

Life-Sharing & Pioneers Lesson 1 “Jesus Is Here” Luke 2:41-52

1. Who and what was God to you when you were 12 years old?

When I was 12, God was a concept in my head. I only believed in God when I really wanted something from God. I thought God was ready to punish me at a moment’s notice. It was easier to pretend that God did not exist. I had no idea that God had a daily plan for my life.

Luke 2:41-52 (Today’s New International Version, ©2005)

The Boy Jesus at the Temple

⁴¹ Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”^[a] ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And as Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and in favor with God and people.

Commentary Material

JESUS SPEAKS WITH THE RELIGIOUS TEACHERS / [2:41-52](#) / [15](#)

In first-century Israel, the age of twelve was considered the time when a child was beginning to reach adulthood. This section of Luke contains an incident at this crucial juncture in Jesus' childhood to give readers an indication of what Jesus' life would

center on: the teachings of God, his true Father. Jesus' own testimony of his purpose, "I had to be in my Father's house" ([2:49](#) NIV), concludes the infancy narratives ([1:1–2:52](#)). Luke is the only Gospel writer to offer this quick glimpse into Jesus' childhood. This story not only reflects Luke's thorough research of Jesus' life but also reveals a youth who, at an early age, understood his special connection to God and dedicated himself to studying God's law. Sit back in amazement, just like those who heard the boy Jesus speak during that Passover season long ago, and rededicate yourself to following Jesus' example, diligently studying the Scripture to learn more about God your Father.

[2:41-42](#) Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual.^{NLT}

According to God's law, every male was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the great festivals ([Exodus 23:14-17](#); [Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). In the spring, the Passover was celebrated, followed immediately by the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. Passover commemorated the night of the Jews' escape from Egypt when God had killed the Egyptian firstborn but had passed over Israelite homes (see [Exodus 12:21-36](#)). Passover was the most important of the three annual festivals. *Every year*, along with other Jewish families, Jesus and his *parents* (referring to Joseph and Mary, his earthly parents) *went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival*. Again there is attention to the law—Jesus grew up in a home where God's laws were obeyed and annual festivals observed. So, the year when *Jesus was twelve years old* was no different, and the family set off for the festival *as usual*.

LIFE APPLICATION

REGULAR HABITS

Jesus' parents, like most devout Jews, went to Jerusalem each year. Jesus' family had the right priorities. Families that establish regular habits of worship are less likely to have their spiritual life deflected by alternative attractions. Keep worship on top of your family's agenda. Putting God first is a great example to children, who quickly learn what parents care about by observing how they plan and spend time.

2:43-44 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.^{NRSV} At age twelve, Jesus was considered almost an adult, so he probably didn't spend a lot of time with his parents during the feast. Those who attended these feasts usually traveled in caravans for protection from robbers along the Palestine roads. It was customary for the women and children to travel at the front of the caravan, with the men bringing up the rear. A twelve-year-old boy conceivably could have been in either group, and both Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was with the other one. Their caravan probably included a large number of people. So it was not until they had gone *a day's journey* and were ready to strike camp that Mary and Joseph checked for Jesus among all their *relatives and friends*, only to discover that he was not in the crowd but had *stayed behind in Jerusalem*.

2:45-47 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.^{NRSV} When Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was not among the travelers, *they returned to Jerusalem to search for him*. The *three days* that elapsed probably involves one day in travel away from the city, one day for them to return, then finding him on the third day. Certainly to their great relief, *they found him in the temple*.

The temple courts were famous throughout Judea as places of learning. The apostle Paul studied in Jerusalem, perhaps in the temple courts, under Gamaliel, one of its foremost teachers ([Acts 22:3](#)). At the time of the Passover, the greatest rabbis of the land would assemble to teach and to discuss great truths among themselves. The coming Messiah would no doubt have been a popular discussion topic, for everyone was expecting him. Jesus would have been eager to listen and to ask probing questions. It was not his youth, but the depth of his wisdom, that *amazed* these teachers.

2:48 His parents didn't know what to think. "Son!" his mother said to him. "Why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."^{NLT} Mary and Joseph knew the true identity of their son, yet that did not keep them from being typical concerned parents. Their son had been gone from them for three days, yet that seems not to have bothered him at all. Jesus

was absorbed in discussions at the temple and did not seem to have wondered about his parents or his connection with the caravan back to Nazareth. Mary was worried, anxious, and overwhelmed by what had happened and her frustrating search for Jesus. Mary's words indicate a hint of scolding: *Why have you done this to us?* She explained that they had been *frantic* ever since he turned up missing, *searching* through the city to find him. They did not understand how Jesus could have treated them so casually.

2:49-50 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.^{NRSV} Jesus couldn't understand why Mary and Joseph got so frantic in their search for him. He surely felt bad that he had caused them distress, but it made perfect sense to him that he would be in his *Father's house*, that is, in the temple. This is the first mention of Jesus' awareness that he was God's Son (he called God "my Father") and that he had special work to do (he said I "must" be here). His relationship with his Father in heaven superseded his human family and even his human home. While he probably went to school and studied along with other boys in the synagogue in Nazareth, to be in the temple with many learned teachers was a great opportunity for Jesus. He took full advantage of his time there, and it seems that he thought his parents would know where he would be.

