



## **Stories on the Way: Lesson Plans for Small Sunday Schools**

### **The Temptation of Jesus Matthew 4:1-11**

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# **The Temptation of Jesus**

After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus spent forty days praying and fasting – he didn't eat or drink anything – and he was very hungry. The devil came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread so you can eat".

But Jesus said to the devil, "The scriptures tell us that we do not only need bread to live; we also need every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem and stood him on the top of the temple and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. After all, the scriptures tells us that 'God will command the angels to care for you' and 'they will lift you up in their hands so that you do not hit your foot on a stone'".

But Jesus said to the devil, "It also says, 'Do not test the Lord your God'".

Then the devil took him to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the countries of the world with all their riches and said, "If you worship me, I will give the whole world to you".

But Jesus answered, "Go away from me, Satan! The scriptures tell us, 'Worship the Lord your God. Serve only God.'".

Then the devil went away and angels came to take care of Jesus.

(Matthew 4:1-11)

## **Staying Focused (Temptation of Jesus Lesson 1)**

This lesson looks at the idea of temptation as something which distracts us from what is really important – God and what God desires for us. It works as the first lesson of Lent, especially if you are very interested in the idea of a Lenten fast. If that is really not interesting to you, you may prefer to use the alternate lesson on the temptation.

Things to know about this lesson:

- I wrote it from the perspective of my Anglican tradition in which people give up something for the Lenten fast. If that is not a practice you observe, you will need to adjust some of the language but I think the lesson as a whole will still work.
- You will need clear tape. Packing tape would be best but lots (and lots) of regular transparent tape would work too.

### **Materials**

- cardstock
- scissors
- crayons/markers/pencil crayons
- packing tape (or lots of regular transparent tape)

### **Open with prayer.**

#### **Introduce the Story**

Can anyone tell me what a temptation is? (A temptation is something that you want to have or do even though you know it is not the best thing to have or want.)

What are things that are temptations for you – things that tempt you?

(offer your own examples to get things started, focusing on things the students can likely relate to like eating sweets instead of healthy snacks or watching television instead of doing something active)

Some temptations are more dangerous than others but all temptations distract us from what is really important – our relationship with God and trying to live the way God wants us to live.

Does anyone know what season of the church year has begun? (Lent)

Lent is the season for getting ready for Easter by asking for forgiveness for the times we give in to temptation and trying harder to not give in next time. It is kind of like cleaning the house before special guests arrive. We want our hearts and minds to be clean and focused on God so that we are ready to celebrate Easter.

In today's story, Jesus is being tempted by the devil to make something other than God the most important thing in his life. Do you think Jesus gives in to the temptation?

## **Read the Story (see page 1)**

### **Discussion**

What were the three temptations? (paraphrase them briefly, if necessary)

Would any of those things been tempting for you?

Did Jesus give in to the devil? (no)

That's right. Each time, Jesus told the devil that God was more important than whatever the devil was offering. He refused to be distracted or separated from God.

One thing that many people do during Lent is give up something that tempts them. Some people give up eating candy or chocolate. Some people give up watching T.V. Some people give up drinking alcohol or coffee. None of these things are bad things to do, as long as you don't do them too much, but none of them are important things either. Giving them up at Lent is a way to remind yourself to be careful about how you handle temptation in general.

Are you or is someone you know giving something up for Lent? What?

If you aren't, would you like to try it? What might you give up?

Share your own choices, if applicable, but this is NOT about convincing the students to observe a Lenten fast.

### **Introduce the Activity**

Even if you are not going to give it up, choose something that tempts you away from God and what God wants for your life. You're going to make a little card to remind you to stop and think about God whenever you are faced with that temptation – no matter what you decide to do about it.

### **Make the Cards**

Distribute cardstock, scissors, and crayons/markers. Direct the students to cut out rectangles of paper about the size of business cards and decorate one side with the temptation they've chosen. Decorate the other side with an image of God or the words "Serve only God".

When finished, help the students wrap their cards in a few layers of tape (DIY laminating).

### **Regrouping**

Invite students to share their cards and any thoughts about their choices.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, help us to stay focused on You so that the temptations of the world do not distract us from what is truly important. Amen.

# **Meditating in the Wilderness**

## **(Temptation of Jesus Lesson 2)**

This lesson introduces students to the idea of meditation. If you are not going to emphasize the idea of a Lenten fast, this is probably a better first lesson on the story. You could also use the alternative lesson, *In the Wilderness*.

Things to know about this lesson:

- You might be skeptical about your students' capacity for meditation. You might be surprised. I have found that children are often very receptive to structured silence – perhaps because quiet is so rare in their lives and they lack the ability to create it on their own.

### **Materials (optional)**

- plain paper and crayons/markers

### **Open with prayer.**

### **Introduce the Story**

If this is your first Lenten lesson, you may want to refer to the introduction of *Staying Focused*. If not, you may still want to refresh students' memories with something like the following:

Who knows/remembers what church season we are in? (Lent)

What is Lent for? (Getting ready for Easter, thinking about God, thinking about temptation, trying to live right)

In today's story, Jesus goes to the wilderness to pray and think about what God wants from him. He spends 40 days and nights there – did you know that Lent is 40 days long, too? We should use Lent the same way Jesus used his 40 days in the wilderness .

Pay attention to the story and see if you can hear what Jesus did.

