there's no difference? Do we really think that no one notices? Or perhaps we've just convinced ourselves of these false ideas because it's easier, at least at first.

Jesus faced an opportunity for a shortcut as well. The devil takes Jesus to the peak of a high mountain to show him all the kingdoms of the world. They could belong to Jesus instantly, if only he would take a shortcut.

In the notes section of my Life Application Study Bible it says, *"The devil arrogantly hoped to succeed in his rebellion against God by diverting Jesus from His mission and winning his worship. "This world is mine, not God's," he was saying, "and if you hope to do anything worthwhile here, you'd better recognize that fact."*

I think you and I can sometimes believe this as well. We justify our actions with statements like,

- "People take shortcuts, it's just the way the world works."
- "To get ahead in a career, sometimes you need to cut corners and look the other way."
- "Everyone does it, people expect other people to take shortcuts sometimes."

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We falsely assumed that the world has already gone to pot so what's it matter. We've bought into the lie of the devil that if we're going to make it in life, we have to operate the way that "everyone" operates.

While it feels like we being efficient when we take shortcuts, we're shortcutting more than we realize. When we take shortcuts, we cheat ourselves. We cheat ourselves out of the process. It's during the process that we learn, we grow, we mature and we develop.

Romans 5:3-4 says, *"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation."*

As we stick to the process and we refuse to cut corners we discover that God begins to use us in unprecedented ways.

2 Timothy 2:21 says, *"If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work."*

Don't be satisfied with cutting corners and taking shortcuts. Put in the work, trust the process and believe that God will use you in a far more powerful than you ever imagined.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what areas are you tempted to take shortcuts?
- What makes these potential shortcuts seem so appealing?
- Do you ever feel like, "everyone" is taking shortcuts, so why not you?
- What could you begin doing to start, "putting in the work" and "trusting the process"?