

STUDY 1

**The Temptations of Jesus
Luke 4: 1-13**

NB. Please read the introduction above as preparation for this study.

READ the passage.

Jot down what you think it is about.

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**Thinking About How You Read
The Passage**

Temptations are only real when they attract us, when we might actually be pulled in their direction. The things that tempt us say a lot about who we are and what we value, and with whom we want to share life. Temptations suggest envy and a desire for what we do not have.

What do you see as a real temptation in your life- a really important challenge to your faithful relationship with God?

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**Thinking About Luke 4: 1-13
With Our Partners**

We asked our partners in South Sudan, India and Timor: ‘What are the temptations of people in your communities?’ and ‘Why do you think Jesus may have been tempted by these three temptations?’
Read the responses below with an openness to be challenged, to see from a different perspective.

To our partners: What tempts people in your community?

In these communities, people are tempted by love of money (corruption, greed, theft/robbery); forcefully acquiring/stealing

properties that belong to another; immorality; false accusations/ lies; injustice; envy; acquiring more wealth at the expense of the poor; taking power by force; and misusing power to exploit the people. The people are also tempted to overindulge in alcohol, prostitution, corruption in public office, and giving and accepting bribes in government offices. There is a temptation to submit to satanic powers, or to be so anxious about conversions that people resort to magic. One partner identified the temptation of modern life that draws young people from farms and from the growing of their own food – they desire money, and its related authority and prestige.

Which of these temptations do you see as part of your life or the life of those around you? Which are quite new to you?

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As you read and reflect on temptations our partners face, how does that challenge what you assume about temptations, and the way you read this passage?

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To our partners: Why do you think Jesus would actually have been tempted by these three temptations?

They responded that Jesus was a human being, with a human heart and desires, and was tempted by what is crucial to all of us – food, wealth, and power/control/pride. In that wilderness place, the temptation for Jesus was to rely on his own desire, power, and ability to respond to the tests, and to forget the presence of God. Part of the temptation was that Jesus knew these things could help his ministry, but at great cost. In one situation, the partner suggested that people look for power and authority through what is mystical (trying to build up connections with any ‘invisible power’).

Jesus' response reminds us that we should always have God in mind and in our prayers, so that the devil will have no space. Jesus took the path of 'salvation through struggle' by rebuking the devil; the symbol of his complete obedience to God being the cross. If Jesus was able to win over these three temptations, then he is able to be obedient to what God requires, and is able to save people from these three temptations and bring them back to God.

In what way do the responses of the partners stimulate your thinking about this passage of scripture?

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Why do you think Jesus was tempted?

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What resources did Jesus use when he was tempted? What resources do you use when tempted?

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Thinking About How You View The Scriptures

Think back to the Introduction, and what was said about the things that shape us, the interests we protect, and our response to Scripture.

What relationships, events and parts of your life shape your response to scripture?

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Which issues strike you, and which ones do you tend to overlook?

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What interests are likely to entice you? What interests conveyed in the scriptures do you automatically protect?

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Going Deeper Into The Passage

Following his baptism and blessing by God (3:21-22), Jesus is immediately led into the wilderness to be tempted.

There are different ways we can approach these temptations. How might Jesus have been tempted to shift allegiances, to alter his place in the world, and to change who he spent time with and sought to protect? That is, how do these temptations seek to get Jesus to think about himself differently?

Each temptation suggests a compromise that will make his mission less burdensome, and will benefit others. If he will just align himself differently with the powers and struggles in society or if he will put himself with those who really know what power is about, he can do such good things. As is frequently the case with temptation, Jesus is tempted by what is good.

First temptation: ‘If you are the Son of God, order this stone to turn into bread.’ (4:3)

Throughout his ministry Jesus will find hungry, tired, dispirited people in great need. They will cry out to him for food. He has the power to be a notable benefactor. Why doesn't he simply turn stones into bread and feed them?

Jesus' response – that one cannot live by bread alone, but by the word of God – indicates that he lives and ministers because of his relationship with God, and not by his own power and abilities. It is important that God's people be fed, as Jesus illustrates in his ministry, but such things must not define life. Here the temptation is about whether Jesus will find life in himself or in God. Jesus knows that, as crucial as this ministry would be, as necessary as it is to care for God's people, his task is to proclaim God's kingdom and to call people to new life.

