



CROSS TRAINING: What price would you pay to get a (real) life?

Week One:
Hardwiring Obedience
Luke 4:1-13

Preparing for the Text

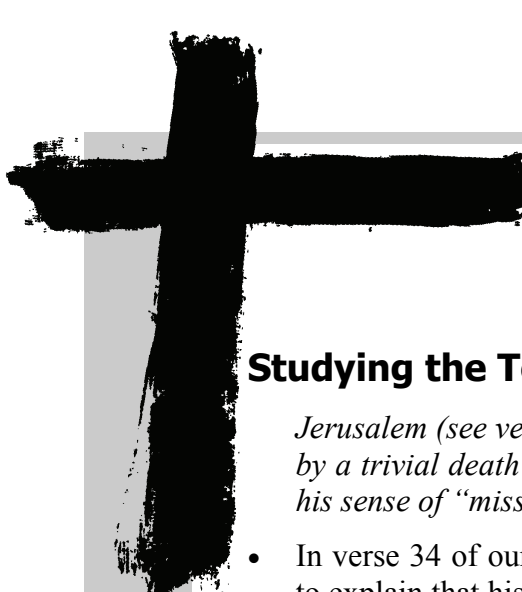
As we begin our Lenten all-church Bible study that will follow Jesus as he journeys toward a Roman cross just outside Jerusalem, pause for a few minutes to let your class or small group “decompress” from other cares and responsibilities by discussing one or more of the following “ice breaker” questions:

- Remembering your life experience between the ages of 6 and 10, who would you have defined as the “most *holy* person you knew” at that time, and what do you remember them saying or doing that causes you to identify them in this way?
- As you reflect upon the past week, what is the very first thing that comes to mind when you think of a seemingly silly or stupid instance of “temptation” that nevertheless became a challenge for you, at least momentarily?
- Thinking back on some of your own “life lessons” regarding strategies for overcoming temptation, what was the best counsel or assistance that you received from others who were trying to help you respond appropriately to those moments of challenge?

Studying the Text:

After reading Luke 4:1-13 with your group, spend time responding to these and other discussion questions that arise as you reflect upon the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness by the devil immediately following his baptism (see Luke 3:21-22).

- Given that the gospel storyteller has previously affirmed the identity of Jesus as God’s beloved Son in the account of his baptism, we should probably recognize that this narrative of temptation signals a point of spiritual significance for all of us. Luke 4:1 clearly states that Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit” and “led by the [Holy] Spirit,” and yet neither the affirmation of God the Father nor the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit serves to make Jesus immune from the devil’s temptations in this passage. In other words, rather than viewing our own moments of temptation as telltale indications of spiritual weakness, this text may perhaps be telling us that the struggle to act and think obediently in response to significant questions of conscience reflect a capacity for spiritual depth and strength of character. Note as well the strategic timing of the devil’s challenge to Jesus. Before Jesus has preached any sermons, healed any sick, cast out any demons or called any disciples to follow him, the devil cleverly arrives in the wilderness to raise his objections both to Jesus’ own sense of identity (“*If you are the Son of God...*”) and vocation (by turning



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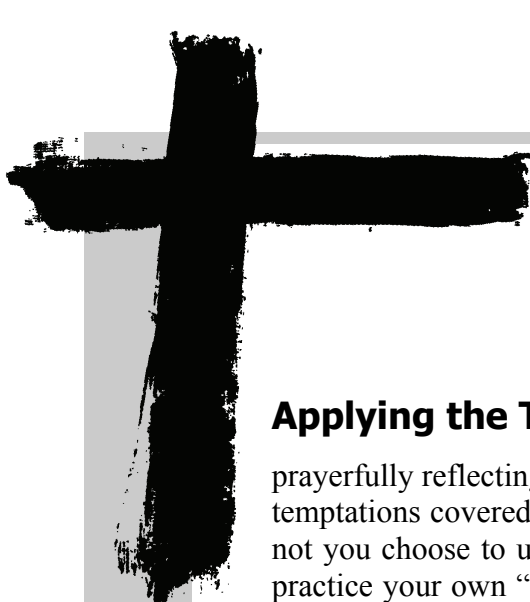
Studying the Text (continued):

stones into bread, bowing to worship the devil, or by putting angelic protection to the test). *How does this sense of the spiritual strength of Jesus and the strategic timing of the devil's temptations serve to either confirm or change the way you think of temptation in your own life at present? In other words, does this passage help you see and understand your own times of temptation and testing in a new light?*

