

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

The Temptation

Goal for the Session *Children will examine how Jesus responded to temptation and explore ways that the Holy Spirit might be with them.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

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

The season of Lent has begun, and children may be aware of this change in the church year. No blaring music or ads welcome the season of Lent. However, temptation is not unknown to children. Long before they can say or define the word, they have experienced it. The chair to climb to get to something beyond their reach on the table is an early temptation. Taking a cookie when no one is looking after being told it's too near mealtime comes later. And they never stop.

Merciful God, so many things and activities tempt us to turn away from you. Give me the power and strength of your Holy Spirit to turn back to you. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- purple cloth
- Christ candle
- Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022
- CD player
- Bible
- Offering basket
- Color Pack 1, 2, 30
- newsprint
- markers
- Resource Sheet 1

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, small heart or cross stickers, zip-seal sandwich bags, crayons
- option 2: newsprint, markers
- option 3: Color Pack 2, small smooth stones, permanent markers
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a bookmark at Luke in the worship table Bible. Print the Lenten response for Gathering on newsprint. For option 1 in Responding, place forty heart or cross stickers in a zip-seal sandwich bag for each child. For option 2 in Responding, create the three sheets of newsprint with the sentence stems and the sheet with the prayer to complete.

Invite the first children to arrive to arrange the worship table with the purple cloth, Christ candle, Bible, and offering plate.

When everything is ready, gather around the worship table. Invite a child to receive the offering. Ask:

✠ What does this white candle represent?

Light the Christ candle. Say that we light the Christ candle as a reminder that Jesus is always with us. Point to the purple cloth. Ask:

✠ What season of the church year does the purple cloth represent?

After the season of Lent is named, recall that the forty days of Lent lead to Holy Week and Easter. Lead the children in the Lenten response on the newsprint:

God is love!

God is with us today!

Easter is coming. Amen!

Show Color Pack 1. Ask:

✠ What do you think is going on in this picture?

temptation: when someone or something tries to get you to do something you know is wrong

Use their conversation to introduce *temptation*, the idea and the definition of the word. Tell the group that the title of this session is “The Temptation.”

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and hold it so the group can see where the book mark is. After the group has recognized that it is near the end of the Bible, they will guess that it is from the New Testament, the part of the Bible that tells about Jesus and the early church. This is a move from a story about Moses from the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament in the previous session.

Ask children to tell you about the baptism of Jesus, a story they may have heard on January 9 and one that they hear every year. When the baptism story is complete, explain that today’s Bible story happened just after Jesus’ baptism. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (But You’re God’s Son).

Show Color Pack 2. Have the children identify each of the three temptations in the illustration. As they identify them, help them remember Jesus’ response. Ask:

- ✪ What do you think about the evil spirit tempting Jesus to do wrong?
- ✪ How do you think Jesus was able to say no to each temptation?
- ✪ Perhaps no evil spirit takes you to high places, but when are you tempted to do something wrong?
- ✪ How do you think God’s Spirit might help you from making the wrong choice?

Their conversation around the final question above will lead into the Responding options.

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children.

- 1. Lenten Calendar** This calendar will help children and their families observe Lent. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (40 Days of Lent). Tell the children about Lent and any practices that your congregation has for this season, such as daily devotion aids or worship services during Holy Week. Look at the resource sheet, and count the spaces on the path. Explain that the forty days of Lent do not include the Sundays during that time. Give each child a bag of stickers. Have them place stickers on the first four spaces (Ash Wednesday through Saturday). Then they can color the picture of Jesus on the space for today. Talk together about where they can display this calendar at home. Make a calendar to use with the group.

**EASY
PREP**

Give the prayer to a worship leader to include as part of congregational Lenten worship.

2. **Prayer for Strength** Seeking the strength to resist temptation as Jesus did, children will write a prayer together. Show children the first newsprint sheet with “Children my age are tempted to . . .” Ask them how to finish this sentence, and write their answers on the newsprint. Do the same with the sheets with “Things that help me say no to temptation are . . .” and “It would be great if we could be more like Jesus by . . .” Then work together to complete each line of the following prayer, also on newsprint:

God, sometimes we are tempted to _____.

Give us strength to say no to temptation to _____.

Help us be more like Jesus, to _____.

Hear our prayers. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

3. **Pocket Rocks** An object to touch can provide strength in the time of temptation. Look at Color Pack 2, and note that one temptation was for Jesus to turn the stones into bread. Give each child a small, smooth rock. Invite them to create a pocket rock to remind them of Jesus’ choice to stay with God’s way. Together, talk about words or symbols that would fit on a rock to be an additional reminder of God’s Spirit with Jesus and with us. Provide permanent markers for children to use to write on their rocks. Suggest that they keep their rocks in a pocket or backpack.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

4. **Music** Peaceful music can also give strength. The simple words of “Dona Nobis Pacem” can be sung, hummed, or remembered in the mind when strength and calmness are needed. Listen to the song (track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). Then sing it together. Finally, have the group close their eyes and hear it in their minds. Talk together about when this song might be helpful. Remind them that they can listen to it without anyone knowing.