Jesus' parents *did not understand* what he meant about his Father's house. They didn't realize that he was making a distinction between his earthly father and his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that he had a unique relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God's Son, they didn't understand what his mission would involve. Besides, they had to rear him, along with his brothers and sisters ([Matthew 13:55-56](#)), as a normal child. They knew Jesus was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind. They had to learn and observe the complex outworkings of Jesus' special identity and calling even as he lived in their family.

2:51 Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them; and his mother stored all these things in her heart.^{NLT} Although Jesus had been in his Father's house, and although he did not understand his parents' concern, Luke explained that Jesus *returned to Nazareth . . . and was obedient*. Jesus understood his identity with God but also was not yet supposed to go about his earthly ministry (that did not happen until he was thirty years old). Jesus' behavior was not disobedient but precociously acting out his true identity, which he would one day

fulfill. In the meantime, Jesus lived a human life, obeying his parents, growing up, studying, and learning. As she had with the words of the shepherds at Jesus' birth ([2:19](#)), Mary *stored all these things in her heart*. She did not completely understand her son, but she remembered these events, thought them over, and sought to find their meaning. One day, it all would be clear. One day her son would become her Savior, and she would understand.

LIFE APPLICATION

BEING YOUNG

If you are twelve years old, one of your hardest jobs in life is obeying the adults who run your home. They are called parents, and they always think they know best. It's very tough for a twelve-year-old to keep from taking over the family and running it according to intelligent twelve-year-old standards. But when the temptation strikes, remember Jesus. . . . Even though he knew his real Father, he did not reject his earthly parents. He went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their authority for another eighteen years. God's people do not despise human relationships or family responsibilities. If the Son of God obeyed his human parents, how much more should you honor your family members!

[2:52](#) So Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by God and by all who knew him.^{NLT} This wording is similar to [1 Samuel 2:21, 26](#). The Bible does not record any events of the next eighteen years of Jesus' life, but Jesus undoubtedly was learning and maturing. As the oldest in a large family, he assisted Joseph in his carpentry work. Joseph may have died during this time, leaving Jesus to provide for the family. The normal routines of daily life gave Jesus a solid understanding of the Judean people.

The second chapter of Luke shows us that although Jesus was unique, he had a normal childhood and adolescence. In terms of development, he went through the same progression we do. He grew physically (*in height*) and mentally (*in wisdom*), he related to other people (*loved . . . by all who knew him*), and he was *loved by God*. A full human life is balanced. It was important to Jesus—and it should be

important to all believers—to develop fully and harmoniously in each of these key areas: physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

2. Why do you think Jesus stayed behind at the temple as a 12 year old?

Jesus was interested in spiritual matters. He knew the temple represented the dwelling place of God and he felt naturally drawn to it. A twelve year old in Jesus' day would have had more responsibility than a 12 year old today, and he was much closer to being an adult. Jesus wanted to start the process of getting closer to His Heavenly Father.

3. Why would Mary and Joseph become so frantic in their search?

Mary and Joseph were frantic over something dreadful of possibly happening to Jesus as their son. But then there was the added burden of knowing that God had entrusted them with a son that was to be very unique in the world. Up until this time, we do know of any other sign given to Mary and Joseph since the time the angel told them to leave Egypt since those who wanted to kill Jesus were no longer alive. They have been waiting for a decade for God's promises to them to become true, and now it looks as though through their oversight, God's promises may go down the drain.

4. How do you think they felt asking their family and friends “have you seen our son Jesus?” When have you ever allowed pride to keep you from asking for help when you needed it?

I think it must have been an awkward situation for them. Many of the family members had to have known about the unique circumstances of Jesus’ birth, and they have to have known about the fanfare surrounding the angels and shepherds. Some may have felt envy and jealousy toward them. I can imagine the sarcasm from some who didn’t believe them, asking “what, you lost the savior of the world. How could you do such a thing.” Or “wait a minute, you’re talking about the son the Holy Spirit gave to the two of you. You let him get away. Why not ask the Spirit where he is. Ha Ha Ha.

Although Mary and Joseph did not let pride keep them from asking for help, there have been times when I allowed pride to keep me from asking for help. I pretended to know something I didn’t know, simply because everyone else around me, seemed to already know it. I was at hotels for quite a time not eating free hot waffles, because I was too proud to ask someone how the machine was suppose to work to cook the things. I have wasted time looking for items in the store, because pride kept me from asking people where things were located.

5. Why would the leaders have been willing to answer Jesus’ questions and engage him in a discussion when he was just 12 years old?

It was the wisdom with which Jesus asked and answered questions that caught the leaders totally off God. If you notice in verse 40, before Jesus stayed behind in

Jerusalem, it tells us “And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on him.” This episode in the temple is the first time we see the wisdom inside of Jesus rising to the surface and coming out. It was obvious that no twelve year old had spoken like this 12 year old. It’s because Jesus looked and lived like a 12 year old, that the leaders were captivated by his responses.

6. How old do you think a person has to be, to obtain wisdom and knowledge from God? How are wisdom and knowledge obtained?

God has never place an age limit on who God’s spirit will fill and grant wisdom and knowledge to. You may recall that Samuel was a young boy, when God first called and spoke to him. God filled Samuel with wisdom. Wisdom and knowledge comes from God, and God imparts them to people of all ages. The bible teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy one is understanding. The more of ourselves we yield to God, the more wisdom and knowledge we obtain. We can grant knowledge through the study of the word of God and bible study. Wisdom comes from practically living out the Word of God in our lives so that we can understand the ways of God.

