

Matthew 4:1-4

Spiritual Warfare: Resisting Temptation, Part 1 of 3

By Joshua Claycamp

Introduction: A Roaring Lion is loose in the Urban Jungle

The average day in the life of an ordinary Christian at Bridge Baptist Church can look like a lot of different things. Some of us are miners. Some of us are accountants. Some of us work with the Ministry of Children and Families. Some of us are engineers. Some of us are lawyers. Some of us are welders. Some of us are stay-at-home moms. Some of us are little children. A typical day in the life of a Bridge Baptist can involve anything from tig-welding an aluminum joint, to handcuffing a prisoner, to drooling on your sister's doll and then smiling at her when she catches you at it. Most of us may find ourselves running all kinds of errands, performing all kinds of tasks, and going to all kinds of different places throughout the day. Can you imagine walking down the sidewalk humming a tune to yourself while cars drive by, you pass pedestrians, you stop at a cross-walk waiting for the light to change color, and as you step from the curb – SUDDENLY, Pounce!

A lion just eats you. You never saw him coming. You never even expected him. You live in the city for God's-sake! What's a lion doing here?!? The answer to your incredulity is that He's always been here. You just never saw him before.

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

Satan is here, alive, out to get you. The Bible calls him a 'roaring lion.' The danger you face walking down the street in Kamloops is no different than the danger you would face roaming the Saharan grasslands of Africa. You may not be in the African Jungle, but you very much are in the urban jungle and the same predator roams around here as he does there.

Two warnings of wisdom come to mind as I contemplate the truth that there are very real spiritual dangers here in Kamloops lurking around every corner:

1. **Proverbs 1:22** - "How long, o simple ones, will you delight in being simple? How long will scoffers (cynics and sceptics) delight in their scoffing (being cynical and sceptical), and fools hate knowledge?"
2. **Proverbs 14:12** - "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Satan is Real and Craves to kill You

Transition: So let us approach our topic with care this morning. When we were preparing for war in the Corps, we sat through what was referred to as 'Safety Briefings.' These briefings were to inform the Marines of the terrain upon which we would be fighting, the tactics that the Marines should anticipate to be used against them, and the enemies' overall resolve and will to fight. When it is apparent that you

are going into a theatre of war, where the enemy intends to offer violent war to you, it is important to be informed and prepared. Knowing is half the battle. So let us consider this time together this morning a Safety Briefing. We're in a hostile environment, and there are certain precautions we need to take in order to survive. Let us pay heed to the Safety Briefing.

Who is this roaring lion out to get us? He is the serpent, the Great Dragon, Beelzebul, the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the evil one, and the adversary. He is Satan. And—if you are a follower of Jesus Christ—he hates your guts with a passion. Like a roaring lion he is prowling about seeking to destroy you. The Scripture speaks overwhelmingly to the reality that Satan wants to kill you. Here are 20 ways in which Satan wants to destroy you this week.

- 1) He will slander God to you in order to cast doubt on the truth of God's goodness and as a result, shipwreck your faith and trust in God (**Gen 3:4-5**).
- 2) He will tempt you to deceive others in order to create, or maintain, the impression of being more spiritual (**Acts 5:3; Jn 8:44**).
- 3) He will attempt to corrupt your mind and steer your thinking away from the simplicity of Christ and His gospel (**2 Cor 11:3**).
- 4) He will physically try to hinder and prevent you from joining with other believers in a Life Group for fellowship and mutual building-up (**1 Thess 2:18**).
- 5) He will wrestle against you, fighting against your progress in discipleship to be more and more like Jesus (**Eph 6:12**).
- 6) He will tempt you to commit sexual immorality against your spouse (**1 Cor 7:5**).
- 7) He may harass you with some form of fleshly affliction or disease; this will ultimately happen sooner or later (**2 Cor 12:7**).
- 8) He will try to blind the spiritual eyes of your unsaved family, friends, and neighbours so that they may not see the glory of Jesus in the gospel (**2 Cor 4:4**).
- 9) He will make every effort to keep your unsaved acquaintances in bondage to sins and idols that hinder them from coming to the true God (**Gal 4:8**).
- 10) He may smite you even this week with disease, suffering, illness, and physical torture (**Luke 13:16; Job 2:7**).
- 11) He will try to trick you into killing your own children, and he craves to physically murder you also (**Ps 106:37; Jn 8:44**).
- 12) He will sow tares [counterfeit false Christians who are pretending to be sincere, or spiritually compromised believers] within this assembly of believers known as Bridge Baptist Church in order to deceive and create disunity (**Mt 13:38-39; 2 Cor 11:13-15**).
- 13) He will always lead you toward theological compromise by causing you to be friendly to false doctrine and its teachers (**1 Tim 4:1-3**).
- 14) He will, with God's permission, persecute you violently for your godliness (**Rev 2:10**).
- 15) He will always at every opportunity tempt you to do evil (**Matt 4:1; 1 Thess 3:5**).
- 16) He is, at this moment, prowling about seeking to capture and destroy you, and he takes especial delight in destroying you through your own stubborn, proud and self-exalting heart (**1 Pet 5:6-8**).

