

Temptations



Call: Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16 : Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” If you say, “The LORD is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Hymn: STF633 My soul finds rest Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGOMfE5TaC8>

My soul finds rest in God alone, STF 633
my rock and my salvation;
a fortress strong against my foes,
and I will not be shaken.
Though lips may bless and hearts may curse,
and lies like arrows pierce me
I'll fix my heart on righteousness,
I'll look to him who hears me.
*Chorus O praise him, hallelujah,
my delight and my reward;
everlasting, never failing,
my Redeemer, my God.*

My soul finds rest in God alone
amid the world's temptations;
when evil seeks to take a hold

I'll cling to my salvation.
Though riches come and riches go,
don't set your heart upon them;
the fields of hope in which I sow
are harvested in heaven.

Chorus

I'll set my gaze on God alone
and trust in him completely;
with every day pour out my soul
and he will prove his mercy.
Though life is but a fleeting breath,
a sigh too brief to measure,
my King has crushed the curse of death
and I am his forever.

Chorus

Aaron Keyes & Stuart Townend © 2007 Thankyou Music Used By Permission. CCLI Licence No. 1085607

Prayer: God immortal, God invisible, far beyond our human thought, we praise you for revealing yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three persons, yet one God. God the Father, you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. In love and grace you sent your Son to be our Saviour. To you be all glory and praise. God the Son, for our salvation you came to this earth and lived a life of love, a life that we can only aspire to. You died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit. To you be all glory and praise. God the Spirit, you come into our lives, transforming, renewing, strengthening, and guiding us into the way of Christ. You call us into the life of faith and gather us into the body of Christ. To you be all glory and praise, now and for ever. AMEN

Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Prayer of Confession: God of our salvation, your Son fasted for forty days in the desert and, when faced with temptation, he triumphed over it. Forgive us Lord, when we ignore your leading, when we favour our own comforts over the needs of others, when we do not learn from your Word, when we do not recognise temptation or give in too easily, when we tune into accusing voices, instead of resting and trusting in your faithful promises. Though Jesus himself was tempted, taunted, and crucified on the Cross, it is through Him that we know our sins are forgiven. AMEN

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: STF661 – Give me the faith Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3aHhmqk8>

Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build thy house again;
thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
and all my simple soul devour.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
into thy blessed hands receive;
and let me live to preach thy word,
and let me to thy glory live;
my every sacred moment spend
in publishing the sinners' friend.

I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone:
to spend, and to be spent, for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
with boundless charity divine:
so shall I all my strength exert,
and love them with a zeal like thine;
and lead them to thy open side,
the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Used By Permission.

Message: Temptations

As we start this period of Lent how do use it? Is it a time of not doing something, or a time of reflection and questioning?

In our reading today we can learn that Lent is more than just not giving in to temptation.

The first thing to say is that temptation is very real, and happens to everyone. Even Jesus faced temptations. Temptation in itself is not wrong, it is a fact of our humanity. It's how we respond to that temptation that is important.

When do we face temptation? We can face it at any time, however it is interesting to note that Jesus faced temptation at a high point in his life. He had just emerged from the waters of the Jordan, having been baptised and affirmed by God as his Chosen Son.

The other "high point" in the bible that is echoed in this passage is when Adam is tempted in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were living in beauty and plenty, everything was perfect, yet they were tempted, and their actions had negative consequences for the whole of mankind, just as Jesus' response to his time of temptation had consequences for us too, but in a gracious and generously merciful way. After Adam we would die, but through Christ we are offered new and eternal life.

We might think we are more likely to face temptation at our "low points," or our weakest moments, but we need to be aware that we can also face temptation when we feel we are in a strong position, and that is perhaps more dangerous.

As always, we can learn from the example of Jesus. He was at the very start of his ministry, God had affirmed him and he was ready to start. The people thought he was the man come to overturn the Roman oppressors, to ride into Jerusalem in a blaze of glory. But that is not Jesus' way. He "retires" to the desert, rather than stride out into action, and he fasts for 40 days. Jesus has now gone from a "high point" to a "low point." He was hungry, he was vulnerable, and the devil takes this opportunity to tempt him.

Why did Jesus go out into the desert? Why did he fast?

Jesus had come to earth in human form, he shared our humanity, he came to fulfil God's purposes here on earth. And as he did at the other end of his ministry, he sought solitude to be with his Father, and to ask questions of his Father, to reflect on what his ministry was to look like.