7. After all the promises Mary and Joseph received, why do you think they were astonished to find Jesus among the teachers in the temple?

Is has been nearly ten years since the last time an angel spoke to Mary and Joseph about Jesus. It’s possible that they may have pushed all those prophecies on the back burner of their minds. On the other hand, after waiting for 12 years for something to happen to show the prophecies was about to be fulfilled, they may have been astonished with excitement that something was finally about to happen. Jesus must have been such an ordinary child, that they did not expect

to find him doing something so important as to be engaging religious leaders, that they probably would not have been able to even talk to on a religious level.

8. Why are we tempted to doubt the plans that God has for our lives and our futures?

When God does not answer our prayers quick enough, or in the way we had hoped to be used, we can begin to doubt God. The mistake we make, is to think that what we want to do for God is the same as what God wants us to do for Him. God is not as interested in the spectacular as we are. Jesus has all these great questions, answers and ideas, yet it is God's will for Him to just go home and listen to his parents and stay off the scene for another 18 years. We would consider that a waste of a great talent. God considers it His plan for Jesus' life from age 12 to 18. Agreeing to submit to God's plan whatever it may be, can cause us to avoid a lot of pain and disappointment. We may be having our greatest impact for the kingdom in an area of our lives that we think is insignificant. The trouble is, we do not know what truly is insignificant.

9. Mary took Jesus' actions of staying behind in Jerusalem as a personal attack on them to make them upset. What do we learn from this passage about the need to let others go in order for them to serve God?

Jesus was not at all trying to make Mary and Joseph upset. What he was trying to do was to discover what changes God had ahead for his life. We often time include others in our visions for our futures, without considering, our vision may not be

God's vision for their lives. Many a parent has been disappointed that a child didn't come back home to live, or back to work the family business, or back to serve in the church they grew up in, because they grew up with a vision of this is the way things are going to be. They invest so much into the child, thinking its out of selfless love for the child, but in reality, part of it is an investment in the vision they have for the child's life. But then God or the person has a different vision in mind and it's very easy to feel betrayed by the person, whose not seeing their actions as a betrayal at all. Mary and Joseph may have felt betrayed. Jesus was attempting to live out a vision inside of him.

10. Why do we find it so hard to let others go?

We do not like some of the transitions that life bring our way. Everytime others leave, a transition takes place in our lives and our futures go off in a slightly different directions. We have to let others go in our families, we have to let them go in our churches, and we have to let them go in our friendships. God never promised we would always have everybody around us that we love. Transitions can be painful.

11. Why did Jesus go back with Mary and Joseph? What can we learn about authority from this passage?

Jesus went back with Mary and Joseph because it was the right thing to do. There was still some things he had to learn from them as his parents. The most important was submission to their authority. One cannot handle authority well, until one can function under authority well. His role at age 12 was to yield to the authority of his parents. He was not to do great teaching lectures to impress those with degrees. Unfortunately, if Jesus were alive at age 12 today, we would insist on making him a star on Christian TV or going around on the preaching circuit. Every spiritual gift a person has, has to be brought under authority so that the use of the gift does not greatly outgrow the character of the person.

12. What does it take to increase in wisdom and in favor with God and with people?

It takes a willingness to stand by the principles of God's word no matter what. Especially when it hurts to do so.

1. If you were told to prepare your home for a visit from President Obama and his wife, what would you do to get ready?

We would probably start to clean the house and get it in order. We'd shovel the snow and pick up any paper that might be around. We would let others know that the President & first lady was coming to our house. We would invite as many people as we were allowed to have to be present in the house when the couple arrived.

Luke 3:1-18 (Today's New International Version, ©2005)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.”^[a]

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰ “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

¹³ “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. ¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with^[b] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

Commentary Luke 3: 1-18

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS / [3:1-18](#) / [16](#)

When John began preaching in the wilderness, a group of eager listeners gathered around him. The Israelites considered John to be a great prophet. God had not sent a prophet to Israel for around four hundred years, so people noticed John. Some whispered: Has the Messiah come, the promised Deliverer of Israel? Indeed, he had. But he was not John; he was the quiet carpenter of Nazareth, watching and waiting for God's appointed time. When that time came, that carpenter, Jesus, would announce a new era, with a brand-new covenant—the kingdom of God had come!

Meanwhile, John the Baptist shouted in the barren wilderness, speaking like the prophets of old, exhorting the people to turn from their sin to avoid punishment and turn to God to experience his mercy. This is a message for all times and places, but John spoke it with particular urgency: he was preparing the people for the coming Messiah. His ministry was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of "a voice shouting in the wilderness" ([3:4](#) NLT) to prepare the coming of the Lord. The calling for believers today is similar to John's, for they too should prepare the way for others to come to Jesus. And sometimes, they have to muster the courage to call people, even though a moral and spiritual wilderness surrounds them. How much urgency do you feel for those who still need to hear the message?

