



MOUNTAINS

THE MOUNTAIN OF TEMPTATION

MATTHEW 4:1-11

MAIN IDEA

All believers should follow the example of Jesus when we face tests and temptations so that we come out victorious.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Think about the times you've recently experienced temptation of some kind. Without focusing on the details or specific situations, compare different common elements about those times (tired, frustrated, scared, uncertain, doubtful, etc.). These common elements cause us to be more or less vulnerable to temptations. Since we all face temptations and tests of our faith, it is imperative that we find and follow the right example of how to deal with what comes our way.

- **What are some emotions or circumstances that make you more or less vulnerable to temptations?**
- **How have you noticed your physical state affect your susceptibility to temptation?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read **Matthew 4:1-4**.

Jesus once again gave us the perfect example of how to deal with the tests and temptations that come our way. Just after being baptized and in preparation to officially begin His earthly ministry, He spent forty days fasting in the wilderness and that's when the enemy came after Him.

- **Why do you think the enemy might time his attack just following a spiritual high point?**

- **What did Satan seek to address or appeal to in Jesus with the first temptation?**

Although he was fully God, Jesus was also fully human. His physical body acted and reacted like ours do. When He fasted, He got hungry. Think about how hungry He would have been after forty days of fasting. He might start thinking about what would taste good and make Him feel better. As He was wrestling with His physical needs, the enemy came and challenged Him regarding His very identity.

- **How would you be tempted to respond if you were Jesus in this moment? Why? How did Jesus respond?**

It is interesting that Jesus resisted temptation in the same way that the Israelites previously fell to temptation. When the enemy attacked His very identity with this, Jesus turned to Scripture as His defense. Instead of looking to fill His hunger with the wrong things, Jesus turned to the best thing. His reference to the written word is a reinforcement

of the value we should place on Scripture in our own lives. The temptation of Jesus helps us know how to handle the temptations that come our way because we have a Savior who can relate to all we go through.

- **What wrong things have you used to try and fill your hunger? What is the danger of turning to the wrong things instead of to God?**

> Have someone in your group read Matthew 4:5-7.

- **What did this second temptation involve?**

When the first temptation didn't work, the enemy moved in for another try. Satan is persistent, but Jesus continued to show us how to respond. Be on guard—resisting in one area doesn't make you immune to other forms of temptation.

- **In what area are you most vulnerable to temptation?**
- **How can you follow Jesus's example and protect yourself using Scripture?**

Note an interesting part of this passage. The devil did not push Jesus off a high point. Instead, he tried to persuade Jesus to throw Himself off and test the protection of His Father. Although we have all heard and maybe said a few times that “the devil made me do it,” the truth is that the devil doesn't make us do anything. He might whisper a thought or try to persuade you into an action but the choice to give in is yours. Just as Jesus faced the choice of whether to give in to the enemy or not, we have the same choice when temptation comes our way.

- **Why is it easier to blame the enemy than to accept responsibility for your choices?**
- **How is it empowering to recognize that the devil cannot make you do something?**

> Have someone in your group read
Matthew 4:8-11.

Just as before, when Jesus resisted the temptation before Him, Satan brought on another one. Sometimes we resist a surface level temptation or the urge to experience instant gratification, but we may have to think twice when we start to feel alone or isolated. Although we know God did not abandon Jesus (and He does not abandon you) sometimes circumstances lead us to feel like we are all alone in the wilderness being tempted by the enemy.

- **What was the third temptation attempt about?**

Satan couldn't get Jesus to give in to him and feed his soul and body with the wrong things at the wrong time. His last attempt was an effort to get Jesus to worship a false god. You may not think that was a strong temptation for Jesus but stop and consider your own life. How often do you get sidetracked from wholly believing and worshiping the Lord? When you put anything in your life before God, you are worshiping a false god.

- **What types of false worship are people tempted with in this day and time?**
 - **What can you learn and apply from Jesus's example of dealing with temptation?**
-

When the enemy used his favorite tactic of twisting Scripture to try and tempt Jesus, Jesus applied Scripture to resist. Jesus demonstrated His knowledge and belief in God's Word. He showed His dependence on it for protection and shut Satan down. He also demonstrated what it looks like to resist the temptation to do things our own way as He was submitted to the Father and trusted His plan. That is exactly what we need to be in the habit of doing. When temptation comes your way in any form, use the Word of God to remind you of truth then apply it to shut down the enemy's attack. Remind yourself that God has a perfect plan and your job is to surrender to Him.

As we face temptation, it is vital to remember that Jesus not only modeled perfect obedience in the face of temptation, but He also fulfilled perfect obedience on our behalf. The reality is there are many times we will fail in the face of temptation. But Jesus never did and that is our lasting hope and motivation as we pursue obedience to God each day. It is Jesus's faithfulness, not our own, that has restored us to God.