- 17) He will, every single moment he can, slander you before God in heaven and try convince the Most High that you are not worthy of His efforts to be saved (**Rev 12:10**).
- 18) He will, when he especially hates you with particular malice and ferocity, ask God for permission to sift you out for personalized concentrated attack and nearly irresistible temptation (**Luke 22:31**).
- 19) He will daily, moment-by-moment, use the power of suggestion, either mental suggestion or subtle persuasion from unbelieving friends, to move you away from the will of God (**Matt 16:21-23**).
- 20) He will try to cripple your effectiveness through confusion, discouragement, and ultimate despair (**2 Cor 4:8-9**).

Testing vs. Tempting:

Transition: Satan's desire to destroy humanity has never waned. He has not lost the will to fight and attack us. He has hungered after man's total destruction from the moment he first laid eyes on Adam & Eve in the Garden. This is his great passion, and he knows that ultimate victory in killing mankind rests in causing Christ to stumble. If you remove the spotless lamb, then you render meaningless the atonement. So he goes after Jesus. Verse 1 tells us that Satan goes after Him in order to tempt him and destroy Him, but the verse begins with the amazing fact that Jesus was lead to this confrontation by the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

Lead by the Spirit: We learn from the Gospel of Mark that "immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). The "immediately," of course, is proceeding from His baptism which we saw last week. As soon as Jesus' baptism was completed, His forty-day wilderness experience begins. Mark's use of *ekballō* ("compelled") indicates the necessity of Jesus' temptation. Although the temptations were given by Satan, they were a part of God's perfect plan for the redemptive work of His Son.

Into the Wilderness: The wilderness of Judea is a hot, barren, and desolate area that extends west from the Dead Sea almost to Jerusalem, and is some thirty-five miles long and fifteen miles wide. George Adam Smith described it as an area of yellow sand and crumbling limestone. It is an area of contorted strata, where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps, the limestone is blistered and peeling, the rocks are bare and jagged, and often the ground sounds hollow (cited in William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], 1:63). Nowhere in Palestine could Jesus have been more isolated or in less comfort.

To be Tempted: Doesn't this sound wonderful? You're God's son, He loves you, He cares for you, and He leads you right out into a wasteland to starve for forty days? Nice. Jesus specifically went there by the leading of the Holy Spirit **to be tempted by the devil**. The Greek *peirazō* translated "tempted" is a morally neutral word that simply means "to test." Whether the testing is for a good or evil purpose

depends on the intent of the one giving the test. When the scriptural context clearly indicates the testing is an enticement to evil, the word is most frequently translated by a form of the English *tempt*, which carries that negative connotation. The fact that **the devil** was here doing the testing clearly indicates that Jesus was being **tempted**, enticed to do evil.

Why would God, the Spirit, lead God, the Son, in such a way as to bring about direct Spiritual Warfare and Intense Temptation? God often uses Satan's tempting to evil as His own means of testing for good. What Satan intended to lead the Son into sin and disobedience, the Father used this to demonstrate the Son's holiness and worthiness. That is God's plan for all of His children. Christians cannot be tempted in a way that God cannot use for their good and His glory. James even tells us to **"consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials [*peirasmos*], knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"** (James 1:2–4). That is God's plan and purpose-to use Satan's temptations as a means of testing and strengthening our faith in Him and of our growing stronger in righteousness. God allows testings in our lives in order that our spiritual "muscles" may be exercised and strengthened. Whether the testing is by God's initiative or is sent by Satan, God will always use it to produce good in us when we meet the test in His power.

