

Temptation

[Luke 4:1-13](#)

There is a story of a little boy who was in a grocery store and walks by an open pack of peanut butter cookies. He stops, and a store clerk notices him. “What are you doing there?” “Nothing,” replied the boy. “It looks to me like you’re trying to steal a cookie.” “No,” said the boy, “I’m trying not to.” That’s temptation – when we desire something that isn’t ours or something we shouldn’t have or do. I remember the many times I have dieted in my life, the times I was most tempted were those times right after I had lost a couple pounds – I immediately wanted to celebrate!

Jesus also faced temptation. Today’s scripture is probably fairly familiar to you. Luke portrays the account of Jesus being led out into the desert for a 40-day fast and a time of prayer. And of course he is joined by Satan who saw a possible

opportunity to win a significant victory over the son of God.

Satan knew when it was a good time to tempt Jesus. Jesus had just come off a tremendous mountain-top experience with the transfiguration where God recognized him as his son. Jesus was alone. He had gone to seek solitude in order to pray. Jesus was weak with hunger after enduring a 40-day fast. Perhaps he was fatigued or stressed having endured a difficult sacrifice in order to commune fully with God. Satan seemed to have picked the absolute perfect time to approach Jesus with any hope of victory.

Have we found ourselves in the same types of situations?

Sin is powerful – it can lure us into doing things at times of weakness that we would not consider otherwise. Maybe we have just come off a mountain-top experience. Similar to my successful visits to the scale, perhaps we feel entitled to a little

sin indulgence. Maybe we want to throw caution to the wind and let the good times roll.

Jesus was alone when Satan approached him. Maybe we too are more vulnerable to sin when we are alone. When no one is looking and we are sure we can't get caught – do we find ourselves listening to the little devil on our shoulders instead of the little angel known as our conscience? Maybe we are lonely and feel there's no harm in indulging in a little sin because no one will ever know.

Maybe we are in a weakened state like Jesus was after his 40-day fast. Maybe our spiritual batteries are worn down because we haven't had time to pray or commune with God. Maybe we have lost our focus a little because we have neglected to feed our souls. Maybe we are weakened by illness or despair. Maybe we are discouraged and can't seem to find God in our

everyday life. The temptations of sin can look that much better when we have been without the love and care of our community of faith and of God.

These are all very real situations that can face any of us at any time. I recall during my first semester at Wesley there was a time when I felt further from God than ever before. Imagine that – at seminary when I should have felt closer to God. But stress and tension and loneliness were taking their toll on me and I needed to be reminded that God was still with me and I was on the path God had chosen for me.

So what do we do when temptation rears up to face us? Let's look at the example Jesus gave us. Satan first appeals to Jesus' physical need of hunger. Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy his hunger. Jesus tells Satan that there is more to life than food – in other words, there are

more kinds of food than the physical. Jesus had been feeding his soul in communion with God – his physical hunger was not a primary concern because he had fed his soul a rich diet.

Satan then seems to tempt Jesus on a mental or authoritative manner. Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says he would give these to Jesus if he would bow down and worship Satan. Satan was appealing to Jesus on the basis of power and authority, but Jesus already knows who holds ultimate power. Jesus says, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” Once again Jesus’ spiritual self was sound and well-fed. Temptation didn’t seem to have a chance.

Finally Satan appeals to Jesus to prove himself as the son of God. Satan tells Jesus to jump from the top of the Temple and prove that God would protect him. Satan wants proof. Satan will not be the only one to ask for it. Several times in

Jesus' ministry people asked Jesus for a sign or a show or proof, but Jesus was interested in the spiritual well-being of everyone. He wanted people to increase their faith and turn to God for their strength. While Jesus did meet the physical needs of many, he did not ignore their spiritual hunger. So Jesus cautions Satan not to put God to the test. Without any other possibility, Satan simply disappears from the scene.

Will that work for us as well? Can we increase our faith to the point where we can resist sin and temptation? I think so. I know the challenges will remain. I know the path will become difficult at times. I also know that God is always with us.

Through the times of illness or despair, loneliness or grief, God is with us.

So what can we do to build our faith so that when temptation comes our way we can look to God for strength and

courage? There are several ways we can connect with God and build our spiritual armor. First, we can pray. It seems so simple but it can be an extremely powerful tool. Many churches have been on the verge of closing because they had lost their focus on God. But when congregations come together in prayer for our church, our community, our neighborhood, and our nation things happen. Lives are changed. Spirits are lifted. Can you pray for the Mount Tabor community?

Second, we can connect to God through studying God's word. Daily devotions and Bible study can fuel our spiritual batteries in very real ways. Some will say there is no point to studying the Bible because we hear it every week. There is some real value in reviewing texts, asking tough questions, and seeking answers through group Bible Study or online sources or just pondering God's word. I would encourage any who are

interested to attend our adult Sunday school class. We are combing through scripture, reading and discussing it together. It is very helpful to hear others opinions and frustrations if for no other reason than to know you are not alone. I can't promise snacks every week but I'll work on that! Devotionals can also help to build your connection with God – there are many available online. If you're not sure where to start I recommend the gospels where you can get a good grounding on Jesus' life and ministry.

Finally, we can commune with God in community as we come together as a body of Christ. We can share with each other as we worship God in this family of believers. During this season of Lent, let us find reasons to come together and celebrate God's great love for us. Even when we fellowship over a shared meal, our times together with each other and with

God are precious. As we lift each other up and care for each other, we are sharing God's love in very real and tangible ways. Our community is noticing. This congregation is alive and well and thriving in spite of the trials and temptations that come our way. We are sharing God's love with each other and it shows. We are extending the hand of grace and it shows. We are the family of God, and it shows. Throughout this season of Lent let us continue to shine with the radiance of God seated firmly in our hearts. Amen.