

# Jesus in the Desert – Resisting Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

## Opening Activity

Would you rather: Bible edition

*Leader Says: For our opening activity, we are playing a version of would you rather with situations from the Bible. How this is going to work is we'll give you two options. You have five seconds to find someone and share your answer with them. Then when another 'would you rather' is read, you have to find someone new to share your answer with.*

## Would you Rather Options

Would you rather:

- Eat a diet only consisting of mana and quail or eat a diet of locusts and honey
- Wander the desert for 40 days or be stuck in the belly of a fish for 3 days
- Have the name Nebuchadnezzar or Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz
- Have a donkey talk to you or have God talk to you via burning bush
- Be able to name all animals or name all plants
- Live in a stable or live in a cave
- Walk on water or part the Red Sea
- Be a shepherd who visited Jesus in the stable or be one of the first people Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection

## Introduction

*Leader will say, Picture this. You're wandering through the desert. You've been there for 40 days. You haven't eaten. Someone appears and tells you to turn rocks into bread. Then they tell you to throw yourself off a building and say if you do, the angels will save you. Then after that, they tell you to bow down because, if you agree, you will have all the power in the world, and you won't answer to anyone.*

*Temptation is one of the oldest things known to mankind. With origins first referenced in Genesis 2 when Eve ate the fruit from the one tree that God told them to stay away from, it gave birth to original sin. Fast forward hundreds of years and we have the temptation of Jesus in the desert.*

## Bible Exploration

To give some biblical context for this moment, this story takes place right after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist which was the official start of his public ministry. Jesus enters a time of isolation...to be alone, to fast, to pray. Here we see the first of many times in the New Testament that Jesus would take some time away from everyone and just "be". Since this is one of those stories that you may have only heard about but may never have read, we're going to break down the story of Jesus in the desert into the three sections: The first, second, and third temptation.

Read Matthew 4:1-4

Jesus enters the desert to fast for 40 days. Think about that for a little bit. We are humans can barely go a few hours without eating, let alone 40 Days. In this passage, we see the first temptation; the devil shows up and tells Jesus to turn the rocks into bread. Jesus takes this temptation and raises him a quote from the Bible: "Men shall not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the Word of God". Jesus was tempted. But Jesus resisted. Let's look at look at the second temptation.

Read Matthew 4:5-8

The devil brings Jesus to the top of the temple where he instructs Jesus to throw himself off the roof because the angels would protect him. Jesus simply replies, "You should not put the Lord your God to the test." The devil tempts Jesus by asking him to throw himself off the top of the temple, God could immediately save Jesus, but it would be a sin to put God to the test. We know our God is all powerful, but Jesus points out we are to trust and not test God's power. We can look at so many of Jesus' interactions with people-religious leaders, pharisees, etc. and see that he sees what is happening and always knows the perfect way to respond. For the second time, Jesus is tempted. But Jesus resists. Now let's look at the third and final temptation.

Read Matthew 4:8-11

The devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of all the words and says that this could all be his if Jesus just bows down and worships the devil. For the third time, Jesus' refusal comes straight from Scripture and he says, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." With that final refusal, Jesus sends the devil away and the angels show up to serve Jesus. Jesus was tempted. But Jesus resisted.

### Application

*Leader says:* Looking at this account of Jesus in the desert, we know Jesus was tempted just as we are everyday by the devil, the world and our sinful nature. With every temptation, Jesus resisted using God's Word.

Read Hebrews 4:15-16

We know that Jesus understands temptation. He experienced every kind that we do. Yet, Jesus was perfect, and we are not. There can often be seasons of our lives where the temptation feels endless. Those seasons where it feels so easy to give into that one thing...that one thing we think will make people love us. That one thing that we think will put us ahead. That one thing that we think will give us everything we need. But the thing is that these temptations, they never help us, they never benefit us. Temptations only put an even bigger wedge between us and God.

- What are some ways we are tempted by our sinful nature, the world and the devil in our lives?

Are we able to perfectly resist every temptation thrown our way just like Jesus? Of course not. We are naturally sinful people, desperately in need of God's grace through Jesus' death on the cross. But what we're able to do is be open and honest with God about each temptation we're facing because our God promises to take the weight of all we're facing...the good, the bad, and the ugly and carry it with ease. Our God promises to forgive and to love.

Jesus was tempted and was without sin. Because of this, we can be confident to draw near to God through grace in Jesus. In a little bit, we're going to spend time diving deeper into these passages but know that no matter what temptation is hanging over your head, God sees you, he loves you, and through him you have the strength to resist.

Let's break off into small groups to dive deeper into this story and in about 15 minutes (*or whatever time frame works best for you*) we'll come back together for our closing activity

### Small Group Discussion

1. What sticks out to you about this account from Matthew?
2. Read this story in the different gospels: Mark 1:9-12, Luke 4:1-13. Like all gospels, each author tells the story slightly differently. What are some of the differences you notice? What are some of the similarities?
3. Jesus uses God's Word to resist temptation. Through the Holy Spirit, how can knowing and reading God's Word help us resist temptation?
4. Why do you think it's so easy of us to be tempted? How is that tied to why we include confession and absolution in worship each week? Where can we go when we fall to temptation?
5. How can God empower you to repent and overcome the temptations you face?
6. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. What does this verse tell us about God? about ourselves?
7. Share highs and lows and pray together as a small group

### Closing Activity

*Leader Says:* We're going to end our time together the same way: reflection and prayer. This may seem uncomfortable but it's important to find new ways to deepen our understanding of God and see him more clearly. Up on the screen (*or Flipchart paper or on the whiteboard...really whatever you have will work*) are three questions:

1. What does this story reveal about God?
2. What does this story reveal about me?
3. How does this story prompt me to pray?

The third question may be difficult to answer right away. But it's an important one. Looking at this story of temptation and god's faithfulness, how does that guide our prayers? (*It's important to remember that we can come to God no matter what and in any manner...we can talk to God just like we talk to the trusted adult in our lives*) So let's take five minutes (*or longer, if need be...feel free to adjust this time as the weeks go on*) and think through/journal these questions. Then after the time is up, we'll close in prayer.

*After reflection time*, as you head into this week, whatever it may look like, know that our God goes with you and through Him, you are strong. Let's pray:

Dear God,

We thank you for your word. We thank you for how you promise to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. As we head into this week, give us the strength to resist temptation and when we fail, remind us that you forgive us and you love us.

In Your name we pray,

Amen