God never tests in the sense of enticing to evil. **"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one," (James 1:13).** All five of the forms of "to tempt" in those verses are from *peirazō*, and all five indicate the negative side of testing, the inducement to evil. God never has a part in that sort of testing, but He can and will turn even the worst sort of testing into the right sort, when it is surrendered to His will and power. It is God's great desire to turn into victory what Satan intends for failure, to strengthen us at the very point where the adversary wants to find us weak.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

What is Fasting & Why did Jesus do this?

There's more to a biblical fast than abstaining from food. Without a spiritual purpose for your fast it's just a weight-loss diet. Some people hear this concept and then conclude that a fast is intended to achieve some objective purpose for the benefit of one's self, but the benefit they seek would not ordinarily be given to them unless they cause God a little grief, so the "spiritual purpose" of the fast is ultimately to go on a form of hunger-strike. Similar to a child that throws a temper tantrum and refuses to eat until his parents give in to his demands, Christians regard fasting as a form of hunger strike in order to compel God to do something He wouldn't ordinarily do on your behalf.

The Bible does not teach that fasting is a kind of spiritual hunger strike that compels God to do our bidding. If we seek for something outside of God's will, fasting does not cause Him to reconsider. Fasting does not change God's hearing so much as it changes our praying.

Fasting is calculated to bring a note of urgent introspection to our prayers. By denying ourselves food we are able to facilitate an environment where we can expose our hearts to ourselves. Jeremiah 17:9 says, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”** It is not only possible for us to be self-deceived, it is likely that we are! Fasting creates the environment in which we are able to more accurately scrutinize our deeper motives as we petition the throne of God above. In fasting we expose ourselves to ourselves. In fasting we are able to more clearly see ourselves from God’s perspective and see how we are in comparison to Him. The pressure of hunger can be immensely self-revealing. Fasting is one way to sober a man’s thoughts and bring clarity to bleary vision. In this way fasting plays a role in bringing the challenges facing Jesus into sharp focus.

1. Fasting is an expression of a humble heart (1 Kings 21:27-29; Psalm 35:13)
2. Fasting is extremely useful in focusing and clarifying prayer (Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3)
3. Fasting is extremely useful in seeking God’s specific guidance (Judges 20:26-28)
4. Fasting is a way to repent, confess, and express sorrow to God for sin when words are not enough (1 Sam 31:13)
5. Fasting is extremely useful in cultivating a trusting heart in the face of Danger as we seek Deliverance and Protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23)
6. Fasting is a way to express to God that you desire for His Greater Purposes to be accomplished (Daniel 9:3)
7. Fasting is a form of focusing on God for the purposes of overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God.

Fasting must always have a spiritual purpose –a God-centered purpose, not a self-centered one –for the Lord to bless our fast. Thoughts of food must prompt thoughts for God. They must not distract us, but instead remind us of our purpose. Rather than focusing the mind on food, we should use the desire to eat as a reminder to pray and to reconsider our purpose.

There is no doubt that God has crowned fasting with extraordinary blessings. Biblical, historical, and contemporary testimonies bear witness to God’s delight in providing unusual blessings to those who fast. But we should be careful never to approach fasting with a mechanical view. We cannot manipulate God to do our bidding by fasting any more we can by any other means. As with prayer, we fast in the hope that by His grace God *will bless* as we desire.

And the tempter came and said to him, “Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

The Nature of the Temptation

The way that Satan phrases his statement is peculiar: the mood of his inquiry is in the indicative which means that Satan knows that Jesus *is* the Son of God. There’s nothing hypothetical or contrived about the first half of his statement: “Since you are the Son of God...” It is not a part of Satan’s plan here to cast doubt on whether or not Jesus is God’s Son. He knows it, and states it emphatically.

