

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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None Are Excused

In what circumstances are you most vulnerable to emotional and spiritual attacks?

Why do you think it is (or isn't) wrong to take the easy way out of difficult situations?

What does it mean to you that Jesus is described as "full of the Holy Spirit," rather than Messiah, Lord, or Son of God when He was led into the wilderness to be tested by Satan?

Luke 4:1-3; 5-7 – ¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ... ⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

I) Whose Story?

We would prefer the story of Job to be unique to him and to avoid contemplating whether God has given the devil authority to touch all that we have, to afflict our bodies and cause us great suffering. It is more comforting to dwell on God's love expressed in Jesus. Turning to the Gospel accounts of these relationships, we confront a sequel to Job's story. Not even God's beloved Son was excused from the devil's purifying work. It seems this is humanity's story.

♦**Highs...**: Our proudest moments are often the most dangerous. Accomplishment is accompanied by praise, success can lead to complacency, recognition can beget pride. Immediately after the Father has declared His pleasure in Jesus, He "was led by the Spirit

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in the wilderness (Luke 4:1).” Newly filled with the Holy Spirit through baptism, the Father wills Jesus to discover what it is to love the Father for His being. This revelation is essential to Jesus’s ability to fulfill His mission. (It is essential to our mission, as well, and we are equally prepared to receive it by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit once we are baptized.)

◆ **...Lows:** Most of us lament emotional and spiritual attacks at times of celebration. It feels like being robbed of something. Even worse is an attack when exhausted. God uses these conditions to reveal the raw response of our hearts. So “for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished (v2).” Directly after the emotional pinnacle of His baptism, Jesus is led away in isolation, starved, and tempted. He is perfectly prepared to learn the desire of His heart.

II) Satan’s Story?

It can feel like the world knows just the right time to attack us and the precise weakness to exploit. That is how our enemy works. Satan desires to use anything he can to incite us to curse God and worship creation. He has no mercy and no love. His singular mission is to cause us to reject God. He has the audacity to try to break Jesus, too. He seizes on this moment of physical and emotional deprivation as his best chance to provoke Jesus to sin.

◆ **Start small:** Here we learn something useful about the devil’s ways. His first attempt to corrupt Jesus is subtle and sophisticated. He uses two effective techniques at once. One is a conditional instruction, and the condition is true. “If you are the Son of God... (v3).” The form of this temptation causes our linear, rational mind to begin the encounter with agreement. Not a casual agreement, a truth we will work to prove. The implied doubt predisposes us to do whatever comes next. The other technique is to disguise the temptation as benign. “...command this stone to become a loaf of bread (v3).” Jesus turns water into wine, so we know miraculous physical transformation is not sinful. Neither is eating bread when hungry, something He defends later in His ministry. The ungodliness of the proposed act is seeking satisfaction from creation at the will of the created, not the Creator. If Jesus can produce His own bread, He bypasses the Father.

◆ **Grand finale:** We also learn that Satan has many weapons with which to assault us. When the subtlety of an insignificant temptation fails, he escalates to grandeur. Instead of a loaf of bread for a hungry man, he offers a view to regal power as he “showed him in an instant

all the kingdoms of the world (v5).” The first temptation is designed to be agreeable and beneath the cares of God. The second is the completion of our believed purpose. *Wow, I can satisfy all my dreams in an instant!* Without the work, the sacrifice, the pain, the suffering. We know we would be avoiding God’s prescribed path to our end, but we arrive there just the same. The flaw here is that the path to our end **is** the purpose because it is the process that builds our being. This temptation attempts to distract us from love of being with love of creation.

III) God’s Story!

We have a cliché for this kind of offer—too good to be true. Satan would be a failed rebel if beneath these temptations was a hollow offer. One or two would succumb, but word would get out and we would sneer at this charlatan. What makes him useful to God is the legitimacy of his offers. He is believable. The misuse of creation can make us temporarily famous, powerful, and wealthy. The denial of creation can cause grief, pain, and shame. We actually must decide between the best of creation and the Creator Himself.

◆ **True authority:** When the devil shows all the world’s kingdoms to Jesus, he does not insinuate an offer. He explicitly tells Jesus, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority... (v6).” He knows such a bold statement is incredible without some basis of authority. He continues, “for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please (v6).” Jesus knows this to be true, later speaking of the devil as the “ruler of this world (John 14:30).” It is apparent from these insights that God’s delegation of authority to Satan, “Very well, all that he has is in your power (Job 1:12),” is applicable to the experience of all humankind. Even the experience of the Son of God while inhabiting humanness.

◆ **Training:** As is Satan’s intent to accuse us and steal God’s glory. He does not offer the world’s kingdoms to Jesus as an act of respect, a gift, or out of love. He is brazen enough to tempt the Son of God to love creation. His intentions are clear. He completes his offer by saying, “If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours (Luke 4:7).” We return to the question that drives Satan: Do we love God for nothing? If our love of God rests upon what He does for us, Satan’s offer is better. We gain as much or more material without the cost of obedience. God uses the devil to prepare His Son for success by mandating Him to choose who and what He will worship. We, too, will be confronted with this choice as training for our mission.