In our world we are told that who we are and what we are worth is determined by what we buy and

own. We are pushed to consume endlessly, beyond what we need, and at the expense of the needs of others. How caught up have you become in this culture? Do you live by the things that the world values or by God's word of life?

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Second temptation: ‘Then the devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. “I will give you all this power and wealth,” the devil told him. “All this will be yours, then, if you worship me.” (4:5-7)

Real temptations, the difficult temptations, are those that suggest that small compromises will achieve really good things. Jesus is promised the power to do good, and to have much influence over the whole world. He can replace the despots of the world, struggle against the abuse of power, eliminate injustice, and create a new world. All he has to

do is compromise on one little point – to worship the evil one rather than God. He has to move from God and the way God shares life with the crowds – the poor and outcasts and excluded – and share life with the movers and shakers. It is about ultimate loyalty. He can still be friends with God; it's just that he cannot give God the sort of loyalty that would flow easily into worship.

Jesus says 'no'. He will not worship anyone but God. And God's way is for Jesus to locate himself not in the places of power, but alongside ordinary people, to share their parties, eat dinner with the most marginalised in society, welcome sex workers, and encourage women to claim the image of God in their lives.

*How important are power and possessions to you?
How important is it to you to do things your way?*

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We all want to spend time with those who are important and can make a difference. Being with those on the margins is less attractive. How easy do you find it to spend time with the people Jesus spent time with, rather than the important or popular ones?

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Third temptation: ‘If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from the temple and, as the scriptures say, the angels will save you.’ (4:9-10)

To emerge safely from this stunt will be a great launch for his messianic career. This time the temptation is doubly insidious. It has the support of the scriptures. Jesus is challenged to prove that he really is God's Son by using the sacred traditions of the community for his own benefit: Jerusalem (the holy city), the holy temple, and the holy scriptures. If the first temptation was

to provide bread, this one is to provide circuses, to trivialise the pain within the human spirit by providing pointless distractions and entertainment. Let him be a magician, a miracle worker, rather than the suffering servant of God.

But Jesus says that it is not right to put God to the test, to make God prove that God is in control of life.

The passage finishes with the words, 'The devil departed from him until an opportune time.'

The temptations, the battle, is not over. This is only the opening skirmish of the battle, one that will not finish until the cross and resurrection of the one declared to be God's beloved Son.

What is one new insight about Jesus and yourself that came to you from this study?

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Project

As you ponder priorities, loyalties, and temptation, think about the following project. Try reading about it while still sitting in the passage about Jesus' temptations. What strikes you most about this project and what it says to your attempt to follow and be with Jesus?

Relief and Development Project 1
Agriculture and Health Initiatives

Location – East Timor (Timor-Leste)

Partner Church – The Protestant Church in Timor-Leste

The Situation

Timor-Leste is known as one of the poorest countries in Asia with 47% of people in rural areas living below the poverty line. Much of the population suffers from food insecurity as only 30% of the land suitable for agriculture is being farmed. As a result, the economy is not generating adequate employment opportunities for the people, including the 11,000 new graduates each year. Health standards are also very poor compared to other Asian countries.

For example, 44% of children under five are underweight and there is a rising incidence of tuberculosis and AIDS amongst young people.

The Project

This project provides assistance in the form of advice, training, equipment and loans to farmers to produce crops and rear animals. This increases food security and income for farming families. A micro-credit program also exists to provide loans for the establishment of small businesses such as brick-making, furniture making and roadside kiosks. Additionally, UnitingWorld has been providing funding to health initiatives including two medical centres and a full time nurse to implement preventative health care.

Achievements

Farmers groups were established directly benefiting over 150 people and many more in the wet land areas. To ensure sustainability, high quality seed and training in natural fertilizers and insecticides enhanced the program. A dry land livelihood program supplied farmers, those living in areas where

crops don't grow, with livestock and equipment. From this, several goat rearing groups managed to triple their herd, increasing income opportunities. Approximately 120 members shared in the benefits of the micro-finance program. In the area of community health, the Los Palos health clinics carried out approximately 30,000 consultations.

The Future

Several more farming and agriculture groups will be formed to provide food and income for many more families in East Timor. Plans have been developed to improve the facilities at each health clinic, provide nurse education and expand preventative health programs.



BIBLE STUDY