

“Why was Jesus tempted?”

Mark 1: 9-13 NASB

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

¹²Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness. ¹³And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.”

I’ve noticed a predictable life pattern.

One day I might enjoy a rare success.

If so, shortly after, I nearly always encounter a severe test—or a series of trials.

Does that sort of thing occur in your life?

Our text tells of it happening to Jesus.

At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove.

God the Father highly commended Jesus.

But then verse 12 of our text states:

“Immediately the Spirit impelled Him (Jesus) *to*

go out into the wilderness.”

The NIV reads: “At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness...”

Other translations read that “the Spirit drove” Jesus into the wilderness.

It’s not as though God’s Spirit drove Jesus in a fancy vehicle to the desert hot spot Las Vegas.



Picture cowboys driving reluctant cattle.

Translators seem to struggle with the term Mark’s gospel used.

When I identify the term for you, I think you will understand the challenge translators face.

In today’s text, Mark used the same word as in Matthew 12 to describe the casting out of demons.¹

The term literally means to throw out—kind of like an umpire or referee sending a player or coach to the clubhouse.

On the other hand, NT writers sometimes use the term in the sense of *send*.

Yet the contexts of the term suggest the the one being sent leaving a comfort zone in order to fulfill an obligation.²

¹ Matthew 12:

² ἐκβάλλει, See John 10:4 and James 2:25

Think of parents sending children to school on a cold, snowy day. The Holy Spirit sent Jesus on a difficult, but necessary mission.

He needed to face—to encounter all types of human temptations.



All of us struggle with at least one type of testing—drugs, possessiveness, alcohol, sex sin, cowardice, impatience, gambling, anger, etc.

We’ve tried to conquer the temptation.

Our failures shame us.

We try to hide them; don’t like to talk about them.

From time to time, we gain brief victories.

In weak moments we go back.

Our shame increases.

Are we simply helpless in the face of temptation?

“I couldn’t help it. I can resist everything but temptation,” said Oscar Wilde.

Someone else protested: “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.”

As the Shakespeare character Angelo said: “Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, Another thing to fall.”³

Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness was not his only time of testing.

Yet the testing was lengthy and intense.

What were Jesus’ secrets to success?

How did he resist those temptations?

The subject of Jesus’ temptation generally brings two questions to our minds.

1) **If Jesus was the son of God, how could he be tempted?**

Hebrews 2:14 explains: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity. . .”

Hebrews 4: 15 informs us that Jesus was: “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

If Jesus was immune to temptations, he would have been no help to us.

Like all of us, Jesus received life-long testing.

Jesus’ temptations were actually more intense than ours because he was more capable.

The more power and knowledge we have available to us, the greater the temptation.

Imagine how much trouble a guy could cause if he knew for sure whether a woman would accept his advances before he attempted them.

Think of the alleged abuses of power we hear about in the news.

³ William Shakespeare, “Measure for Measure,” Act 2, scene 1.

In WWII, the US Navy created a reserve program for women called Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service—WAVES.

They worked as clerks, recruiters, mechanics, parachute riggers, weather forecasters, etc.

One of those WAVES commented:

“The best advice I ever received came to me from my ensign when I was at WAVE boot camp. She told me, ‘To stay out of trouble, say “yes sir” all day and “No, sir all night.”’”

Elected officials and other prominent people undergo additional temptations.

Jesus resisted extraordinary tempting.



2) The second is a question for every person who deals with temptation.

John 5 tells of an invalid man at the pool of Bethesda.

For 38 years, he’d been unable to walk and he waited by the pool hoping for a cure.

Hadn’t walked since 1986

John 5:6 NIV: “When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’”

What kind of a question is that?

A valid one.

Some sick people prefer their illness to wellness because it means they can control others and don’t have to assume certain responsibilities. That’s why Jesus asked the question.

If we fight a temptation, we must decide whether we really want to stop doing what we do. I recall asking God’s forgiveness for things. But I wasn’t ready to ask him to take the temptation away.