CLOSING

Gather at the worship table.

God Is with Me

Our God is with me
everywhere;
All day and night I’m in
God’s care.
It doesn’t matter where I
go,
Because God is with me,
this I know.

Repeat two times

Sing “God Is with Me” (Color Pack 30; track 7 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). If children do not know this song, play it for them and read the words together before singing it.

Remind the children that this new season of the church year, Lent, continues until Easter. It is a time when the whole church follows Jesus to Jerusalem.

Invite each child to think about how to say no to temptations this week. Pray:

Loving God, we will seek the presence of your Spirit when temptation comes to us. Amen.

To each child, say, “Thank you for coming. See you next week.”

March 6, 2022
The Temptation

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

But You're God's Son based on Luke 4:1-14

John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. Luke reports that Jesus was about 30 years old when this took place. Then God's Spirit led Jesus into the desert wilderness. Jesus stayed there for 40 days. During all that time, he didn't eat anything and he was really hungry, not just a little hungry, but starving hungry!

During these days, more than a month, the devil, an evil spirit, tempted Jesus. The evil spirit wanted Jesus to worship and follow the evil ways, not God's ways.

First, the devil said to Jesus, "I know you are starving hungry. You are God's Son; just turn some of these stones into bread."

Jesus said, "It is written in God's word, 'People don't live by bread alone.'"

Well, that didn't work. Now the evil spirit took Jesus to a high mountain, where he could see a long way. "Look, Jesus," said the devil. "I can put you in charge of all the lands that you see because I can give these lands to anyone I want. If you will worship me, I will give them to you."

Jesus looked around. He said, "It is written in God's word, 'Worship only God and serve only God.'"



The evil spirit must have been feeling a bit frustrated now because nothing seemed to persuade Jesus to join him. But the devil had one more idea. "Jesus," the devil said, trying to sound friendly, "come with me to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem."

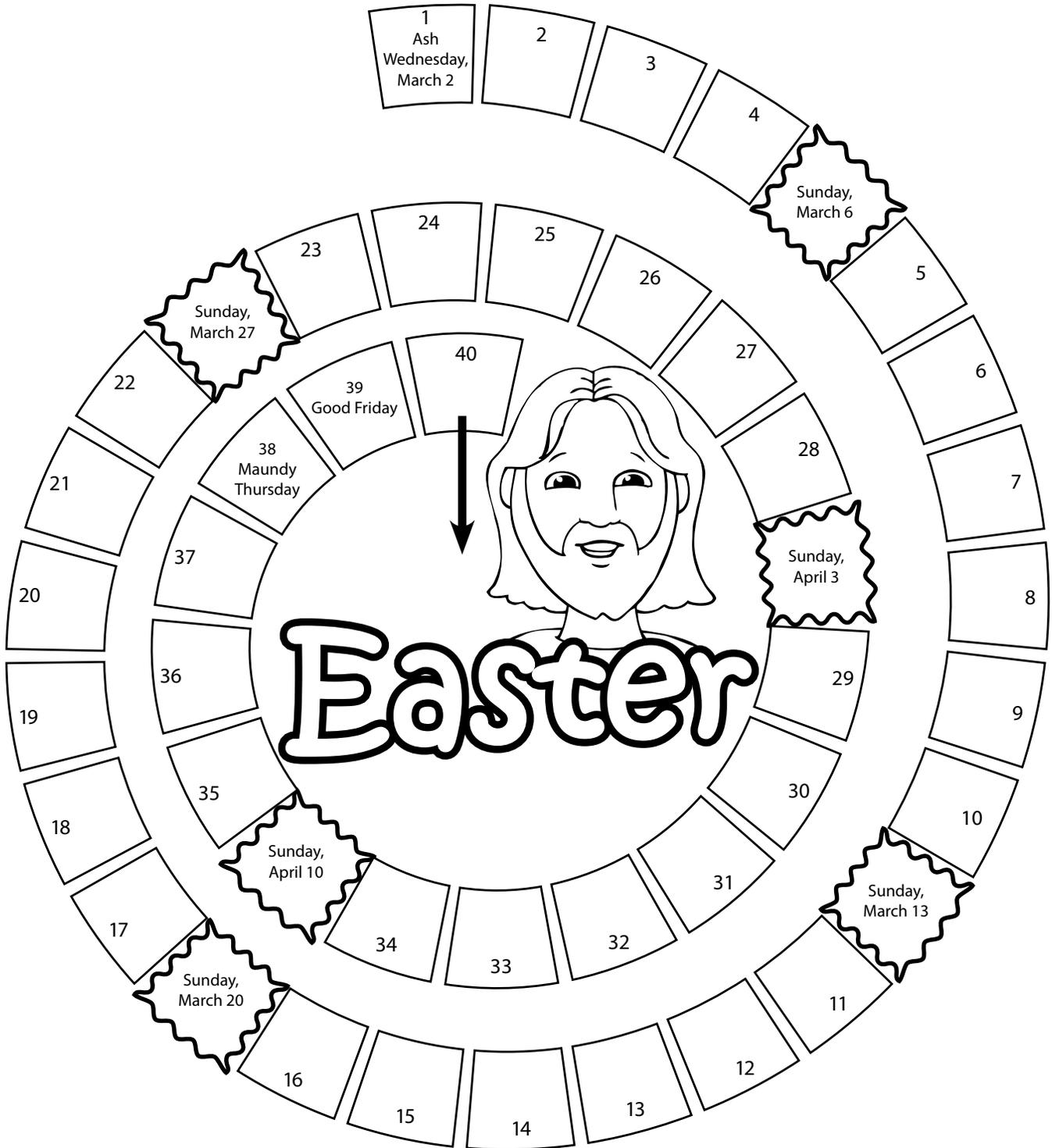
When they got there, the evil spirit said, "Jesus, since you are God's son, I know that if you fall from here angels will protect you so you won't be hurt. I know this because it is written in God's word. Come on, give it a try."