[3:1-2](#) In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene.^{NRSV}

Once again Luke gave his Roman audience a historical context for his narrative (as in [2:1-2](#)). This would be like writing "during Abraham Lincoln's administration." *Tiberius*, the Roman emperor, ruled from A.D. 14 to 37. He began his reign in August of A.D. 14 when Caesar Augustus died. Thus, Tiberius's *fifteenth year* would have been from August A.D. 28 to the following August.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman *governor* responsible for the province of *Judea* from A.D. 26 to 36. The term "governor" is quite general. According to history, Pilate was actually *praefectus Iudaeae*, a military title of a commander of auxiliary troops. Originally, Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, had been assigned this portion to rule after his father died, but he ruled so poorly that his subjects petitioned for him to be

removed. The Romans installed a governor in A.D. 6, and eventually Pilate held this post. Pilate was greedy, inflexible, and cruel. He was always at odds with the Jews. At one point, he brought Roman standards bearing the figure of the emperor into Jerusalem. The Jews protested and Pilate eventually removed them.

Herod, ruler of Galilee, was Herod Antipas. Herod and his *brother* (actually, half brother) *Philip* were both sons of the cruel Herod the Great, who had been dead more than twenty years. Herod Antipas was in power from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. Philip ruled *the region of Itureaea and Trachonitis* from 4 B.C. to A.D. 33 or 34. *Lysanias ruler of Abilene* is otherwise unknown. The region of Abilene was north of the other regions mentioned. Herod Antipas, Philip, Pilate, and Lysanias apparently had equal powers in governing their separate territories. All were subject to Rome and responsible for keeping peace in their respective lands.

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.^{NRSV} Under Jewish law there was only one high priest. He was to be appointed from Aaron's line, and he would hold his position for life. By this time, however, the religious system had been corrupted, and the Roman government was appointing its own religious leaders to maintain greater control over the Jews. Apparently the Roman authorities had deposed the Jewish-appointed *Annas* (who ruled from A.D. 6 to 15). Five of Annas's sons became high priest; *Caiaphas* was his son-in-law, who held the *high priesthood* from A.D. 18 to 36. Caiaphas, therefore, actually held the office, but Annas retained his title (see [Acts 4:6](#)) and probably much of the power and influence it carried. Because the Jews believed the high priest's position to be for life, they would have continued to call Annas their high priest.

The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.^{NRSV} This "John" refers to John the Baptist, *son of Zechariah* the priest, whose birth story is told in [chapter 1](#). The words Luke used here to describe John's call are reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. Dating a prophet's call with reference to political and religious authorities was also common in the Old Testament. Thus, Luke was placing John in the category of the Old Testament prophets (see [7:24-28](#); [1 Samuel 15:10](#); 2 Samuel [7:4](#); [1 Kings 17:2](#); [Isaiah 6:1](#); [38:4](#); [Jeremiah 1:1-3](#); [2:1](#); [13:3](#); [Ezekiel 1:1-3](#); [Daniel 7:1](#); [Hosea 1:1](#)). There had not been a prophet in Israel for more than four hundred years. It was widely believed that when the Messiah would come, prophecy would reappear ([Joel 2:28-29](#); [Malachi 3:1](#); [4:5](#)). With the arrival of John, prophecy returned to Israel, and this was a sign to the people. For more on the wilderness theme, see [3:4](#).

"The word of God came to John" means that God gave John his message, and from that point, John brought that message to the people. The narrative here picks up from [1:80](#), which explains that John lived *in the wilderness* until he began his preaching. That preaching began only after God gave John the message he was to proclaim.

LIFE APPLICATION

MEASURE OF GREATNESS

Powerful religious and political leaders like Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas ruled in Palestine, but they were upstaged by a desert prophet from rural Judea. God chose to speak through the loner, John the Baptist, who has gone down in history as greater than any of the rulers of his day. How often people judge others by the superficial standards of power, wealth, and beauty, and miss the truly great people through whom God works! Greatness is measured not by what a person has but by his or her faith in God. Like John, give yourself entirely to God, so that his power can work through you.

3:3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.^{NRSV} The word of God came to John in the wilderness, and apparently he stayed in the wilderness with the people coming out to hear him (3:7). There had been no prophecy in Israel for hundreds of years; news that a prophet had burst onto the scene excited the people. So John went from place to place *into all the region around the Jordan*, taking the message that God had given him (3:2).

John proclaimed to those who came to hear him *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. "Baptism," "repentance," and "forgiveness" go hand in hand. To "repent" means to confess sin and then to turn away from sin and toward God. It is, in effect, an inner cleansing. So John used an act to symbolize that cleansing from sin: "baptism."

It would tire the hands of an angel to write down all the pardons God bestows upon true penitent believers.

William Bates

The origins of John's baptism are difficult to trace. Some have claimed that his baptism modeled that practiced by those at Qumran; others have urged that his baptism modeled that practiced by Jews when initiating proselytes to Judaism. The members of the Qumran community viewed themselves as the covenant community of the last days and so dwelt in the desert, living an ascetic life and immersing themselves daily in acts of ceremonial cleansing. At the same time they taught that internal repentance must accompany the external act. Its sacramental nature is seen in the fact that only a full member of the community could practice it, and then only after two probationary years. Converts from pagan religions were admitted to Judaism only after fulfilling certain obligations, which included the study of the Torah, circumcision, and a ritual bath to wash away the impurities of the Gentile background.

John's baptism both parallels and differs with these forms of baptism. His baptism was new in that he was asking the Jews themselves to be baptized as a sign of repentance. They considered themselves "clean" as descendants of Abraham; only "unclean" Gentiles needed baptism. But John explained that sin makes everyone "unclean," and they all needed cleansing and forgiveness. Forgiveness from God is available, but there can be no forgiveness without repentance.