When it is understood this way, one hears the undertone of flattery in Satan's expression:

"Since you are God's only begotten Son in the highest sense of the term, able to do wonders and in charge of all creation, worthy of all worship and praise, why not turn these stones into bread and satisfy your hunger now that you've been fasting these forty days."

It seems to be a perfectly reasonable suggestion. To fast any longer than forty days is humanly impossible. Scientists have determined that the maximum a man can go without food is little more than forty days. Jesus is at the end of his rope from a purely physical perspective having been now forty days without food, and Satan's suggestion pays the appropriate tribute and homage and then suggests that it is time to break the fast and eat. There's no need to make a quick trip to the grocery store. He can create some bread right now out of the stones that surround Him.

From our perspective it doesn't seem like such a bad idea. This is the craftiness of the serpent on full display. You and I can only truly appreciate the nature of the temptation by scrutinizing Christ's response.

But he answered, "It stands forever written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Christ's Parry and Counter-Thrust

Satan's suggestion is considered by Christ and immediately parried by a Biblical assessment. Christ responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3 stating in the perfect tense that it stands written by God, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that comes from the mouth of God."

Something interesting stands out when we go back to Deuteronomy 8:3. Christ changes the quote from "Lord" to "God" at the very end. Christ gives a slightly *different rendering* to Satan than that of the original. In the original it's saying that God's people must learn to listen to the Lord, *which is Christ*. But as the Christ now deals with the great tempter He quotes the passage as saying people must learn to trust in the Word that comes from God. *He is God, yet He, as both God and man, must trust in God!* As a man, He must trust in the greater part of Him and the Triune God of which He is one person.

We see two things:

1. What the Lord says is exactly what God says. What God says is exactly what the Holy Spirit says. You cannot stop to wonder here. **Gregory of Nanzianus has said**, "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one." **Or Herman Bavinck**, "The great challenge facing us with this is to see that the unity of the divine essence does not cancel out the Trinity of the persons or, conversely, that the Trinity of persons does not abolish the unity of the divine essence."
2. **Christ recognizes here the importance of trusting in God in the midst of alternative and competing voices, even though He is God.**

Deuteronomy 8:3 in context: The passage in Deuteronomy clearly shows that God often intentionally placed His people in trying circumstances “to humble” them and remove any trace of pull-myself-up-by-my-own-bootstraps determination and self-reliance, “to let [them] hunger” so that they would need to trust Him *even for their food*, so that “He might make known that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the *LORD*.”

Satan’s Strategy is now clear:

1. Doubt

Satan tries to undermine God’s character and credibility because he wants you to doubt God. With that ploy he succeeded in plunging the entire human race into sin. The crafty serpent questioned God’s Word, saying to Eve, “Indeed, has God said?” (Gen. 3:1) He then impugned God’s motives by saying that God had a selfish, ulterior motive in forbidding Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 5). He was saying they couldn’t trust God because He might say one thing but mean another. Satan claims to be giving us the straight scoop on life, but in reality it is Satan who is the liar (John 8:44). God has no capacity to lie (Titus 1:2).

Satan wants you to doubt God—to doubt His Word and His power. And we fall into his trap too often. We’re tempted to worry and lose control in a difficult situation because we don’t really believe God can solve our problem. Sometimes we doubt God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness and therefore become burdened by feelings of anxiety and guilt. Some people wonder if God really loves them, especially when bad things happen, such as a spouse leaving or the death of a loved one.

2. Self-Sufficiency

Satan wants us to believe we are self-sufficient and therefore urges us to trust in our own resources, rather than God.

Satan is trying to divide God from God by attacking the man with the flattery and adulation that properly belongs to God: The nature of the temptation is now far more sinister than simply trying to flatter Christ into eating some bread which he could miraculously provide for himself. This is an assault on the Trinity by creating a division within the Human part and the Divine part of Christ.

Christ the Lord is saying that, “I am here under divine appointment. The Holy Spirit led me here. In the way He appointed I must wait on His Word and trust Him to supply my needs. To resort to miracle, which I—unlike any other human being—can actually do, would be to fall victim to the same self-reliance that the Israelites fell into over a thousand years ago when they were first brought out of Egypt!”

