

Have you ever noticed that almost every mountaintop experience in life is followed by a valley experience? We leave school with great plans to make our mark in the world, but find out that the world doesn't exactly offer us the opportunities we'd hoped for. We move to a new city in the hope of leaving painful memories behind, but find they've come with us. Life's high moments are often followed by low times of disappointment.

If we knew our Bible then these experiences wouldn't surprise us, because Jesus went through the same thing. He'd visited John the Baptist who baptized Him into a way of life which was to change the world. The heavens opened and Jesus saw the form of a dove descend upon Him and heard the voice of God say: *You are my son; I am well pleased in you.* This must have been a high moment for a simple carpenter from Nazareth. But looked what happened next: *Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert where for 40 days He was tempted by the devil.* What a fall into the valley of despondency this must have been! Jesus went off into the desert to work out His identity. He sought solitude to discover how to act when He is God's Son?

Jesus began to fast and He went without food because He was seeking something greater than bread. The struggle lasted for 40 days and the number 40 in the Bible is significant for it's a symbol that something important was happening. The rains fell on Noah for 40 days. The nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Elijah stayed on the mountain with God for 40 days. Something important was happening and Jesus was finding His mission in God's eyes.

That's when these three temptations came to Him and when we step out for God, we usually find temptations come. Jesus had just been anointed by God and now He was in a battle for His soul. Jesus was in a war that would decide the destiny of the one God appointed as Saviour. Life can be a spiritual fight and Jesus was in a fight. ***The devil was clever in that every temptation the devil offered weren't actually bad. The devil never suggested that Jesus do anything overtly immoral or unlawful.***

Jesus was tempted by good and that was the problem. We are often tempted by things that are not bad in themselves, so let's consider Jesus' temptations to see how they affect our lives.

***Some Temptations Are To Satisfy Natural Needs With Unnatural Choices*** - At the end of Jesus' 40 day fast he was very hungry, and so the devil tempted Jesus through a simple suggestion. Remember that all temptations are suggestions as no one can make us yield, we do that ourselves. The devil simply suggested that Jesus make some of those little rocks that looked like loaves into bread, where's the harm in that? Jesus was in the desert coming to grips with the kind of Messiah He was to be. He was settling in his own mind how he needed to go about his work. As the days dragged on, it became clear to Jesus that He had to point to a deeper hunger in people which was a hunger beyond bread. Jesus was to show the people their hunger for God. And that's the point of danger in the first temptation: Concentrate on the physical; focus on bread; feed the people and be a welfare reformer. These are good things and important things for its right that we care about the poor. Jesus could have been a marvellous provider of basic human needs. He could have given bread and drawn great crowds to himself. But Jesus came to win people, not to bribe them.

Missionaries realized long ago that they could go into a poor country and draw hordes of people by giving away rice. But they discovered that when the rice ran out, the people disappeared. Missionaries learned that they had to preach the good news of salvation first, and then feed the people. People can be blinded by the physical aspects of life. Jesus could have given people bread if He'd wanted to, but look at his answer: ***It is written: Man does not live by bread alone.*** There is a deeper hunger in people, a hunger that a sandwich won't ultimately satisfy. The issue for Jesus was: *Who will be the ultimate focus in my life; people or God?* He chose God, and by doing this Jesus was set free to serve people.

Jesus' answer to this temptation is not a condemnation of material things, we need food and shelter and clothes.

Jesus is against a life that ignores the spiritual and acts as if God doesn't exist. ***We do not live by bread alone.*** Bread gets mouldy and must be replaced and our lives can't be counted by the loaf. Jesus resisted temptation but His battle was far from over.

***Some Temptations Are To Gratify Good Ends With Bad Means*** - The devil failed to get Jesus to turn stones into bread, or make bread more important than God. But the powers of darkness are relentless so a second temptation came to Jesus. He saw in his mind's eyes the kingdoms of the world. He saw Rome with its regal might. Egypt's glorious beauty. Babylon with its beautiful riches. Thornliebank's elegant splendour. This temptation was an appeal to Jesus' ambition and that's what made it seem good. After all, did Jesus not come to win people? Wouldn't that task be easier if He had power and authority?

The devil knew that Jesus' mission was to draw people back to God, so that the tempter tried to get Jesus to take a shortcut to that mission. There's nothing necessarily wrong with power and authority, someone has to be in charge. But where would that authority come from? Could a good goal, to call people to God; be accomplished by bad means? Jesus could have had all the authority He needed to accomplish his goals. But what kind of authority would make people follow? If a person with a knife at his throat were to follow God, would that count?

Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Jesus could have been the most powerful man on earth had He chosen to be, but He would have failed in His mission to win the hearts and minds of people. He came to win people, not to force them. Jesus would not use people for His own glorification. He knew people needed to be treated with dignity and worth, and not forced to worship Him. What kind of God would He be if He held a knife to our throats and asked, *Now, don't you want to follow me?*

**The devil wanted to give Jesus power to corrupt Him with it. Force them to follow you, he hissed.** But as tempting this proposition was, because Jesus wanted to succeed; He answered: ***It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.*** Jesus demonstrated power; the power of absolute allegiance to God.

Jesus had absolute faith in His Father God and He didn't need to use a shortcut to complete His mission. Jesus didn't have to grasp or clutch for power, for He had it all along. He was tempted to gratify an ambition but He resisted. Even so, the devil was not ready to give up. A third temptation came.

***Some Temptations Are To Exploit A Close Relationship With A Shallow Acquaintance*** - This was the most subtle of the temptations. The devil challenged Jesus: ***If you are the Son of God throw yourself down from here. Then the devil quotes from Psalm 91: 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. Make a spectacle of yourself,*** the devil said. *Gather the crowds and leap off this high tower to the ground below. If you're truly God's Son then He'll rescue you and You won't get hurt. Go on; you'll impress everyone and they'll follow you.* The devil was goading Jesus. *This is your chance, go ahead. Show them!* The problem was that the devil's argument was all wrong. Jesus was God's Son and He'd come to win the people with love, not trick them with stunts. The temptation was to use His status as the Son of God, and force God into action by jumping off the temple.

How did Jesus answer? *Do not put the Lord your God to the test.* Jesus wouldn't exploit His relationship with God, there would be no compromise. Rome allowed for all types of religions to flourish in its kingdom, but it fought Christianity from the beginning. Why? Because the Christians wouldn't compromise, they wouldn't bow to Caesar. Doesn't that say something to us?

Jesus realised that there was more to His life than safety and comfort. He came to give His life, not to protect it. Jesus' goal wasn't the applause of the crowds but the devotion to the will of his Father. Jesus was on a mission that would take Him to the cross, and he would not compromise with evil. He calls us to carry our crosses for him, too.

***Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Do not try to force God into doing what you want rather than what He wills.*** This is an awesome rebuke of the powers of darkness. No compromise!

Jesus went into the desert right after His baptism, and He was tempted to use his powers to satisfy His need. He was tempted to take shortcuts to gratify his ambition. He was tempted to use his unique status with God to exploit that relationship. Had Jesus given in to any of those temptations He would have been pulled off-course. Had He compromised to evil, His mission could never have been accomplished. But Jesus would have none of that, and He won. Verse 12 says the devil left him until an opportune time, and that opportune time was at the cross. And Jesus defeated that too. Opportunity may knock only once, but temptation rings forever. Let us beware and may God save us from compromise. **Amen.**

*(1755 words)*