



#2 The First Battle | Pastor Joe Wittwer | June 21, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Last week we read the story of Jesus' baptism, which was the moment He officially inaugurated His mission as the Messiah. This week we look at what happened next to our leader. **Mark 1:12-13**: "At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him." After every Big Moment comes a test. The Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness, literally compelling Him to go. The word "tempted" translates a Greek word that means "to test someone to see what kind of person he is." God tests us to approve us, while the devil tempts us to make us sin or fail. So what can we learn from Jesus' test in the wilderness? Here are two things:

1. Follow the leader into the desert.

After His baptism, Jesus disappeared into the desert for 40 days. Jesus knew He would be tempted during His 40 days, but He also knew that during that time He would be alone with God. Scripture reveals that Jesus often went into solitude to spend time with God. **Mark 1:35**: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." **Mark 6:31**: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" **Luke 5:16**: "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Being alone with God allows time to pray and fast away from any distractions. We need to follow the leader into the desert, in Greek, *eremos*, a solitary place. Even just 40 *minutes* each day, rather than 40 *days*, can bring us into a whole new level of companionship with God. We would be able to experience tremendous growth and understanding. So follow the Leader into quiet times with God.

2. Follow the leader into the battle.

While Jesus was in the desert, the devil tempted Him. Jesus was locked in a mortal battle. (Read **Matthew 4:1-11**.) Matthew provides three examples of how Jesus was tempted many times over the course of those 40 days. Jesus had to protect Himself from falling to Satan's ways. And the devil knew just how to tailor those temptations for Jesus. In the same way, Satan knows how to best tempt each of us. So like Jesus, remember...

a. **You are not alone.** Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted. He went through the same things we all do. And God gives us this promise in **1 Corinthians 10:13**: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." One reason the Spirit compelled Jesus to go to the desert to be tempted was so that Jesus could in turn help us. Jesus fought that battle for 40 days so that He could help you fight yours. **Hebrews 4:15-16**: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to endure. He has experienced the same things as Christ, and He will make a way of escape—just turn to Him. So how do we turn to Him?

b. Use God's word to resist. Jesus responded to the devil by quoting Scripture. Satan threw a temptation toward Jesus, and Jesus responded with truth from the Bible. **Psalm 119:11** says, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* This is what Jesus did, and it is what we must do to resist the devil's ways. We can protect ourselves with the word. **Ephesians 6:17** encourages, *"Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* Jesus had verses in mind that helped Him resist each temptation. Likewise, find specific verses that address your greatest temptations.

For instance, if you struggle with sexual temptation or pornography, you might want to memorize **Matthew 5:27-28**: (It is written) *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* If you are tempted by greed, by consumerism, by the constant desire for more, more, more, you might want to memorize **Luke 12:15**: (It is written) *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* If you are tempted to lose your cool, to get angry and threaten people, you might want to memorize **Ephesians 4:31-32**: (It is written) *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* If you are simply tempted to be your own selfish pig and think only of yourself, you might want to memorize **Philippians 2:3-5**: (It is written) *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."* You get the idea. Identify your weaknesses (because the devil has), and learn what God's word says about them. Then resist temptation with the sword of the Spirit. It is written!

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What strikes you as interesting or telling about Jesus' experiences during His 40 days in the wilderness? How did these experiences prepare Him for His ministry and leadership?
2. Just as it was for Jesus, it is common for us to experience a "test" after a Big Moment, especially one that affects our relationship with God and others. When have you recently or memorably encountered this phenomenon?
3. What kind of experiences have "tested" you—approved you as of a follower of Christ—since you became a Christian? What are the positive aspects of this kind of "temptation" or testing, even when we sometimes fail? (Remember that the disciples failed a few of these!)
4. What are one or two key temptations Satan knows to hit *you* with individually, and what are some verses you already use or the group can suggest you use for countering them?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- As Joe challenged, memorize **1 Corinthians 10:13** (above in 2.a.) or meditate on it this week if you have already done so.
- In your PBJ time, identify your weaknesses and learn what God's word says about them. Then resist temptation with God's sword of the Spirit. It is written!
- Take the 40/40 Challenge! (40 minutes a day for 40 days of PBJ time.) As Jesus did, find an *eremos* (solitary place) this week to start this practice for 40 days. Once you've met the challenge, you'll likely want to stick with it for life!

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ to give us an example to follow.
- Ask God to help you expose your thoughts to Him so He can reveal what's tempting you. Ask Him to help you overcome any denial of what the devil already knows full well!
- Pray that God would help you be faithful in taking up the 40/40 Challenge, and that He would help His word reside in and on your mind and heart.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.