

Testing in the Desert [Ben Brown]

Luke 4:1-13

About a month ago, I got to go to an Indiana PacerMs basketball game for free. A buddy of mine was able to come with me and we had a good time. IMve been to their arena several times before and I know my way around the city pretty well.

But as we were getting into the city and closer to Conseco Fieldhouse, my friend directed me down some different streets, he apparently knew his way around too, and had a real good shortcut, that found us parking right behind the stadium in a lot with very cheap parking. In fact we couldMve parked their for free, because for this game there was no attendant on duty and it was basically the honor system. That shortcut worked out extremely well C we saved \$, some walking distance. It was very convenient.

Of course some shortcuts donMt work out so well. The past month IMve had a couple ministry meetings up in Elkhart at 1st Baptist Church. I donMt think weMve taken the same way more than once. When you count going there and coming back, going there and coming back C 4 trips C weMve taken 4 different routes. We havenMt gotten completely lost, but I have wasted some time, back tracking, and guessing what way we should take. When I think back to all the youth group trips, basketball team excursions, and social trips IMve taken, I might be able to go all night with stories of shortcuts gone bad, and you probably could too.

Taking shortcuts when traveling is one thing, except for very extreme cases if it doesnMt work out, you only lose some time, some money for more gas.

Taking shortcuts in other areas of our lives is a whole nother ballgame. Even something as practical as doing maintenance on your car, cut enough corners for enough time, youMll put yourself at risk for repairs or damage later on. LetMs be honest, wherever we might individually work, its very tempting to cut some corners no matter what you do, particularly when you know it wonMt hurt anything. Maybe as this past April 15th rolled around, you might have wanted to massage your tax information a little bit, to give you a more favorable return.

Though we may not be conscious of it at the time, taking shortcuts often involves a spiritual decision. We would do well to see the shortcut for what it really is C a temptation to sin.

When we consider massaging our tax info, we are being tempted ever so subtly to be dishonest, to lie, to profit wrongly. Not to pick on this example too much, because all these temptations to take the quick and easy way, to try a shortcut C they are all sly attempts by our Enemy to

prevent us from trusting God, from depending on the Lord and growing in our faith.

Jesus' example screams at us to depend on God when we face those temptations to compromise and spiritually cut some corners.

His example is crystal clear, that when it comes to spiritual temptation, dependence is the key, and dependence doesn't take shortcuts.

We all no doubt can use some encouragement when it comes to depending on God to deal with temptation whatever our specific struggle is. Let's see how dependence on God can help us, as we learn how dependence doesn't take shortcuts.

This story is set up in **verses 1-2. Read.**

If you've been following Ralph's lessons through this book, you'll remember how Luke is building a case that Jesus is the promised Savior, Messiah. Birth, events surrounding His childhood (when they took Him to the Temple) & God was providing incredible evidence that Jesus was the Messiah.

Even as a youth he was committed to pleasing and following the will of His heavenly Father.

And even in these first 2 verses, we see Jesus devoted to doing what His Father desires. Did you notice that twice it's mentioned that the Spirit was with Jesus, controlling and guiding Him. In fact we can see that dependence on the Lord actually leads Jesus into the desert.

That's an interesting point we ought to take note of & many of us know (in our head) that we need to trust the Lord daily for whatever we're going through, heard it preached a lot from this very pulpit, you've hopefully seen it work in your lives, but there's also the tendency to think, "Oh, I am trusting God in this, why isn't everything working out perfectly?" "Why isn't my life better than it is, I am trusting God!"

Remember, if dependence doesn't take shortcuts, then depending on God will not make life a cakewalk.

Sometimes dependence on God leads us into the desert, figuratively speaking. Sometimes we can be totally right where God wants us, controlled by the Spirit, and life gets harder. Depending on God does not automatically make life a cakewalk.

Jesus is fasting and being tempted. Something about this I hadn't really considered before is that it's very likely Jesus was being tempted the whole 40 days he was out in the wilderness, and as this time comes to an end, Satan pulls out all the stops to try to get Christ to fall. So far at this point in history, Satan has done pretty well for himself, he's been pretty successful at this. Satan had gotten Adam and Eve to give in to temptation, and it's easy to connect this story with the children of Israel wandering in the desert after the Exodus, and they certainly failed to depend on the Lord. So what will happen here?

I guess I might as well give away the ending: Jesus passes the tests with flying colors, does so again BY DEPENDING ON GOD. The focus of this episode turns to 3 different temptations Satan uses to try to get Christ to fail and sin. Jesus is able to resist the urge to take these shortcuts because he's depending on God.