I could only pray, “Lord, help me want to be rid of this thing.”

We have to want to quit.

About ten years after college, I was preaching at the church in Hollywood.

A former college classmate struggled with various temptations and was not winning. He came to me for counseling.

None of my suggested solutions worked.

In frustration, I told him not to come back.

It seemed that not only did he enjoy succumbing, he also got satisfaction from seeing me fail in my attempts to help him.

A Montana Farmer: “Opportunity knocks only once, but temptation bangs on the door for years.”

If we are really serious, Jesus can help us.

Here are some secrets Jesus practiced:



1. Know-memorize Scripture.

Satan tried the tactic of quoting Scripture. He took Jesus to the highest spire on the Jerusalem Temple.

Some estimate it could have equaled 15 stories.

Then came Satan’s Scripture test:

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written, (the Bible says) ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone,’” **Matthew 4:6 NIV.**

The devil accurately quoted from the OT Psalm 91.

But the devil lifted it out of its context.

Satan neglected verses 2 & 9:

“If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’ and you “make the Most High your dwelling . . .”

In other words, God’s promises are good only if we stay faithful to him.⁴

In 70s and 80s, a few Hollywood young, single women tried to justify sleeping around by saying that the Bible teaches love.

If you really love someone, it’s all right to sleep with that person, they claimed. We pointed them to Scripture, which never approves of sex outside of marriage. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”⁵

A wealthy lady and her maid were discussing the maid’s dating life. The lady asked, “Do you just allow any man to kiss you? No, I just allow those I know and those I love.” The lady was shocked by her maid’s answer and said, “But that’s a lot of men. What’s the difference between those you know and those you love? How do you decide? The maid quickly responded, “Well those I know I let, and those I love I help!”⁶

Real love respects the other person and God.

If we don’t know the Scriptures, we’ll not just have temptations; we’ll be buried in them.

During the Iron Curtain days, someone asked a Russian official why Bible study was frowned on in his country. He replied:

“We find that the reading of the book changes people in a way that is dangerous to our state.”

⁴ Satan also left out verse immediately following. . . verse 13, “You will trample the lion and the serpent (the devil).”

⁵ **Hebrews 13:4 NIV**

⁶ From *Loneliness Is a Decision*, p 91

When we read the Scriptures, it’s dangerous to Satan and his ways.

If we’re serious about overcoming temptation, we’ll learn Scripture and live by God’s word.

2. Jesus’ second secret of overcoming temptation: pray fervently.

As someone observed: “Temptation usually comes through a door that has been left open.”

In Luke 22:40, Jesus taught us:

“Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”

When we pray, it’s as though we are making specific plans not to fall into temptation.

We learn the Scriptures.

We pray.

3. Jesus calls us to something better.

We need to spend more time praising God and thinking about our high calling.

“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your minds on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” (Colossians 3:1 NIV).

The world wants to squeeze us into its mold.

We know there is something better and more noble.

I Peter 2:9 NIV: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,

that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

We remain undeserving, but Jesus forgave our sins and calls us to live by his unselfish godly standards.

Yogi Berra’s famous dictum:

“It ain’t over ‘til it’s over” isn’t true in the Lord.

When the Lord forgives, it’s over.

Nikos Kazantzakis years ago wrote a book entitled, LETTERS TO GRECCO. In it an old man lies dying. He is filled with remorse for his sins. At his death he goes trembling before the Lord for judgment. A big bowl of aromatic oil is placed at Jesus' fingertips. Jesus dips a sponge into that bowl- and begins washing this remorseful man clean of his grime and shame. Then Jesus says to him, "Don't bother me with that stuff anymore. Go over and play."⁷

May we all find pure joy in the Lord and live Christ-like for him!

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com



Yogi Berra

⁷ Brennan Manning, *LION AND LAMB*, Old Tappan, New Jersey: Chosen Books, 1986.