

# Living Word Small Group Study Guide

November 22-28, 2020

Sermon Series: Being Jesus

Week Four: “Jesus @ Home Alone”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

## **Suggested Opening Prayer:**

*Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.*

*Almighty God, as You have given Jesus Christ to be Savior and Lord, grant us now to accept and rejoice in our salvation and in His Lordship. Amen.*

## **Sermon Series Theme:**

Many people like to try to make Christianity out to be a black and white answer to the gray areas of life. But we don’t live in a world that is naturally slanted toward faith. The assumption of the existence of the sacred has taken a hit by years of focus on science and the temporal world. So how do we as Christians live out the sacred in a world that doesn’t just naturally accept that there is anything but the secular? How do we live in a world that may even be antagonistic toward the sacred? How do we live out the sacred in a secular world?

## **This Week’s Sermon Theme:**

Jesus put Himself in the precarious position of being alone in the wilderness. That could be dangerous even today. But what about when you’re home alone on your La-Z-Boy? How safe are you, spiritually speaking, with your TV, laptop, or the thoughts of your own mind? That age-old question is relevant even today, “Who are you when no one’s watching?”

**Sunday Scripture Reading:** Luke 4:1-12 (A group member should read the passage aloud).

## **For Group Discussion:**

### ***What does the text actually SAY?***

*The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.*

Where had Jesus been just prior to the events of this passage? (4:1)

Where did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus to? (4:1)

For how long was Jesus tempted by the devil? (4:2)

What did Jesus eat during this time? (4:2)

What is the devil's first temptation of Jesus? (4:3)

What is Jesus' response to this first temptation? (4:4)

Where does the devil then take Jesus, and what does he show Jesus? (4:5)

What does the devil promise to give Jesus from there? (4:6)

What does the devil say is the cost of this promise? (4:7)

How does Jesus' respond to this second temptation? (4:8)

Where does the devil take Jesus after this, and what does he tell Jesus to do from there? (4:9)

Why does the devil say Jesus should be willing to do this? (4:10-11)

How does Jesus respond to this third temptation? (4:12)

What did the devil do when he had finished these temptations? (4:13)

### ***What questions does the text raise for us?***

*The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.*

We might wonder why the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness in the first place – why was it so necessary?

We might also wonder why Jesus felt it necessary to fast while He was there.

We probably wonder what exactly the devil hoped to accomplish with all these temptations.

Similarly, we might ask if there was any real risk that Jesus might actually yield to these temptations.

We might ask what was wrong with turning a stone into bread, if Jesus was starving.

We probably wonder what the devil meant by saying that the authority and splendor of the world's kingdoms had been given to him – has it really?

We might wonder why Satan is so familiar with Scripture that he quotes it back to Jesus, and why his use of Scripture is, apparently, inappropriate.

Finally, we might wonder what it means when it says the devil left Jesus “until an opportune time” – did Jesus undergo another temptation later?

### **Commentary on the text:**

**The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.**

See also: Mark 1:12; Matthew 4:1-11; John 6:14-15; John 7:1-9; John 12:27-28; Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 4:15; Luke 1:32; Luke 3:22; Luke 3:23-38; Deuteronomy 8:2; Exodus 4:22; Psalm 90:1; Deuteronomy 8:3; Deuteronomy 6:13; Deuteronomy 6:16; Luke 4:16-20

The story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness occurs in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While Mark's version contains no details, only the terse sentence "He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan" (Mark 1:12), Matthew and Luke provide more extensive content of the temptations (see also Matthew 4:1-11). Matthew's version does differ from Luke's in some ways, though, including the order in which the temptations occur. We should also note that whereas the Gospel of John does not include the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, there are references to Jesus being tested or tempted spread throughout his Gospel as well. For example, in John 6:14-15, the people try to make Jesus king forcing Him to make the choice to withdraw; in John 7:1-9, Jesus' brothers want Jesus to put His miracles on display for the world to see in Judea; and in John 12:27-28, as the time of Jesus' crucifixion draws near, Jesus is tempted to pray "Father, save me from this time." Each of these stories shares thematic commonalities with the temptations Jesus faces in the wilderness in Matthew's and Luke's telling of the story. The fact that the story was widely known in early Christian circles is also attested by the reference to it in the book of Hebrews (2:14-18 and 4:15), where it is used to substantiate Jesus' role as the perfect high priest.

The introductory chapters of Luke's Gospel have made very clear Jesus' identity as the Son of God, from the birth narrative (Luke 1:32), to God's pronouncement at His baptism (Luke 3:22), to the genealogy that immediately precedes the temptation narrative (Luke 3:23-38). Now through Jesus' response to these temptations, the reader comes to understand just how Jesus will live out this identity as God's Son. As Son of God, Jesus lives in simple obedience to His Father. The story demonstrates Luke's theme of the cosmic earthly struggle between the Kingdom of God and the forces of evil. Will Jesus, the God-Man, align with God, or with the devil, who is given authority over earthly (human) matters? The challenges the devil issues to Jesus are extraordinarily realistic, and pertinent seductions toward someone with Messianic ambitions in that time and place. When Jesus chooses to be obedient to His Father, and align with God's Kingdom rather than the devil's, it affirms that Jesus is a legitimate minister of God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven."