### **Read the Story (see page 1)**

### **Discussion**

Who took Jesus to the wilderness?

What did he do there? (fasting and praying)

Does anyone know what fasting is? (giving something up for a period of time, like Lent – sometimes people choose to give up eating for a little while)

Why do people do it? (as a way to pray and to focus, to get ready for the work God has for them)

But why would Jesus go to the wilderness to do that? (to be alone and away from distractions)

Do you like to be alone sometimes? Why or why not?

Being alone and quiet sometimes is good for you because it gives you a chance to pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings and to God.

## **Introduce the Activity**

What do we do when we pray? (talk to God)

Talking to God is very important but so is listening to God. Listening can be harder than talking, though, since God doesn't usually speak to us in the same way as we speak to God. With practice, though, we can learn how to listen to what God tells us in our hearts.

For thousands of years, people have practised different ways to make themselves be really quiet so they could really hear God. This listening prayer is called meditation and it is what Jesus was doing in the wilderness to prepare to face temptation and begin his work.

We are going to try some meditating today. Ready?

Sit comfortably, in a position that you can stay in for a while without moving. You can close your eyes, if you want to, or you can keep them open.

Once we get settled, I will say a short prayer and then we will sit, still and silent, for a few minutes. If you get distracted with other thoughts, don't worry. Just let the thoughts go and quiet your mind again, as many times as you need to. Meditating takes practice!

## **Meditation**

Say the following slowly with lots of pauses (you may want to change the wilderness you describe to something that your students are likely to be familiar with):

Make your body still and quiet.

Make your mind still and quiet.

Breath deeply and slowly (model the breathing). Feel the air coming in and leaving your body.

(wait a couple of breaths)

Lord God, in this season of Lent we turn to you. We are sorry for all the things we have done that we should not have done. We are sorry for all the things we have not done that we should have done. Make us strong enough to resist temptation. Make us strong enough to stay focused on You. We know you listen to us – help us listen to you.

(keep silence for about five minutes)

Lord God, in this season of Lent we turn to you. Amen.

## **Regrouping**

Invite students to stand and stretch. Congratulate them on their efforts, acknowledging that

keeping quiet for that long is very difficult.

How did it feel? Did you like it? Why or why not?

Do you have any questions?

If you have time, you could hand out paper and crayons for people to draw their experience.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for the wilderness. Thank you for time to think and pray and get ready to do the things you want us to do. Help us practice listening as well as talking to You. Amen.

## **In the Wilderness**

### **(Temptation of Jesus Alternate Lesson )**

This lesson asks students to spend some time thinking about the setting of Jesus' temptation, rather than the concept of temptation itself.

Things to know about this lesson:

- You will need to find and make copies of wilderness pictures. You can choose to give students some selection or to simply make them all pictures of the Palestinian desert.

#### **Materials**

- photocopies of wilderness pictures
- plain paper or construction paper
- scissors
- crayons/markers/pencil crayons
- glue sticks

#### **Open with prayer.**

#### **Introduce the Story**

If this is your first Lenten lesson, you may want to refer to the introduction of *Staying Focused*. If not, you may still want to refresh students' memories with something like the following:

Who knows/remembers what church season we are in? (Lent)

What is Lent for? (Getting ready for Easter, thinking about God, thinking about temptation, trying to live right)

In today's story, Jesus goes to the wilderness. to pray and think about what God wants from him. He spends 40 days and nights there – did you know that Lent is 40 days long, too? We should use Lent the same way Jesus used his 40 days in the wilderness .

Pay attention to the story and see if you can hear what Jesus did.

#### **Read the Story (see page 1)**

#### **Discussion**

Where did Jesus go? (to the wilderness)

What is wilderness, anyway? (if they don't know the word wilderness, explain that it's places in nature where there are no people or towns or roads and that it can be dangerous)

What did he do there? (fasting and praying)



Does anyone know what fasting is? (giving something up for a period of time, like Lent – sometimes people choose to give up eating for a little while)

Why do people do it? (as a way to pray and to focus, to get ready for the work God has for them)

But why would Jesus go to the wilderness to do that?

Have you ever been out in nature without very many people around? How did it feel?

How would it feel if you were completely alone and very far from people or the things we make like roads and towns? Do you think that's how Jesus felt? If not, how did Jesus feel? Why would he feel differently

In our story today, Jesus is in the wilderness of Palestine. Palestine is very different from Canada. The wilderness Jesus goes to is a desert wilderness – a very dry place that gets very hot in the day and very cold at night. Not very much grows there because it is so dry. (Show a picture)

### **Introduce the Activity**

We are going to make pictures that remind us that Jesus is with us all the time, even when we feel all alone and scared in the wilderness. You can choose what kind of wilderness to use for your picture.

Let the students choose which wilderness picture to use as their base.

### **Drawing the Desert**

Distribute the plain or construction paper, crayons, and scissors. Direct students to draw and cut out pictures of themselves, Jesus, the Spirit, etc. to glue onto their base wilderness picture. If they have more time, they can colour the wilderness picture, too.

### **Regrouping**

Invite students to explain their pictures and their reasons for choosing the wilderness they used, if applicable.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for the wilderness. Thank you for time to think and pray and get ready to do the things you want us to do. Help us follow Jesus' example this Lent. Amen.