The Way of Testing (Luke 4:1–13)

Introduction: Last week we started this new series, *On the Way with Jesus: A Lenten Journey Through Luke*. In Luke, Jesus is constantly on the way toward Jerusalem, the destination of his death on the cross. This morning we will look at the topic, The Way of Testing (Luke 4:1–13).

In Lk. 4:1-13 we read that Satan tempted Jesus and the three temptations echo Adam & Eve in the garden as well as the testing of the Israelites in the wilderness.

Temptation #1 – Turning Stones into Bread (4:1-4)

In refusing to turn stones into bread, Jesus shows that he will submit to His Father in heaven and trust in His timely provision, instead of using God to get what he wants, when he wants, and how he wants it – now.

Temptation #2 – Glory and Authority (4:5-8)

In refusing to bow and worship Satan, Jesus turns down an easy power grab and commanding influence over nations and relies on the Spirit's power, instead of committing idolatry and compromising His mission with a crown without the cross.

Temptation #3 – Testing God (4:9-12)

In refusing to perform a spectacular diving off the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus is content with who He is and commits to stay the course, instead of showing off, attracting attention, and demanding God to validate His identity and significance.

Before we go any further I want to underline this often neglected salient point underlying this story:

Our full humanity and our freedom to re-imaging God is tested moment-by-moment.

This passage here follows immediately after Jesus' family tree reaching back to Adam (Lk. 3:25-38 vs. Abraham in Matt. 1:2-17).

Luke underlines God's purpose for humanity in the biblical story of creation, i.e., Jesus the full human (the second Adam) has succeeded what the first Adam failed – Jesus is the image bearer who lives out his full humanity by exercising His freedom in doing right by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

[T]he pressing question now is not "Who is Jesus?" or "How can we be saved?". It is instead, "***What is a human being?***"[1]

Jesus models how a complete human should act when confronting who has to face anti-God powers; He is our guide for discovering what it means to be a complete human being.

His encounter with Satan in the wilderness is a time of testing initiated by God and models how Image-bearer embodies a purpose-driven life.[2]

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[1] Iain Provan, *Cuckoos in Our Nest: Truth and Lies about Being Human,* p. 2. *Emphasis ours*.

[2] "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit … was led by the Spirit in ***the wilderness***, where he was ***tempted***" (**πειράζω** - test one's faith, virtue, character, by enticement), see https://biblehub.com/greek/3985.htm

Every human desires a smooth journey, an easy and comfortable walk in the park. However we must also consider that without trial or struggle might not be a blessing but a sign of complacency or compromise, diminishing our true humanity, and living less than the human being we are created to be.

Mark McCrindle, a social analyst, has recently identified one of five 2026 Trends: as society becomes more sceptical of traditional institutions, be it government, media, or large companies, people are seeking genuine relatable connection and authentic human elements.[3]

> ***To be formed and shaped by the Incarnate: That is what it means to be truly human*** … Real human beings are allowed in ***freedom*** to be the creatures of their creator. Being formed in the image of the Incarnate means being permitted ***to be the human being one really is*** … God loves real human beings. God became a real human being.[4]

Like what we see here at the outset of Jesus' ministry, if or whenever we embark in a journey of faith with Jesus, we should expect Satan to turn up the heat, put out all the stops, attempting to derailing us – by hook or by crook!

Gleaning from Jesus' encounter with Satan in the desert, I would like to suggest THREE lifelong practices for overcoming temptations as we follow Jesus on the way.

[3] https://mccrindle.com.au/article/trends-of-2026/
[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditations on the Cross. Emphasis ours.*

Gain victory in our private world so we can re-image God in public square.

Lk. 4 is the pivotal moment in Jesus' life – a transitioning point from His private life to His public ministry, with His mission statement clearly stated (4:16-21; cf. Is. 61:1ff.).

Then Jesus, ***full*** of the Holy Spirit … He was ***led*** by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry. (Lk. 4:1-2 NLT)

"Full" - portrays something brought to its intended capacity; the word underscores completeness: nothing lacking, nothing partial.[5]

"Led" – being aware of, held attentive to, guided by, and following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Luke's description of the "silent years" of Jesus can be considered as evidence of His intimate relationship with His heavenly Father and strong devotion to bless others:

Jesus grew in ***wisdom*** and in ***stature*** and in ***favour with God and all the people***. (Lk. 2:52)

We see Jesus here as one Spirit-filled human who reveals His faith and commitment since childhood and affirmed by His Heavenly Father in His baptism (Lk. 3:21-22).[6]

[5] https://biblehub.com/greek/4134.htm
[6] See also Lk. 10:21

Trials and testing are not signs of God's displeasure but the arena in which spiritual warfare is a constant on this side of eternity.

Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, '***People do not live by bread alone.***'" (Lk. 4:3-4 NLT)

Jesus' life is saturated by the Holy Spirit, fluent with God's word, and conscious of His life purpose.[7] This wilderness experience is a continuous "training ground" designed to strengthen His capacity for the ministry that follows.

Jesus was in touch, in tune, in line, and in love with the Holy Spirit all along!

A Spirit-led life doesn't exclude trial and testing - What is most important is trusting in the goodness of God and His timely provision, not instant satisfaction or gratification. He showed us that, In a world of 24/7 digital instant connectivity and impulsive reaction – an easy trap of quick fix equivalent to turning stones into bread – it's better to learn the patience required to sit with one's needs or circumstances and process them in a Spirit-guided (and scripture-grounded) way and to rely on God than to demand instant satisfaction.

Victory over one temptation doesn't make it easier for the next but preparing for greater effectiveness in the next round.