LIFE APPLICATION

TURN AROUND!

Every now and then in a football or basketball game, some poor player gets totally turned around and begins running toward the wrong goal. When that happens, his coaches and teammates don't stand by passively and politely suggest that he rethink his plan. They scream and yell in the most impassioned tones and terms for him to stop and turn around—NOW!

John the Baptist's message was very similar: you are heading the wrong way, and if you don't do a "180," you will meet with disaster. There was very little concern for subtlety or social protocol in John's preaching. He let people know in no uncertain terms that if they continued on their present course, no matter how well or how skillfully they proceeded, they were on a collision course with judgment. John called for true repentance—nothing less than a complete change of mind, heart, and behavior, the kind of radical change that only God can enable. Have you experienced this kind of change in your life? Do you need to repent of anything—actions, thoughts, attitudes, omissions—now?

For baptism, John needed water, so he remained in the region around the Jordan River. This seventy-mile-long river stretches between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem lies about twenty miles west of the Jordan. Many significant events in the nation's history took place by the Jordan River. For example, there the Israelites renewed their covenant with God before entering the Promised Land ([Joshua 1–5](#)). In the Old Testament, "repent" means the radical return to God of those who have broken the covenant with him ([Ezekiel 18:21, 30](#)). So this prophet burst onto the scene at the Jordan River, calling the people back to God—this time through repenting, turning from sin, and being baptized.

[3:4](#) As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.'"^{NKJV} In John's day, before a king took a trip, messengers would tell

those he was planning to visit to prepare the roads for him. Similarly John told his listeners to make their lives ready so the Lord could come to them.

Isaiah the prophet also called his people to repentance. The second half of the book of Isaiah focuses on the promise of salvation—the coming of the Messiah and the arrival of a man who would announce this coming ([Isaiah 40:3](#)). John the Baptist was, in fact, that *voice . . . crying in the wilderness*. The Greek word for "crying" is *boao*, meaning "to cry out with great feeling." Why did this voice come from the "wilderness"? The word "wilderness," also translated "desert," refers more to a lonely, uninhabited place than to a sandy desert. Isaiah's use of the word "wilderness" alludes to the wilderness experience of the children of Israel on their exodus from Egypt to Canaan. The "wilderness" represents the place where God would once again act to rescue his people and bring them back to him.

John was merely God's "voice" for the important message that God was sending to his people ([3:2](#)). What was that message? *Prepare the way of the LORD*. "Prepare" refers to making something ready; "way" could also be translated "road." Thus, part of "preparing the way" is to *make His paths straight*. John's audience, the people in Israel who came to see this prophet in the wilderness, were faced with a life-changing message. If they would prepare themselves—clear away the spiritual debris and straighten any "crooked" moral paths—the way would be ready for their King and Messiah to come. Those who accepted John's status as a true prophet from God understood these words as God's message to them, humbled themselves, repented, received baptism, and opened the "way" for their Messiah to take hold of their lives.

[3:5-6](#) "Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."^{NKJV} While both Matthew and Mark quoted from Isaiah [40:3](#), Luke also quoted the two following verses, [Isaiah 40:4-5](#). As the "way" is being prepared ([3:4](#)), seemingly impossible tasks must be done—such as valleys filled in and mountains leveled, crooked places straightened and rough ways smoothed. The images of these words reflect a powerful construction force grinding up everything in its path. God's highway will roll over every obstacle of unbelief or idolatry. As people prepare for the King, they will "straighten out" their lives through repentance from sin. The important words quoted from Isaiah (*and all flesh shall see the salvation of God*) showed Luke's non-Jewish audience that salvation was for all people, not just the Jews (see also [Isaiah 52:10](#)). John the Baptist called all humankind to prepare to meet Jesus. As Simeon said, "My eyes have seen your salvation" ([2:30](#)), so one day "all flesh" shall see God's salvation, for it will be made available to everyone.

LIFE APPLICATION

FEAR OR FAITH?

What motivates your faith—fear of the future, or a desire to be a better person in a better world? Some people wanted to be baptized by John so they could escape eternal punishment, but they didn't turn to God for salvation. John had harsh words for such people. He knew that God values reformation above ritual. Is your faith motivated by a desire for a new, changed life, or is it only like a vaccination or insurance policy against possible disaster?

3:7 Here is a sample of John's preaching to the crowds that came for baptism: "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?"^{NLT} John was the first prophet Israel had heard in over four hundred years. When news spread that a prophet was preaching in the wilderness, *crowds* came out to hear him, and apparently many also believed his message and *came for baptism*. This baptism represented repentance from sin ([3:3](#)). This sample of his *preaching* sounds harsh; Matthew tells us that John spoke these words specifically to "Pharisees and Sadducees," distinguished men who had come to John not to be baptized but simply to find out what was going on ([Matthew 3:7](#)). John called them a *brood of snakes* (Jesus also used this term, see [Matthew 12:34](#); [23:33](#)), conveying how dangerous and cunning these religious leaders were and suggesting that they were Satan's offspring (see [Genesis 3](#); [John 8:44](#)). John asked them, "*Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?*" The Jews, and especially their self-righteous religious leaders, applied God's judgment to the Gentiles; John warned that judgment was coming on them. John's astonishing frankness made him popular with the people but unpopular with the religious establishment. Anyone, religious leader or member of the crowd, who was open to John's message found repentance, baptism, and readiness for the coming Messiah. Those who rejected him faced stunning accusation for their hard-heartedness.

