

Deut. 26:1–11
Ps. 91:1–2, 9–16
Rom. 10:8b–13
Luke 4:1–13

Forty Days

Goal for the Session

Youth will reflect on how Jesus resisted temptation and consider how they can demonstrate faithfulness to God in trying situations.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 4:1–13

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Sharon H. Ringe

Jesus’ time in the wilderness is a time of “testing” (*peirasmos*). These are not “temptations” to do things that are desirable but not good for him (like our “temptation” to eat an extra piece of cake). Rather, these are tests to see whether even good things can lure Jesus from a focus on God’s will—or can lure believers into following a more comfortable messiah. In two of the three the devil’s hook to catch Jesus is the challenge “if you are the Son of God . . .” Does Jesus really believe what he has heard? Will God make good on the implied commitment? Let’s find out before you go charging off into dangerous places.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Lori Brandt Hale

The story is more about the responses Jesus gives to the temptations than to the temptations themselves. Jesus’ responses underscore his faithfulness to God, setting the stage for the whole of his ministry and, ultimately, his sacrifice. His responses come with the full knowledge that obedience to God will bring persecution, misunderstanding, and the cross. To say yes to the world would have required Jesus to say no to God, to the way of God, and to an idea of God’s kingdom that those followers simply did not understand. It would have required him to say no to the freedom and love for humanity that are the marks of his death and resurrection.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jeffery L. Tribble Sr.

By taking on “intentionality” and “receptivity to God’s grace” during Lent, new converts and members gain the spiritual depth to be faithful to “the mystery of God-with-us” even in our unexpected trials and temptations. Jesus did not ask for trials and temptations; he accepted that they could not be avoided if he would do God’s will. Jesus’ season of testing was not for a day or two; his season of forty days of temptation suggests to us that we may have faithfully to endure seasons of long and protracted difficulty. Jesus did not have just one encounter of diabolical testing; he overcame multiple temptations. His temptations were real and riveting.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Kimberly M. van Driel

The text tells a story about how evil works on the basis of distortions and lies. The devil presents wants as needs, falsehoods as truths, distrust as faith. The devil’s second pitch is false, as revealed by the demand for false worship. At stake is who will be trusted and worshiped. We ask: Where else do we hear lies that sound truthful? From politicians or the media, or the pulpit? How might clinging to God’s word unveil such lies as lies? Also, of the first and third temptations, we could ask: Where else do we see wants presented as needs? Where are we tempted to think of faith as something God must earn?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:1–13

Focus on Your Teaching

Youth are at a point in their lives in which freedom, responsibility, and risk taking are new and exciting. Consequently, they are primed to succumb to temptation. In matters large and small, the voice of temptation is persuasive: “You can have this. Just reach out and grab it!” When young people resist temptation, they are most often motivated by fear of the consequences. Jesus provides a model of positive resistance to temptation, showing youth one real-world benefit of a strong and living faith.

Guide me, faithful God, to teach with clarity and trust. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

YOU WILL NEED

- slips of paper
- small container
- pens or pencils
- copies of Resource Sheets 1 and 2
- Bibles

For Responding:

- option 1: paper and pens
- option 2: newsprint and markers
- option 3: Internet access

For Web Connection:

- Internet access

GATHERING

Before the session, write each of the following situations on a separate slip of paper:

- ✂ You have a chance to copy test answers from a classmate’s paper.
- ✂ You find a twenty-dollar bill in your church’s fellowship hall.
- ✂ You have friends over, parents are away, and there’s beer in the refrigerator.
- ✂ You find the locker of someone you don’t like left unlocked.
- ✂ Your friend offers you something valuable that you suspect is shoplifted.
- ✂ You find information online that you could easily copy into your school project, which is due tomorrow.
- ✂ You break something valuable, and it would be easy to blame your younger sibling.

Greet the youth and have them (working in pairs if you have a large group) take a situation from the container. Invite each person to tell how she or he would handle the temptation.

Discuss:

- ✂ How would your response to the temptation make you feel?
- ✂ What else might happen as a result?
- ✂ How would your faith influence your actions?

Explain that in this session the youth will examine several temptations that Jesus faced. Lead the group in an opening prayer:

Dear God, meet us here and form us as your people. Amen.

EXPLORING

Remind youth that today is the first Sunday in Lent, a forty-day season of preparation for Easter that is partly derived from Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness. Explain that as Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness, so do Christians traditionally join in spiritual practices designed to help deepen their relationship with God.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has helpful information and resources about Lent at www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/worship-resources-lent/.

Distribute Bibles. Ask youth to read Luke 4:1–13 silently. Invite a volunteer to read the passage aloud. Ask youth to summarize the passage. Point out that there is no explanation why the devil tests Jesus, nor does the passage give any detail about what Jesus is thinking or feeling while the testing is going on.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Flesh It Out) and pencils. Ask the group to imagine some of the unwritten details in Luke 4:1–13, filling in the blanks on the resource sheet. Work on the resource sheet together or assign parts of it to groups of two to four youth, depending on the size of the class. If time permits, assign parts for the expanded version of the text and perform a dramatic interpretation of the story.