[7] Cf. Lk. 2:41ff.

Exercise our "God-given power & authority" by remaining faithful to God; wear a crown of thorns to lift others up.

Jesus' status, kingdom authority and power is affirmed and acknowledged by God at His baptism; the issue now is, "How is Jesus going to use it? Will Jesus misuse or abuse it under tempting circumstances?"

Again, the first son of God, Adam, failed; the second Adam, the Son of God succeeded.

Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. "***I will give you*** the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them," the devil said, "because they are ***mine to give*** to anyone I please. ***I will give it all*** to you if you will ***worship me***. Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say, '***You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him***.'" (Lk. 4:5-8 NLT)

The arrow of Satan's temptation is aimed at human desire to determine and to design our own destiny, to be in total control.

It is the pursuit for a designer solar system in which self-importance is expressed in subjecting everything and everybody with power and might, brute force and coercion.

If Jesus has taken the offer He would have forfeited God's world restoring purpose, His identity, and His mission for a feel-good moment and, like Adam & Eve, succumbed to a selfish and anti-god ambition.

But by rejecting Satan's offer, Jesus in effect demonstrates self-control and faithfulness – fruit of the Spirit – for He knows His mission is to serve and not to be served.

He lives with the equilibrium of contentment and godliness, trusting in what is His Heavenly Father to give in His time instead of what He can grab.

He gains by giving up his selfish ambitions, giving away his power and authority, giving out grace and acceptance, giving in to His Father's will, giving to perfect obedience, giving His all for humanity's gain![8]

> [T]he humble person is open to God's will being the best possible future … Humility is essential to keeping our hands off the scales and remaining open to the heart of God."
>
> Dallas Willard[9]

Likewise, we would lose our "God-given authority and power" when we adopt a god-substitute of command and control for momentary self-aggrandizement. For in doing so we sacrifice our God-given freedom to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our mind, and our neighbours as ourselves (cf. Lk. 10:27) - thus we forfeit our participation in and our contribution to kingdom advance.

In the workplace or serving in a church, this looks like micromanaging, manipulating outcomes, or steamrolling colleagues to get our own way.

[8] Cf. Phil. 2:5-11.

[9] Dallas Willard, Hearing God Through the Year, p. 48.

At home, it can look like parents or grandparents using guilt or financial leverage to control the life choices of our children/grandchildren. It is the refusal to give up self-serving desires/ambitions and instead choose to lead by giving grace and empowering others.

In short, don't by pass God – be patient with His ways - use our freedom and power to do what is right, at the right time, and in the right way.

Remember: It's not about us - God is not our magic wand to produce impressive show to validate our significance or to "wow" people.

As the "Son of God," like Israel, the king, and other God chosen, angelic agents in OT,[10] Jesus is acknowledged to be someone who has an intimate relationship with God and given power and authority to serve the people as God's representative, reflecting His character and fulfilling His purposes as the leader-shepherd of His people.

Since Satan can't put Jesus under his spells, he twists God's words (Ps. 91:11-12) and theologizes with evil intent to manipulate Jesus to prove God's promise of protection over the anointed King, the chosen Son of God.

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "***<u>If you are the Son of God, jump off!</u>*** For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to ***<u>protect and guard</u>*** you. And they will ***<u>hold you up</u>*** with their

[10] Cf. Ex. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1; 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7; Job 1:6, 38:7.

hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, '***You must not test the Lord your God.***'" (Lk. 4:9-12NLT)

But Jesus knows the heart of His Father and interprets Scripture in light of God's character, His will, His plan and purpose of redemption.

To test God means demanding God to validate Himself through miracles, even after ample evidence of His power has already been given.[11]

He understands that claiming a promise while acting in disobedience is actually "testing" God, not trusting Him.

Unlike the Israelites in the wilderness who demanded miraculous signs from God, Jesus affirms that faith trusts God's character without needing a spectacular, coerced display.

Here is the critical question we must ask:

Are we using circumstances to define God or letting God to define our circumstances?

Jesus refuses to be persuaded by Satan's distorted truth by citing an overriding principle from Deut. 6:16: God's people must not put God to the test. Honouring God is more important than impressing others.[12]

[11] Deut 6:16 alludes to the incident at Massah (Exodus 17:1-7), where the Israelites complained and doubted God's presence, demanding proof of His care.

[12] Ed Vasicek, "Dueling Midrash: Satan vs. Jesus in the Temptation in the Wilderness (Part 2)

Jesus refuses to misuse God (and Scripture) as narcissistic milk and egocentric honey for self-interest, spectacle, or power.

Jesus refused to do a spectacular stunt just to get attention or to validate His significance or identity as the Son of God; He doesn't need to do something impressive or to be admired as a super-hero.

Beware of the trap of measuring our identity by our follower count or the number of likes on a post which is a highly filtered version of our life online and panting for people positive responses to validate your significance, rather than finding quiet confidence in who you are offline.

If we become "sign-seekers," trying to "wow" people or attract attention or admiration, we are actually attempting to manipulate God to act on our agenda.

But it's not about us - true faith shows itself in trust and obedience; it doesn't force God's hands and demand self-serving proofs, even in the absence of a spectacular miracle, impressive success or wins, or adoring crowds.

Conclusion: Like the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promise land, the wilderness is the place of testing that reveals the condition of one's heart/faith and character – a divine "curriculum" for strengthening one's faith muscles as we journey with Jesus on the way.

"https://sharperiron.org/article/dueling-midrash-satan-vs-jesus-temptation-wilderness-part-2#:~:text=Why%20would%20Jesus%20care%20whether,1