He might also have said, “I will never work a miracle on my own behalf! The miracle working power I possess is for the benefit of others! I will work for the blessing of others, but I will trust in God for my own needs!” As both man and God, He would not break the division

What Spiritual Benefit is this?

We live from our Heart. The part of us that drives and organizes our life is not the physical. This remains true even if we deny it. You have a spirit within you that was designed to be in union and harmony with God, to reflect the character, person, and image of God. This spirit is in you and it has been formed contrary to its original intention. It has been formed by choices and decisions that you made as the world around you exerted certain influences and pressures upon you. Your spirit has taken on a specific character, it is shaped a certain way, and because of its shape and formation it has certain peculiarities to it – some good, some very bad. But the truth is, we all have a spirit and it has been formed. This is true of everyone including you.

The quotation here, “man shall not live by bread alone...” itself means that we live from our heart. There is something more meaningful, more important to the life we live than even the needed nutrients essential for the basic sustenance of our bodies. Christ’s quotation means that to live well from our heart, it matters most what we feed our heart – more even than what we feed our bodies.

The situations in which we find ourselves are never as important as our responses to them, which always come from our “spiritual” side. A carefully cultivated heart, cultivated for the purposes of believing and trusting in God and depending upon Him rather than our own self-reliance, assisted by the Grace of God, will foresee, forestall, or transcend and transform most of the painful and difficult situations before which others stand helpless like little children crying, “Why?”

Accordingly, the greatest need you and I have is transformation of our heart (Romans 12:1-2). The spiritual place within us from which outlook, choices, and actions come has been formed by a world in which our focus and choices were made separated from and directed away from God. Now it must be transformed by stepping back to God and embracing His word.

Narrow Application:

Overcoming the Test through the Ministry of the Holy Spirit: the inerrancy and reliability of the Scripture. We must cling to God the way that God clings to God! If God himself felt that His only sure success to beating Satan was to cling to the Words of God, then will we do any better? No, we will not! And to think otherwise is to think we are smarter, stronger, and more resilient than God!

Broad Application

We are often tempted to rely on ourselves. This is to trust in our own comprehension. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is straight into the mouth of a lion! A course of action that seems right to us, that requires our own expert assessment is surely bound to build our pride as we increasingly trust and rely in ourselves – this is just the ticket that the roaring prowling Lion is looking for! (Proverbs) Here’s the truth: we make those choices because we think that if we don’t we may not be able to live otherwise. A man doesn’t necessarily need to live! There may come a time when it is best for him to die. But living or dying, while he lives he must live according to God’s ways and trust Him in all circumstances no matter what!

Conclusion: Dog eat dog? Run from the Deceiving Beast of this World and Trust in the Holy Spirit's Truth by Turning to Scripture!

Have you ever been to a junkyard that kept dogs on hand in order to keep thieves out by night? Have you ever encountered the mean, half-starved junk-yard dog?

It has been said that we live in a "Dog eat Dog world." This clever line is intended to foster a scrappy stray-dog, junkyard dog mentality within us that causes us to fight and strive hard for the scraps of this world that we desperately want. But the truth is that this is just another clever line developed and delivered by the enemy intended to foster just such a mentality within us. He takes great joy in seeing the sons of Adam go to war with each other, attack each other for such empty and fleeting scraps. And we buy into this clever line of the junkyard dog, and we effectively do the devil's bidding. He is clever and skilled in turning us upon each other and even turning us upon ourselves.

The truth is that we live in a "Roaring Satanic Lion eat small, separated-from-the-flock sheep world." His whole strategy is to get us to rely on ourselves, to cause us to stray from our flock and our home and our Lord's Word. Once he has us isolated, he toys with us. Like a cat playing with a mouse. Every swipe further maims and wounds the little mouse. This is Satan's desire for you. If he can separate you, he will try to turn you against your brothers. If he can't do this, then he will give you over to addictions, temptations, depraved and debauched living, and through that he will seek to destroy you. It is a Lion eat Sheep world, my beloved fellow sheep.

Stay close to the Great Shepherd. He is the only one smart enough to beat the Lion! Let us pray.