Of course, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days also recalls the wandering of Israel in the wilderness for forty years after their escape from Egypt. According to Deuteronomy 8:2, "the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." It is important to recognize that these wandering Israelites had been identified as "God's firstborn son" in Exodus 4:22, but that throughout their wanderings they longed for what they remembered as a more pleasurable past or pined for what they hoped would be a more economically secure future. Whereas these wandering Israelites, "God's firstborn son" continually failed the tests laid before them, Jesus, the Son of God, led by the Holy Spirit into the desert, passes every one. Jesus is thereby demonstrated to be the perfect fulfillment of God's expectation for Israel, God's "son."

Turning to the individual temptations themselves, we can see that each one is an invitation for Jesus to seize hold of a particular kind of power. Here, it is also helpful to understand the Greek worldview that was prevalent in Jesus' day, and in the day that Luke's original readers lived in. They recognized three specific categories of vice – love of pleasure, love of possessions, and love of glory. Other

theologians have categorized the temptations as economic, political, and religious. In the first temptation, Jesus is tempted to satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread. To do so would not only yield the personal, sensual pleasure of breaking the fast, but would also involve the grasping of a “magical” power to transform substances – demonstrating the ability to solve the economic problem of world hunger with merely a word. As God’s Son, this power was easily within Jesus’ reach, and was part of the Messianic expectation of the arrival of the “last days.”

Similarly, in the second temptation, Jesus is offered political leadership of the entire world. For the Jews, the hope that the Messiah would wrest political and military control from the occupying Romans was widespread among the people. Jesus is offered exactly that role, possessing, and ruling over all the kingdoms of the world. The devil is, essentially, encouraging Jesus to be the king His fellow Jews want!

The final temptation is religious in nature – convince the people of your identity as the Son of God through miracles and by proving the truth of God’s Scriptural promise to protect the one who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High” (Psalm 90:1). If God commands angels to protect David from “stubbing his foot,” would He not protect His own son when He throws Himself off the highest part of the Temple? Furthermore, is not radical trust in God very close to exactly this kind of “blind leap”? Satan tempts Jesus by asking, essentially, “do you trust God or don’t you?” – getting at the very foundation of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Jesus’ refusal of each of these temptations reveals Jesus as a righteous man worthy of teaching Godly virtue to the people of God. Each refusal is buttressed by a clear biblical teaching straight from the Torah, the authoritative Scriptures for all flavors of Judaism in Jesus’ day. “Man does not live on bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3), “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” (Deuteronomy 6:13), and “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (Deuteronomy 6:16) are foundational commands that will guide the rest of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus clearly rejects the option of a violent, military, and zealous vision of what it means for God’s Kingdom to take root in Israel. Jesus rejects the idea of asserting power over nature just to serve His own appetite. Jesus rejects the idea of asserting power over other human beings for the sake of His own glory. Jesus rejects the idea of crassly interpreting Scripture to even assert power over God to assure His own survival. Rather, the way God will live out His identity as the Son of God not through the grasping of power, but by taking the role of Isaiah’s “suffering servant” – an identity He will claim verbally in Luke’s very next passage, as Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20).

Even though Luke says the devil left Jesus “until an opportune time,” there are no further direct accounts of Jesus being tempted by the devil. However, the devil does reappear, and forcefully, at other places in the narrative. In Luke 22:3, it is Satan who convinces Judas to betray Jesus, and in Luke 22:24-32 it is Satan who instigates an argument among the disciples about who is the greatest. The conflict between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan also takes center stage when Jesus is accused of driving out demons in the name of Satan himself (Beelzebub) in Luke 11:14-28. In fact, throughout Jesus’ ministry, the forces of evil simply change tactics. Knowing that Jesus has withstood the temptations, the devil seeks out other, “more opportune” times, places, and people, to attempt to discredit Jesus and sabotage His mission.

**Final Thoughts for Discussion:**

*The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.*

How do you relate to the ancient categorizations of vice – love of pleasure, love of possessions, and love of glory? Which is most enticing to you?

If you are honest, would you have preferred for Jesus to say “yes” to any of the temptations?

To dive deeper into that last question (in case you answered too soon) ... what if turning stones into bread meant the alleviation of world hunger?

What if giving Jesus political authority over every nation and place meant every nation was a Christian nation?

What if being saved by angels after jumping off the Temple roof had provided the tangible, visible evidence that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, instead of having to accept it on faith?

Why do you think Jesus so readily said “no” to these temptations, even though some good may have come out of them?

What kind of a Messiah do you really want? What kind of a Messiah do we really have?

When do you most readily succumb to temptation? When you are alone or when you are in community with other followers of Christ? What does your answer suggest to you about the need for Christian community?

Who are you when no one’s watching?

**Suggested Closing Prayer:**

*Holy God, we give You thanks that we have a Savior who has experienced the very same temptations we face every day, yet who was without sin. We pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit to help us to be victorious over whatever temptations come our way. We long to be the obedient children modeled for us by Jesus. It is in His name we pray, Amen.*