But Jesus was not going to be tricked. He answered, "It says not to tempt or test God."

The evil spirit had had enough for now. He left Jesus until he could find another time to tempt him.

40 Days of Lent

Directions: The Season of Lent is a time to prepare for Easter. It lasts 40 days, but we don't count the Sundays. Draw a cross or put a sticker on the chart each day, except for Sundays. Pray for God's love to help you grow.



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

Wilderness Testing

Goal for the Session *Heeding Jesus’ response to his testing in the wilderness, adults will commit to Lenten practices to strengthen their faith.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

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

Many adults are familiar with the wilderness experiences of life. The hardships of lost jobs, damaged relationships, or life-threatening illnesses test the resolve or the faith of the strongest. Yet prosperity can prove to be a far greater temptation, turning us away from centering our lives on the Holy One. To be sure, prosperity itself is not a bad thing. The test comes when the good things money can buy take center stage. Lent offers the opportunity to shine the clear light of God on our lives, turning toward penitence and away from those things, albeit good, that may test our relationship with God.

Eternal God, focus my attention and my intention on you as I prepare to lead. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 13, 2022
- candle, matches

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
- option 2: Resource Sheet 1, newsprint or board and marker, writing paper, pens
- option 3: writing paper, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, for option 2 in Responding, print the following on newsprint or a board: In my daily routine, how might I become more intentional in my relationship to God? How might I become more receptive to God's grace?

Welcome participants, reminding them that today is the first Sunday of Lent. If in the last session the group did a personal relationship inventory, invite those who are willing to tell about their discernment of ways to strengthen their relationship with God.

Ask adults to think about a time when they were tested through some difficult or challenging experience. Ask:

✠ Do you recall feeling God's presence in the midst of that experience?

Say that in this session, adults will encounter a time when Jesus himself was tested.

Light a candle. Invite the group to imagine themselves to have gone to a place of solitude, where they sit quietly, breathing in and out slowly. Ask them to consider what in their lives serves to distract them or turn them away from God. Encourage them to bring those things before God, offering them up and committing to move those things from the center of their lives.

Pray the following:

Holy God, we give thanks for your enduring presence. Guide us now as we seek to discern more clearly your loving intent for the world. Amen.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke continues to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit. While here the presence of the Holy Spirit does not mean the absence of testing, the Spirit is the power of God available for the contest.

Adults come with a variety of past experiences with Lent, from not observing it at all to giving up meat on Fridays. Encourage them to come to the season open to fresh expressions of attentiveness and penitence.

**EASY
PREP**

EXPLORING

Remind participants that five weeks ago, they explored Luke's account of Jesus' baptism, where the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. In today's focus scripture, which immediately follows his baptism and genealogy (Luke 3:21–38), Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tested.

Before reading the focus scripture, distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 4:1–13), and ask adults to silently read the "What?" excerpt. Ask adults to consider the following:

✪ What is the difference between a temptation and a test?

Form two groups. Ask one to listen closely to how the devil tests Jesus, while the other listens for Jesus' responses. Then read the focus passage, Luke 4:1–13, aloud. Afterward, ask the group listening for the devil's tests to describe them in turn, while the other group describes how Jesus responded.