We see in vs. 3-4 that this dependence leads Jesus to avoid the shortcut that might provide what He needs.

Again, he hasn't eaten for 40 days, and the obvious first place Satan tries to get him is with food.

If and when you fast, what happens? Well, you get hungry sure, but unless you preoccupy yourself with something, you'll start to think about food a lot more too. Imagine 40 days of that, and now Satan suggests, hey, why don't you use your powers to provide food for yourself.

Read vs. 3-4.

On the surface, it seems like the devil is challenging Jesus' identity (if you are Π) but I think there's more to it than just that.

If we read between the lines a little bit, we can hear Satan saying, "Come on Jesus, God doesn't want you to starve to death out here, use your powers to meet your need."

It's a shortcut to provide what He needs.

In reality, Satan is tempting Jesus to be independent. Not necessarily questioning if Jesus is the Son, he's tempting Jesus to act selfishly and independently of the Father. Questioning God's care and provision, almost like "help yourself if God's not going to." The act itself wasn't bad, like turning stones into bread, but Satan is trying to get Jesus to take a short cut, use His powers for selfish reasons contrary to what God wanted and independent of the Father's will.

Jesus understands that life is about dependence, not independence. He realizes life's top priority is not about food, sustenance, as he quotes

Deut. 8:3 C he shows he understands that life is about doing God's will C rest of the verse, unquoted in this account goes on to say, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Life is about dependence, life is about doing God's Will, obeying His word.

Jesus needed bread, needed to eat for sure, but He wasn't about to take the shortcut that would have given him what He needed, depending on God isn't about shortcuts. His example teaches us that depending on God will allow us to trust God's provision. God will provide, and we can trust Him to do so. Shortcuts that offer quick fixes but are rooted in selfishness and require moral and spiritual compromise in that sense C they must be avoided, and as we depend on God, we'll be able to discern those bad shortcuts, avoid them, and trusting God for His provision.

Satan tries a second time to get Jesus to independently take a shortcut in **verses 5-8. read.**

Here, dependence on God leads Jesus to avoid the shortcut that will give Him-not what He needs-but what He deserves. Satan is hoping to trip up Christ by tempting Him with power and glory.

Who isn't tempted in some way, shape, or form, by power and glory? Maybe we have some perfectly sanctified people here tonight who completely have the humility thing down, but for the rest of us, I have a feeling we'd have a hard time with this one.

The thing about this is C Jesus deserved all of this power and glory. He was God! He'd emptied Himself of all the rights and privileges that came with that, but He still deserved it, and here's a shortcut! SATAN C PTO YOU, I will give all this, trying to appeal to His ego a little bit, but also appealing to His sense of safety and comfort. This shortcut offers a way to avoid all the pain, sorrow, and suffering that awaited Him on the Cross.

But since He's depending on God, he's able to avoid this shortcut C by depending on God and applying Scripture C Jesus is able to see right through what Satan is doing. Jesus realizes that going Satan's way will actually lose power, not gain it. It's not even Satan's to give. Satan can't truly grant this wish. Jesus realizes there are not shortcuts to glory and again we see that dependence doesn't take shortcuts, as Jesus is committed to worshipping and serving God alone. He rejects Satan's invitation to abandon His loyalty to the Father. God alone is worthy of our allegiance, and though God's way seems harder and seems a long way off, Jesus committed to worshipping and serving the Lord alone.

The lesson for us here is much the same. Being committed to God's way means we trust that He will work things out. By depending on Him, we will learn to do things God's way and in God's time.

Are you up for a promotion at work and tempted to toot your own horn or go out of your way to impress those who are making the decision? I am kind of facing this right now with a job I've applied for at Grace, without getting too much into let me just say that it's tempting to send an innocent email to get an update or make sure I crossed paths during graduation with those who would be considering me. But Dependence doesn't take shortcuts, depending on God teaches us to do things God's way and in God's time. Even though it's hard.

The third temptation Jesus endures is recorded in **vs.9-12. read.**

Am I the only one here who whenever I am raised above the ground I be it a ladder, on a roof, looking out a balcony, on a tall building I am the only one who always thinks about what would happen if I fell or jumped off? Maybe I am just really weird, maybe that's the kid in me that liked to jump off stuff.

Interestingly, historians recorded that people often got dizzy looking down from this point of the temple I 450 ft above the ground.