- **What is your biggest take away from today's lesson?**

- **How can you be intentional about trusting God's plan instead of your own?**

APPLICATION

- **Identify where you are most vulnerable to attack from the enemy. Make a game plan to protect yourself when attack comes in that area. Make a daily commitment to Scripture as a means of defending from spiritual attack.**
- **Seek an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation with an individual who does not have a relationship with Christ.**
- **What temptation do we fall into the most? How can we position and protect ourselves from giving in to this in the future?**

PRAY

Thank Jesus for giving you the example of how to deal with temptations that come your way. Express your gratitude that He suffered through all that He did and was perfectly obedient in the ways you have failed. Confess any temptations that you have been guilty of giving in to recently or habitually and ask for strength from the Holy Spirit to shut the enemy down when he comes after you in the future.

MATTHEW 4:1-11

4:1–2. The temptation of Christ highlights numerous parallels between Jesus and OT Israel. Deuteronomy 8:2–3 says that the Lord led Israel into the wilderness to be tested for forty years. Similarly, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested for forty days. The three temptations Jesus faced parallel the tests Israel faced in the wilderness, and every Scripture that Jesus quoted in response to his temptations was drawn from God’s message to the Israelites about their wilderness test (Dt 6–8). Israel failed its tests, but Jesus passed His and in doing so “fulfilled all righteousness” (see Mt 3:15). Thus He is qualified to create a new spiritual Israel. Several features of Matthew confirm Jesus’s intention to gather a new people for God. He chose twelve disciples to parallel Israel’s twelve tribes. This was a conscious effort to identify His followers as the new Israel. The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that He was truly human as well as divine.

Notes:

4:3. The stones that littered the wilderness floor resembled small round loaves of bread in shape, size, and color. Interpreters disagree as to why it would have been wrong for Jesus to transform and eat the stones. Most suggest that He was tempted to exercise supernatural power rather than depend on God’s provision. Clues in the text suggest that the Spirit, who led Jesus into the wilderness, commanded this fast. Thus, breaking the fast prematurely would have been an act of disobedience, preventing Jesus from fulfilling every act of righteousness (3:15). Jesus aimed to end His fast when the test was over and no sooner. God would signal the end by providing food. Matthew 4:11 shows that at fast’s end, angels came and “began to serve” Jesus. The verb serve means “to serve as a table-waiter” and implies that the angels fed Jesus. During their wilderness wanderings, Israel failed to trust God to provide food and water. Jesus, the embodiment of the new Israel, had unwavering trust in God’s care.

4:4. Jesus quoted Dt 8:3. His reference to every word that comes from the mouth of God recalls the OT theme that God's words are not idle but are to be received as commands. Deuteronomy 8:1, 6 emphasize the need to obey God's commands, and Dt 8:1 teaches that man lives by following God's commandments just as 8:3 says that man lives by what comes from God's mouth (Dt 6:24). Thus the OT text that Jesus quoted teaches that obeying God is more important than being well-fed. Israel struggled to learn this truth (Ex 16:3; Nm 11:4–5). In contrast, Jesus hungered for righteousness more than bread and thirsted for obedience more than water. He urged His disciples to have the same priority (Mt 5:6).

Notes:

4:5–7. Satan quoted Ps 91:11–12 out of context, trying to convince Jesus that the Father would supernaturally protect Him even if He gambled with His life. Jesus responded by quoting Dt 6:16 which refers to the time when Israel, angry and thirsty, questioned God's presence until He miraculously produced a stream of water from a rock: "They tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' " (Ex 17:7). Had Jesus succumbed to Satan's temptation, it would indicate that His faith was frail and depended on God's miraculous action. Jumping from the pinnacle of the temple would test God by attempting to force Him to perform a miracle.

Satan implied that God is trustworthy only when He rescues us from suffering and danger. Jesus knew better. God is trustworthy even when He allows us or even causes us to suffer. True faith recognizes this and perseveres through hard times. When Jesus suffered on the cross (27:41–44), those who tormented Him used arguments similar to that of the devil: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." They even quoted Ps 22:8 to argue that Jesus would be rescued if God really loved him, much as Satan quoted Ps 91:11–12 to argue that

God would rescue Jesus from a deadly fall if He were really God's Son. Again, Jesus knew better. He trusted God even through a brutal scourging, even when nails were driven through His limbs, and even when God let Him suffer a horrible death.

Notes:

4:8–9. Although Satan exercises some authority over the world (Lk 4:6; Jn 12:31), the kingdoms of the world belong to God, and He promised to give them to His Son (Ps 2:8).

4:10–11. Jesus responded to Satan by quoting from Dt 6:14 and 10:20. If Jesus had worshiped Satan in order to gain worldly power, it would have indicated that He valued creation more than the Creator and the kingdoms of the earth more than the kingdom of God. Jesus insisted that only God is worthy of worship. After citing Dt 6:13, Jesus's reception of worship later in this Gospel (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17) without rebuking the worshiper (cp. Ac 10:25–26; 14:11–15) strongly implies His deity. That the angels came to serve Jesus further implies His superior status.