

The Way, Week 1**THE JOURNEY BEGINS****Matthew 4:1-11**

⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

--Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV

Before we start, please think about *a temptation that you are dealing with RIGHT NOW.* (I'll give you a moment to do that.)

In Matthew 4, we learn three things about the nature of temptation.

TEMPTATION IS...

1- A shortcut

² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” –*Matthew 4:2-3 NRSV*

Now, there’s nothing wrong with bread – but Jesus said NO to that temptation because he knew it was a cheap shortcut. He knew that even though he could get *lots of followers fast* by turning stones into bread, this was not the way to do it.

Jesus knew that shortcuts don’t take you where you really want to go. Have you ever been in the car with somebody who says, “Let’s turn right here, I know a shortcut!” And then thirty minutes later you’re completely lost, and you wish you’d stayed on the right road?

Well, as we walk the “Road to Jerusalem” (the road to fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives), we’re going to see all kinds of shortcuts that we THINK might get us where we want to go.

For example:

- You want to have some nice furniture for your house
 - o Temptation says don’t work and save – that takes too long – just whip out your credit card and go into debt!
- You’re angry, upset, or stressed out, and you want to feel good
 - o Temptation says don’t actually deal with what’s bothering you – No, just take a pill, or pour a drink, or smoke something, or eat a big chocolate Sundae
- You want to feel loved
 - o Temptation says don’t take the time to build a relationship – No, just go for the one-night stand – or get on the internet and look at pictures
- You’re struggling in your marriage
 - o Temptation says don’t take time to work on the marriage—just have an affair
- You want to feel respected
 - o Temptation says don’t build a life of character and integrity – No, just show, drop names, power up on the ones below, and suck up the ones above you

Temptation is a shortcut. It looks like a quick way to get where you're going. But in the end it just gets you lost.

TEMPTATION IS...

2- Deceitful and tricky

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up...'"

--Matthew 4:3-4a

Notice that the devil quotes Scripture! But he's taking it out of context and twisting it for his own purposes.

And that's what temptation does – it takes something that's true and twists it just enough to trick you into going the wrong way!

For example:

- Maybe you're tempted to overeat. Temptation says, "Well, you gotta eat!" And that's true – but you don't have to OVER-eat.
- Maybe you're tempted to pad your expense report, or cheat on your taxes. Temptation says, "Well, it's not like you're robbing a bank." And that's true – but it's still wrong.
- Maybe you're tempted to go online and look at pornography. Temptation says, "The human body is beautiful!" And that's true—but God did not create the human body to be exploited.
- Maybe you're an alcoholic and you're tempted to have a drink. Temptation says, "One little drink is not all that bad." And that might be true for some people – but it's not true for YOU.

Temptation is TRICKY! And that's why you and I need some traveling companions who love us enough to tell us when we're being deceived.

TEMPTATION IS...

3- A loyalty test

“All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

--Matthew 4:9

And now we see what the tempter is really after. This is a test of Jesus' loyalty. Will Jesus stay true to his Father in heaven? Or will Jesus come over to the dark side? It's a loyalty test!

And here's the shocking truth, my brothers and sisters:

Every time you and I face temptation, our loyalty to God is being tested.

The question being raised is, “Are you serious about going to Jerusalem, or not?”

(Again, Jerusalem represents God's purpose for our lives. It's becoming who God wants us to be. Do you want to get there, or not?)

Now, with that sobering thought in mind, let's talk about

How to deal with Temptation:

1- Take the Long View

Nothing of real value happens fast:

- Real relationships take time
- Getting in shape takes time
- Saving money so you can buy without debt takes time
- Building character and integrity takes time
- Overcoming addiction takes time

So when temptation comes along, focus your mind on those long-term goals and think about how they're going to be so much better than the momentary gratification that's right in front of you.

2- Study the Scriptures

When the devil comes with a temptation, what is the first thing Jesus says?

“It is written”

Jesus knew the Scriptures. Jesus used Scripture like a sword to fight off temptation. (That’s why it’s called the Sword of the Spirit). So we need to study the Scriptures.

BUT LISTEN: You need to *really study* the Scripture. You need to learn the *whole story* of Scripture. You need to learn what the Scriptures mean in their *original context*. You need to study the Scriptures in community with the church, so you don’t go off on weird tangents. You need to get into a *serious* Bible study like *Disciple Bible Study*.

3-Get help

The Road to Jerusalem is hard – you need traveling companions. You need somebody who will support you when you’re struggling with temptation. You need somebody who will hold you accountable; who will help you take the long view.

That might take the form of a support group, or a small group Bible study. It might be a friend that you can be really honest with. It might be a Christian Counselor. It might be a 12-step group, like Alcoholics Anonymous, or Emotions Anonymous, or Overeaters Anonymous.

LISTEN: If you are seriously struggling with temptation,

Do not try to defeat it alone!

You can’t! So don’t try. GET HELP.

Now think back to that specific temptation that YOU are struggling with.

- Remember I told you that it’s a short cut – it’s not going to get you where you want to go
- And I told you that it’s deceitful and tricky – don’t let it fool you
- And remember that temptation is a loyalty test – you’ve got to take this seriously

And I told you three ways to deal with temptation, and I’d like you to think about which of these you need to do:

1. Take the Long View
2. Study the Scriptures
3. Get help

Which of those is God calling you to do?