Satan plants that sort of idea in Jesus' head here with this temptation I see what happens if you jump.

And He even quotes Scripture. Misinterprets it. After getting shot down twice by Jesus using the Word, Satan decides he'll try to use it to his own advantage. Psalm is about how God faithfully cares for His people, - Jesus since you're God's Son, God will protect you I just go ahead and jump. God won't let you get hurt.

Satan wants Jesus to prove God's faithfulness. To prove that He'll protect and care for you.

Let go and let God! Prove God's faithfulness.

Again, basing His dependence on the Lord and what God's written in Scripture, Jesus overcomes this temptation. He realizes that testing God isn't trusting God.

There's a huge difference between trusting God to take care of you and presuming upon Him, artificially creating a need for God to act.

That's really not trusting God at all, that's a lack of trust, lack of faith. P God I want you to show me that you can be trusted, prove it to me by doing this. That's very manipulative. Testing God isn't trusting God.

But as we do depend on God, let Him lead us, control us, seek His Spirit's work in our lives through His Word, as we depend on God it will

help us know God's will.

This isn't easy at all though. We know that depending on God doesn't take shortcuts. Yet what if it is God at work, what if He is being gracious to me and providing a way here? We see in this last temptation that as Jesus was depending on God, He was able to discern what course to take; He was able to see through even Satan's twisting of Scripture. He was able to discern this was a temptation to test God, not an opportunity to trust Him.

We see from Christ's example that depending on God helps us know God's will.

- This story wouldn't be complete without noticing that dependence leads Jesus to victory. Read vs.13.

Taking Satan's best shot, Jesus does emerge victorious. Matthew's account records how angels came to minister to Him. No doubt providing the care and help that Satan had tried to get Him to obtain on His own. It's not a permanent victory, Satan and his demons constantly battle Christ throughout His ministry throughout the Gospel accounts. That is a reminder for us as well, that as we depend on God we will recognize that it's an ongoing battle. We have victory over sin and its power through Christ and the Cross, but yet we still face temptation, we still give in to our flesh, we are perfect, yet imperfect.

So we'd be fools to think that one battle means the war is over. Monday went great, God gave me victory, strength, I can relax on Tuesday. That's not depending on God. Depending on God teaches us to recognize the ongoing battle. So we are daily devoting ourselves to His priorities, His purposes, His instruction we find in the Bible. That is why consistent, daily time reading and studying God's Word is so important. As it did with Christ, it will help us overcome temptation.

Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* says something that has stuck with me for a while, "Temptation is a suggested shortcut not a towards what I understand as evil, but towards what I understand as good. Temptation yielded to is lust deified, and is a proof that it was timidity that prevented the sin before."

Giving in to temptation shows that I worship my desires more than God. And yet, if I am laying my desires, plans, wishes, motives, will at the feet of Jesus-I am depending fully on the Lord, I won't take those shortcuts. My will, desires, lusts won't be deified as He states it. Dependence doesn't take shortcuts.

So what are the shortcuts we are tempted to take?

Comfort? Depending on God we'll recognize life isn't a cakewalk. And to go the way of comfort often goes against our dependence on the Lord. Shortcut of Getting My needs met? They may be your needs, but we should not attempt to get what we need independent of God, we should trust Him to give us what we need in His good and perfect way.

Temptation to get power and privilege? Get all you can by any means necessary. That's the way the world operates. But as we depend on God, we'll do things His way and according to His timing, not on our own schedule.

Temptation to manipulate God, tempting shortcut to Get what you want and make God prove Himself? Depending on God will help us see that that's not how real faith acts, we'll know God's will and not have to test God because we don't trust Him.

Temptation to think one victory means the whole war is over? Depending on God gives us victory, but it's not a one time deal, it's a constant principle, it's an ongoing battle.

Dependence doesn't take shortcuts. Our enemy's temptations tried to get Jesus to live selfishly and independently of God the Father. It will be the same for us. Beware of taking shortcuts just because they look good or seem ok. Seek the Lord's Will, depend on the Spirit's prompting, meditate on God's Word, pray for wisdom. Because dependence doesn't take shortcuts.

Depend on the Lord and you'll be able to recognize the enemy's shortcuts for what they are. C traps to get us relying on ourselves rather than God and snares to get us wrapped up in our own desires rather than God's. Jesus' example teaches us that real dependence won't take the kind of selfish shortcuts Satan tempted Jesus with. Instead, by depending on God, we'll find spiritual victory and spiritual growth and the joy found only in walking closely with God.