After the final reading (or dramatization) of the fleshed-out story, discuss:

- ✧ What were the easiest and hardest blanks to fill in? Why?
- ✧ How has adding imaginative details helped (or hindered) your understanding of the Scripture text?
- ✧ What have you learned from this activity about the devil’s motivations and Jesus’ thoughts and feelings?
- ✧ In what ways do you think this experience helped Jesus prepare for ministry?

Read the following quote from the “What?” excerpt on page 1: “[The devil’s tests are] to see whether even good things can lure Jesus from a focus on God’s will—or can lure believers into following a more comfortable messiah.” After pointing out that there’s usually nothing wrong with eating when you’re hungry, discuss the following questions:

- ✧ Since a case could be made that turning stone to bread is a much smaller thing than worshiping the devil, what would have been wrong with Jesus making himself something to eat?
- ✧ Would Jesus still be Lord and Savior if he had given in to even one of the devil’s temptations? Why or why not?
- ✧ How might knowing this story about Jesus and temptation help you grow in faith?

Invite the youth to keep the last question in mind as they move to Responding.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. It’s Tempting** Youth will consider how they can demonstrate faithfulness to God in trying situations by rewriting Luke 4:1–13 to include some of the temptations they face. Distribute paper and pens. Participants may work individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. Invite them to consider who the devil is in their updated version, whether and where Jesus enters the story, and how the story ends. Invite youth to tell their updated story(ies), and then discuss:

- ✧ How might one’s faithfulness to God benefit not only the one who is faithful but others as well?
- ✧ How can facing temptation help you grow in faith?

EASY
PREP

The Food Corps (<https://foodcorps.org>) has much pertinent information on their work, their philosophy, and the population they serve in the “What We Do” dropdown menu. You may find it helpful to print some of this information before the session.

2. **Strength in Numbers** Youth will consider how the community of faith can provide support in trying situations. The “Now What?” excerpt on page 1 suggests, “The devil presents [1] wants as needs, [2] falsehoods as truths, [3] distrust as faith.” List these three categories on a posted sheet of newsprint. Invite the youth to brainstorm real-life examples and then to reflect on ways they might support one another in overcoming such failures. On a separate sheet of newsprint, put these mutual pledges in the form of a group covenant.

3. **Food Justice and Faithful Living** Youth will consider how they can demonstrate faithfulness to God by recognizing the trying situations others face on a daily basis. Though Jesus resisted the devil’s temptation to feed himself, the Bible records many instances of Jesus feeding hungry people and sharing meals with others. Take some time to explore information about the work of Food Corps (<https://foodcorps.org>) on behalf of children’s equitable access to healthy food. Encourage the youth to reflect on what they learn by discussing the following questions:
 - ✪ What surprised you about the work of Food Corps and the children they serve?
 - ✪ How do you think a lack of access to healthy food would affect your ability to be faithful to God?
 - ✪ What is the connection between living faithfully and working for the benefit of others?

CLOSING

Explain that everyone will join together in a litany that affirms Jesus’ victory over sin and celebrates God’s grace, which helps us to face down our temptations. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Closing Litany). Invite the youth to name three common, real-life temptations that youth face in the community, and have everyone write these temptations in the spaces provided on the resource sheet. Ask three volunteers to take the parts of Speakers 1, 2, and 3, and lead the group in the litany as a closing expression of faith. Finally, send the youth back out into the world with a brief benediction:

Go in peace.

■ ENHANCEMENT

WEB CONNECTION

Search YouTube for “Ash Wednesday & Lent in Two Minutes.” Watch the video together, and discuss the following questions:

- ✪ What stands out for you in the video?
- ✪ What surprises you about what you learned?
- ✪ If you’ve attended an Ash Wednesday service where ashes were used, how was that experience?
- ✪ How have you observed Lent in the past? How will you do so this year?

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Youth
Resource Sheet 1

Flesh It Out

Use your imagination to fill in the blanks of the following “expanded” version of Jesus’ wilderness temptation (based on Luke 4:1–13, NRSV).

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil, who did this because _____

_____.

Jesus ate nothing at all during those days, because he _____

_____, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus, thinking _____

_____, answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “If you will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus, thinking _____

_____, answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you.’” By now, Jesus was really _____

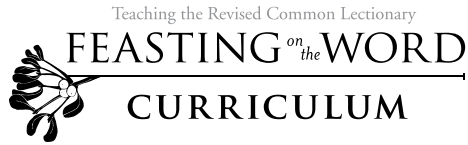
_____, but he answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he felt _____

_____, but he departed from him until an opportune time. Meanwhile, Jesus _____

_____.



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Youth
Resource Sheet 2

Closing Litany

Instructions: Fill in the blanks with three common temptations, as chosen by the youth. Then join together in the litany.

Leader: Here's some good news, as we get ready to leave this place: God sent Jesus to sympathize with our weaknesses, because Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

People: And so we can draw near to the throne of favor with confidence to receive mercy and find grace when we need help. And we do need help . . .

Speaker 1: _____

People: "One does not live by bread alone."

Speaker 2: _____

People: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God."

Speaker 3: _____

People: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Leader: Even when we lack the confidence to stare down.

People: Thanks be to God, for God's mercy and grace! Amen.

—based on Luke 4:4, 8, 12, NRSV; Hebrews 4:14–16, CEV