Form small groups of three. In each group, ask one person to read Deuteronomy 8:1–3, one to read Deuteronomy 6:10–16 (the two passages from which Jesus quoted in his responses) and the third Psalm 91 (from which the devil quoted). Ask each person in a group to briefly summarize his or her passage for the other two. In the total group, discuss:

- ✪ What are the parallels between how Deuteronomy describes the experience of the Israelites and Jesus' experience?
- ✪ Who accompanied the Israelites in their long years in the wilderness? Who accompanied Jesus in his testing?
- ✪ In the absence of witnesses to this key event in the life of Jesus, how might we ourselves serve as witnesses?
- ✪ The phrase translated "If you are the Son of God" can be translated "since you are the Son of God." What difference, if any, does that make in understanding the passage?

To transition to Responding, ask volunteers to read aloud the "Where?" and the "So What?" excerpts. Ask them to reflect on the following:

- ✪ How does one say yes to God and no to the world?
- ✪ What spiritual tools do we have to remain intentional and receptive to God in seasons of protracted difficulty? In prosperous times when the good things of the world put us to the test?

Suggest that Lent is a time to further develop, or take on for the first time, practices that can increase intentionality and receptivity to God.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

1. **Fasting to Strengthen Faith** By refraining from that which dilutes a focus on God and giving themselves to other practices, adults can strengthen their faith. Say that when Jesus went into the wilderness to be tested, he fasted and prayed. Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Slow Down—and Fast) and pens and invite someone to read aloud

the explanation of fasting. Invite adults to consider the expanded definition of fasting as abstinence and the suggested options for abstinence. Ask them to name other options from their own lives, as well as posing questions. Encourage adults to take the sheet home and commit to practicing fasting and prayer during Lent.

- 2. Commit to Intentionality and Receptivity** In exploring an understanding of intentionality and receptivity to God's grace, adults can commit to practices to strengthen their faith that fit the way they live. Refer the group to the "So What?" excerpt's focus from Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 4:1–13) on intentionality and receptivity. For a variety of reasons, many adults do not set aside time for daily devotions.

Call attention to the posted questions and hand out writing paper and pens. Suggest that, rather than guilt tripping themselves for what they may not be doing, they examine their daily routine, identify ways to practice intentionality and receptivity in the midst of daily living, and write them down.

For example, if they take a commuter train to work, are in a video meeting, or are dropping children off at school, suggest that they notice people and situations around them and say a silent prayer for them. Encourage them to keep track of how often they are able to do this in the coming week.

- 3. Identify Forms of Prayer That Work** By identifying forms of prayer that fit their lives, adults can commit to practices that can strengthen their faith. Suggest that breath prayers—inhaling while praying one phrase, and exhaling while praying another—can be a powerful way of being more mindful of God throughout the day. Two other examples of prayers that fit the fabric of many people's lives are praying the newspaper—intentionally praying for the events and people in news stories one reads in the paper or online—and praying while walking, in which one prays for what one observes while on a walk.

Form small groups, distribute writing paper and pens, and invite adults to make a list of forms of prayer that they have used. Make a master list, or ask a volunteer to do so, and e-mail it to all members of the class.

CLOSING

Pray the following:

Gracious God, as your Spirit was with Jesus in his time of testing, be with us now as we seek to be more mindful of you, more intentional in discerning your presence and will, and more receptive to your abundant grace. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 13, 2022, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Luke 4:1–13

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Slow Down—and Fast

Fasting is a form of interior “spring cleaning”
—Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 80.

When Jesus was faced with his tests in the wilderness, he combined prayer and fasting. This and other examples in the Gospels suggest that the combination of prayer and fasting invites a greater measure of God’s power to be released through us than by prayer alone.

Lent is the traditional season of prayer and fasting in preparation for the great “feast of feasts,” Easter, the great fast of the church year. What real significance can Easter have if we do not know the experience of Lent? As Protestants began to recover church seasons, many of us took on the tradition of “giving up” things—dessert, chocolate, popcorn, chewing gum, or other frivolities. What we have participated in and witnessed is the trivialization of a very profound discipline. The question we need to ask in any spiritual discipline is:

- What does God want to accomplish in me in this discipline?

While refraining from eating food is the original meaning and most basic expression of fasting, one might consider fasting in terms of its inner dynamic: *abstinence*. In a culture obsessed with consumption, we need to consider fasting in terms of the whole of our affluent and addictive lifestyle. The purpose of abstinence is to learn to enjoy rightly God’s good gifts. What would it mean to abstain from the following:

- constant media stimulation?
- overpackaged, processed foods?
- needless shopping sprees?
- personal recognition?
- judging others?
- overpacked schedules?

Prayerfully consider the question of what you are doing or consuming to excess, that may be serving to distance you from experiencing God more fully. If you choose to fast from a thing, practice, or habit, keep a prayer journal to record your thoughts and prayers for a time.

—Excerpted and adapted from “The Practice of Self Emptying: Rediscovering the Fast,” in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life, Newly Revised Edition*, 2014, by Marjorie J. Thompson (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), 81–94.