- After centuries of prayerful reflection on these wilderness temptations of Jesus, the Christian tradition has come to recognize that the devil is asking Jesus to act in ways contrary to his own “script” for living as the beloved Son of God. In fact, we will later see in the Gospels that Jesus does feed hungry people by miraculous means, even though he refuses to turn stones into bread in this passage (see Luke 9:10-17). We can also suggest by the testimony of scripture that the vindicated authority of Jesus will be acknowledged on that day when “every knee will bow and every tongue confess” that he is Lord (see Philippians 2:5-11). And it may be just as clear that as he makes his way toward the suffering and sacrificial death required by his humiliating crucifixion in Jerusalem, Jesus nevertheless refuses to put his Father to the test by choosing the painless safety and protection that might be provided by God’s angels (see Luke 22:39-53). *With this in mind, where does Jesus find a proper “script” for his own life as an obedient and beloved firstborn child of God, and what does this suggest to you as you consider your own sense of identity and responsibility as a son or daughter of God? What resources from this story can assist you in resisting the pressures and seductions of so many alternate voices seeking to define your life and command your attention and behavior?*
- As we close our time of study in this passage, look again at the three temptations posed by the devil. The first is focused on providing food to meet the challenge of real hunger. The second seeks to provide political power at the cost of false worship or idolatrous commitments. And the third suggests that a convincing demonstration of divine protection and favor should be provided on demand to resolve any moments of self-doubt and insecurity. *In what ways are you still familiar with one or more of these temptations in your own life? In other words, do you ever find yourself wanting God to satisfy your material needs, give you power or authority to use in your dealings with others, or prove to you that God has promised to be with you to bless and protect you at all times? And if so, how should you respond to such temptations given what Jesus has now shown you in this story?*

Applying the Text:

By now it will probably be obvious to your group that the wilderness temptations of Jesus contribute a crucially strategic episode in the formation of the Lord’s unique sense of Messianic identity and vocation. Before he can *begin* his public ministry, he *defines* his task and approach by referring repeatedly back to the “script” of Deuteronomy in his responses to the devil who tempts him. You may perhaps wish to adopt something of this same strategy in choosing to commit yourself to a new pattern of scriptural memorization and prayer during the seven week season of Lent. For centuries, Christians have found value in memorizing this passage of scripture (Luke 4:1-13),



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Applying the Text (continued):

prayerfully reflecting on the account of Jesus and his victory over the devil knowing that the three temptations covered in this narrative continue to be perennial concerns for our lives. Whether or not you choose to utilize this text in that way, give consideration to using this Lenten season to practice your own “script” for these times of temptation by committing scripture to memory and daily reflection in your time of prayer. Daily practice for these seven weeks of Lent will probably be sufficient to make a new pattern *habitual* for you.

Praying the Text:

Before you close this first session of our Lenten all-church Bible study with your class or small group, allow any who wish to do so to sit in an empty chair at the center of your gathering while all the others “lay on hands” to pray for strength and guidance in responding to times of spiritual temptation and testing. While some may not yet feel comfortable and confident enough to ask for such intercession, be open to the possibility that this story regarding the temptation of Jesus may evoke a desire in some group members to seek prayer support in dealing with pressures they may be facing at present. None should leave a session without knowing that others can and will pray with and for them as they seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus during times of testing or temptation.

Upcoming Cross Training Studies:

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| February 28, Week 2: | <i>Messiah’s Mission Statement</i> —Luke 13:31-35 |
| March 7, Week 3: | <i>Wasting Space and Borrowed Time</i> —Luke 13:1-9 |
| March 14, Week 4: | <i>A Brief History of God</i> —Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 |
| March 21, Week 5: | <i>Gospel Calculus</i> —John 12:1-8 |
| March 28, Week 6: | <i>Downward Nobility</i> —Luke 19:28-40 |