3:8 "Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."^{NRSV} Confession of sins and a changed life are inseparable. Faith without deeds is dead ([James 2:14-26](#)). Repentance must be tied to action, or it isn't real. John's message is very similar to both that of Amos and James in showing God's ethical and social demands flowing from salvation (see, for example, [Amos 5:4-15](#); [James 2:14-25](#)). Those who believe must also *bear fruits worthy of repentance*—they must truly turn from sin and live for God.

The Jews thought that, as descendants of Abraham, they were guaranteed God's blessings and that the promise given to the patriarchs was guaranteed to all their descendants, no matter how they acted or what they believed. John explained, however, that relying on Abraham as their ancestor would not qualify them for God's

kingdom. John probably pointed at stones nearby and said, "*God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*" John may have used a play on the Aramaic words for "stone" and "children" in making his point that God can make a nation for himself from whomever he chooses. Only those who "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" would be ready for God's coming kingdom. The apostle Paul would later explain this to the Romans: "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. . . . It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" ([Romans 9:6-8](#) NIV).

LIFE APPLICATION

NO HAND-ME-DOWNS

Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being Abraham's descendants was not enough for God. The religious leaders relied more on their family lines than on their faith or their standing with God. For them, religion was inherited. But a personal relationship with God is not handed down from parents to children. Everyone has to commit to it on his or her own. Don't rely on someone else's faith for your salvation. If you profess to having a life renewed and changed by Jesus, then make sure your actions truly show it.

[3:9](#) "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."^{NIV} God's message hasn't changed since the Old Testament—people will be judged for their unproductive lives. Just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, God's people should produce a crop of good deeds ([3:8](#)). John said that people who claim to believe God but don't live for God are like unproductive trees that will be cut down. *The ax is already at the root of the trees*, poised and ready to do its work, cutting down those trees that do not bear good fruit (see [Psalm 74:5-6](#); [Jeremiah 46:22](#)). Not only will the trees be *cut down*, but they will be *thrown into the fire*, signifying complete destruction.

LIFE APPLICATION

IN NAME ONLY

We know people by their fruits, their lives. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but do nothing about it. Like many in John's day

who were God's people in name only, people are of no value if they are Christians in name only. If others can't see someone's faith in the way that person treats them, he or she may not be God's person at all. So how are believers to bear good fruit? God calls them to be "active" in their obedience. To be productive for God means obeying his teachings, resisting temptation, actively serving others, and sharing the faith.

3:10-11 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."^{NRSV} John's preaching elicited responses from the crowd. Many asked, "*What then should we do* in order to 'bear fruit'?" (3:8; see also [Galatians 5:22-23](#)). To the mixed *crowds*, John responded that they could readily show compassion, such as sharing food and clothing with people in need. The word for "coats" is actually "tunic," referring to a short garment worn for extra warmth under the longer robe. The person with two tunics ought to *share with anyone who has none*. The same with extra food, so that no one is hungry.

3:12-13 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.^{NIV} *Tax collectors* were notorious for their dishonesty. Romans gathered funds for their government by farming out the collection privilege. Tax collectors earned their own living by adding a sizable sum—whatever they could get away with—to the total and keeping this money for themselves. Unless the people revolted and risked Roman retaliation, they had to pay whatever was demanded. Obviously they hated the tax collectors, who were generally dishonest, greedy, and ready to betray their own countrymen for cold cash. Yet, said John, God would accept even these men; God desires to pour out mercy on those who confess, and then to give strength to live changed lives. So when these men *also came to be baptized*, they too asked what they should do to act on their repentance. John told them to tax appropriately: *Don't collect any more than you are required to*. They had to stop enriching themselves at the expense of their countrymen. John did not ask them to quit their jobs, only to do them honestly. Both Matthew and Zacchaeus were tax collectors ([5:27-28](#); [19:2](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

John's message demanded at least three specific responses:

1. Share what you have with those who need it.

2. Whatever your job is, do it well and with fairness.

3. Be content with what you are earning.

John had no time to give comforting messages to those who lived careless or selfish lives—he was calling the people to right living. What changes can you make in sharing what you have, doing your work honestly and well, and being content?

3:14 "What should we do?" asked some soldiers. John replied, "Don't extort money, and don't accuse people of things you know they didn't do. And be content with your pay."^{NLT} John's powerful message even reached *soldiers*. Luke does not specify, but most scholars agree that these were not Roman soldiers but Jewish soldiers who served to help keep the peace (similar to police officers). Like the tax collectors, they stood in a separate and privileged position over the common people, capable of using their power for good or for taking advantage of people. So when the soldiers asked what they should do, John told them to quit some of their activities—such as extorting money from people and accusing people of things they didn't do. As with the tax collectors, they were told to control their greed by being *content* with their pay.

John's message took root in unexpected places—among the poor, the dishonest, and even hardened soldiers. These people were painfully aware of their needs. Too often respectability is confused with right living. They are not the same. Respectability can even hinder right living if it keeps a person from seeing his or her need for God. If you had to choose, would you protect your character or your reputation?