It's interesting to look at the three temptations and the reasons behind them. They are all part of the questions about what being God's Chosen Son, the Messiah, really means. And as is often the case with temptation, each one has a "reasonable" basis. Jesus was hungry, so turning stones into bread would be helpful. If Jesus was to be sovereign over the world, then why not make it easy to get there? Surely some spectacular event would draw the crowds to him?

However Jesus' response each time demonstrates his single minded devotion to God's will.

Physical needs are important, but loyalty to God is more important.

The path to becoming Lord of all was humble service, not seeking power or status. There was no easy "short cut" for Jesus. He knew he would be Lord of all in time by his ultimate self-sacrifice on the Cross.

Trust in God is not proven by forcing him into sensational rescue. Jesus' power was to be used in bringing healing and wholeness, and restoring life, not in cheap stunts.

How does this all apply to us?

We all face temptations, whether at times of strength and power, when we might be vulnerable to selfishness and greed, or at times of weakness when our vulnerabilities can be exploited.

How do we respond?

The devil may have questioned Jesus' credentials, "if you are the Son of God." It's OK to ask questions, to have doubts, but not to put demands or conditions on God. Turning stones into bread was not so much about satisfying hunger, but about our motives for doing good. We cannot "bribe" people with promises of wealth or material happiness. When we do good for others, what are our motives, to satisfy ourselves or to show Christ through our actions?

We have the tools at our fingertips to help us, and we are not alone. When faced by the devil, Jesus was able to overcome the taunts with scriptural truths. We have the bible to help us overcome whatever temptations come our way. Knowing and obeying God's word, written down for us in the bible, is an effective weapon against temptation. (It's interesting to note that the word of God, represented by the "sword of the spirit, the word of God," is the only offensive weapon mentioned in the armoury of God in Ephesians 6:17.)

The bible will always give us the answers if we act on its meaning, and obey its word. The devil quoted verses from Psalm 91, (used in our Call to worship), but he used them to "bamboozle," to twist their true meaning. Psalm 91 is about God protecting us, not about spectacular displays of rescue. This teaches us to beware of using the bible to promote our own agenda, to simply quote bible verses and not act on their true meaning.

Jesus gives us the "survival tools" against the temptations we do and will face, in this bible passage from Luke. He took "time out," he sought solitude away from distractions, and he fasted. He knew the truths from the scriptures, but so did the devil.

If we are true followers of Christ, there is no easy "short cut," we are not to compromise or to strike a bargain with God. We should need no spectacular display or sensational stunts to know that Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus came to our rescue, he lifted us up from the sins of the world, when he was lifted up onto that Cross. Amen

Hymn: STF 351 – *In Christ alone* Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_063OI38RQ

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied -
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty © 2001 Thankyou Music Used By Permission. CCLI Licence No. 1085607

Intercessions: Response – (*Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***)

Father, knowing our weakness in the face of temptation, we ask for your strength and protection so that, though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we pray for all those who are fighting temptation and finding it difficult to resist. We ask you to help them see clearly, and equip them with all they need to choose what is right. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we pray for your Church as it struggles to steer a straight course true to your calling. We pray for wisdom and courage, honesty and the willingness to be vulnerable. We pray for your Church as it seeks to move forward and outward into our communities to further the Good News that you bring. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we pray for those whose company we enjoy. We pray too for those who irritate us and those whom we annoy. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we stand alongside all those who suffer or who are unwell at this time, all whose lives are in chaos or despair, and all those who live in the dark prison of guilt. We pray for areas of the world where the temptation to fight overshadows the desire for peace. We pray for your reassurance and peace, your understanding and compassion. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we pray for the dying, especially the unnoticed and despised. We pray for those who have gone through death, and now see you face to face, that they may receive your merciful forgiveness and know the joy of living with you for ever. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Father, we thank you for the knowledge that nothing is beyond your forgiveness and no one is beyond the limits of your love. *Lead us not into temptation: **but deliver us from evil***

Merciful Father, accept these, and all our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn: STF645 Will your anchor hold Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6r3h7OhsZxw>

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?
Chorus.

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?
Chorus.

Priscilla Jane Owens (1829-1907) Used By Permission.

Blessing: Creator God, you tell us that you will make a way in the wilderness. Help us to see it, however faint it may be to our human eyes. Guide us through the desert and help us find the oases, so that we may flourish for you. Amen.