LIFE APPLICATION

TRUE RELIGION

Have you ever heard someone describe another person's religious commitment by saying, "Well, she talks a good game"? Obviously, there is a difference in talking about faith and actually living it. When some soldiers—gruff, hardened, experienced military men—came to John and asked what they needed to do to get their lives right with God, he didn't tell them to start singing in the choir or giving their testimonies. He told them to change the way they lived. John promoted an aggressive, outgoing, action-oriented way of life, not a "shelter-in-the-time-of-storm" mentality. True repentance, true religion, does not consist of changing the vocabulary as much as changing the lifestyle. Talk is cheap; true religion

is not. What has yours cost you lately?

3:15 Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah.^{NLT} There had not been a prophet in Israel for more than four hundred years. It was widely believed that when the Messiah came, prophecy would reappear ([Joel 2:28, 29](#); [Malachi 3:1; 4:5](#)). When John burst onto the scene, the people were excited. He was obviously a great prophet, and they were sure that the eagerly awaited age of the Messiah had arrived. Some, in fact, *were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah*. Even after his death, some of John's disciples considered him to be the Messiah (see [Acts 18:25](#); [19:1-7](#)). John spoke like the prophets of old, saying that the people must turn from their sin to avoid punishment and turn to God to experience his mercy and approval. This is a message for all times and places, but John spoke it with particular urgency—he was preparing the people for the coming Messiah.

3:16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."^{NIV} John's baptism with water symbolized the washing away of sins. His baptism coordinated with his message of repentance and reformation. Baptism was an "outward" sign of commitment. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an "inward" change of attitude leading to a changed life. John's baptism did not give salvation; it prepared a person to welcome the coming Messiah and receive *his* message and *his* baptism.

Although John was the first genuine prophet in four hundred years, Jesus the Messiah would be infinitely greater than he. John was pointing out how insignificant he was compared to the *one more powerful* who was coming. In Oriental households, a lowly slave would untie the sandals of guests and then wash their feet. John saw himself as even lower than that slave in comparison to the coming Messiah. John was not even worthy of doing the most menial tasks for him, like untying his sandals.

He who has the Holy Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs.

Alexander MacLaren

The coming of the Spirit had been prophesied as part of the Messiah's arrival. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire* revealed the identity of the promised Messiah:

- I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. ([Isaiah 44:3](#) NIV)

- The time is coming. . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. . . . For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) NIV)
- I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ([Ezekiel 36:26-27](#) NIV)
- And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. ([Joel 2:28-29](#) NIV)

LIFE APPLICATION

FIRED UP!

In describing the baptism that Jesus brings, John links the ministry of the Holy Spirit with fire. Fire can give light, warm us, and cook our food. Fire can also purify. The Holy Spirit, like fire, purifies believers in a number of ways. He shines light on their hearts and in their minds, disclosing areas that need to be confessed, repented, and brought under the lordship of Christ. He uses the heat of conviction from God's Word to prompt them to deal with their sins. He illuminates the path before believers, guiding them into all truth. Like a laser in the hands of a skillful surgeon, the Holy Spirit helps bring healing and wholeness to the believer. Have you taken time lately to let him examine you and do any necessary treatment?

The Old Testament promised a time when God would demonstrate his purifying power among people ([Isaiah 32:15](#); [Ezekiel 39:29](#)). The prophets also looked forward to a purifying fire ([Isaiah 4:4](#); [Malachi 3:2](#)). This looked ahead to Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Holy Spirit would be sent by Jesus in the form of tongues of fire, empowering his followers to proclaim Jesus' resurrection in many languages. The baptism with fire also symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing God's judgment on those who refuse to repent. The experience would not necessarily be like that recorded in [Acts 2](#), but the outcome would be the same. This baptism would purify and refine each believer. When Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, the entire person would be refined by the Spirit's fire. For those who believe, "the fire" is positive; but for unbelievers, "the fire" brings awful judgment, as is described in the next verse.

3:17-18 "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.^{NIV} Threshing was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called chaff. This was normally done in a large area called a *threshing floor*, often on a hill, where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the farmer tossed the beaten wheat into the air. A *winnowing fork* is a pitchfork used to toss wheat in the air in order to separate wheat from chaff. The *wheat* is the part of the plant that is useful; *chaff* is the worthless outer shell. Chaff is burned because it is useless; wheat, however, is gathered.

"Winnowing" is often used in the Bible to picture God's judgment. Jesus used the same analogy in a parable ([Matthew 13:24-30](#)). John spoke of repentance, but he also spoke of judgment upon those who refused to repent. Those who refuse to live for God are chaff, the useless outer husk of the grain. By contrast, those who repent and reform their lives are like wheat. Those who refuse to be used by God will be discarded because they have no value in furthering God's work. Those who repent and believe, however, hold great value in God's eyes because they are beginning a new life of productive service for him.

The warnings coupled with John's announcement of *the good news* made John's message all that much more riveting.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

2. John the Baptist came forth with a message of repentance and preparation for the Lord. Which of the following areas are you in need of the most preparation for the Lord in 2011. A) your prayer life, b) your giving, c) your yielding to others, d) your insistence on your own way.

I want to see a deeper and richer prayer life in 2011 for me as an individual and for us as a church. That's where I need the greatest preparation for the Lord.

3. What image comes to mind when you hear "making straight paths for the Lord?"

I see something like a bulldozer going down a dirt road pushing everything in front of it in order to make a straight line from one place to another. When I grew up in GA, the road was dirt and after a rain, there would be ruts all over the place from cars going through the mud.

When the bulldozer came, all those ruts would be flattened and all the holes would be filled in.

4. What type of areas in our lives would be represented by the valleys that need to be filled in in verse 5?

Sometimes we have too low of an opinion of what God can do through and in us. We think God may not be interested in us, or that God could not really love us. Those areas have to be filled in so that we can know that when God calls, we are invited to truly become part of the family. We can be so battered by the pains of life, that we feel ourselves unworthy of being in the family of God.

5. What type of areas in our lives would be represented by the mountains and hills that need to be made low in verse 5?

On the other extreme, we may think we have a righteousness of our own that somehow can impress God or catch God's attention. Pride and arrogance can cause us to think we do not really need salvation as much as others might need it. We can almost feel that God is blessed to have us on God's team. Our super status in the world, has nothing to do with getting right with God. All of us have to recognize ourselves as sinners with no hope of salvation apart from Christ.

6. How do we as believers allow our straight roads to become crooked?

Our roads become crooked by walking away from the will of God in our lives in everyday situation. In every situation in which we fail to live as God would have us live, and we accept our behavior as okay without a real repentance of it, we have chosen to become crooked in our walk. Rare is the walk that becomes crooked all at once. It usually happens in small steps and small degrees. The longer we walk in the wrong direction or attitude, the more crooked our road becomes. Compromise with sin, always leads to a crooked road.

7. On the one hand we say, we want to have God's presence come into our lives, yet on the other hand, what are the kind of things we do to keep the Lord from coming in?

We keep the Lord from coming into our lives by intentionally avoiding God. We avoid asking for an examination in our prayer time, and even avoid prayer. We avoid obeying God's word by giving ourselves an exception because of our unique situation. We make up our minds that our lives belong to ourselves, and we have a right to live as we desire to do so. We simply will not allow God to influence certain areas of our lives.

8. John speaks of producing fruit in keeping with repentance? What type of fruit is God expecting out of us in 2011?

God is expecting us to give God our total submission to every aspect of God's will for our lives. This means a change in our attitudes toward others. It means becoming more generous and compassion. It means reaching a new level of patience with others. God wants us to bear with one another in love as the fruit we are called to produce. We all have some faults. In 2011, let us put up with others and they put up with us.

9. John speaks of taking care of each other's physical needs in verses 11. Why is being generous to those in need one of the marks of a believer in Christ?

Jesus' new commandment to us was for us to love one another. Love has to have some means of action accompanied to it for it to be the kind of love that Jesus speaks to us about. Meeting the physical and emotional needs of others is a form of putting love into action. Our generosity has to be accompanied with no expectation of return if it is to be motivated by love. God is generous to both those who follow the Lord and those who do not. We are called to be like God. Part of our giving to others is out of appreciation of what the Lord has given to us.

10. John speaks against exploiting others when we have power on our side in verse 13. What are ways we exploit others in the life of the church without thinking of it as exploitation?

When we don't do our part in serving and in giving, yet we take full advantage of what is offered, we are forcing others to carry a bigger load. That's a form of exploitation. The Bible never tells us to be equal in everything, because we are not equally situated. But we are to do our part with what we have to offer. Often times we set our priorities based on our ability to exploit others to do things for us, that we should be doing ourselves. Most of us are capable of helping to clean up after events at the church, but we simply pass that responsibility on to others by forcing them to work extra after we have enjoyed the benefit of the event. Exploitation can quickly become a way of doing business if we are not careful.

11. Why do you think the people were hoping John might be the Messiah who was to come?

It has been nearly 400 years since a real prophet in line with the prophets of the Old Testament had come on the scene. John's message was a fresh word from the Lord and the people were excited. If John were the Messiah, it could mean that a real turn of events was just around the corner. The Messiah was expected to set God's people free from all oppression.

13. What was John's view of Jesus?

John had such a high view of Jesus, that He did not even consider himself on the same level as Jesus even though they were cousins. As the Messiah, John knew that he was not worthy enough to have the privilege of untying Jesus' sandals. When we compare what John thought of approaching Jesus and what we think of approaching Jesus today, a lot of the awe and the mystery is missing from us that was rooted in John. John also saw Jesus as a divider between those who were serving God and those who were not. Jesus would separate the real followers and the pretenders.

14. Would you have been more comfortable around John or Jesus? Why

John appears to be much more direct in his approach in demanding that you repent if you have any hope of getting right with God. Jesus appears to first grab your attention with something else, and once you seem interested, Jesus hits you with the cost that is involved. John emphasizes repentance, Jesus emphasizes the cost involved to follow Him. I think I'd be more comfortable around John.

Life-Sharing & Pioneers Lesson 3 Pass Along The Message John 3:20-42

1. If you found out some really good news, who would be the first person you would want to share it with and why?

The first person I would want to tell would be Pastor Toby. She's the one I'm closest to and if it's really good news, we are probably going to feel the same way about it.

John 1:29-42 (Today's New International Version, ©2005)

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."^[a]

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^[b]).

COMMENTARY MATERIAL

"Behold! The Lamb of God."^{NKJV} The title "Lamb of God" would be associated in the minds of the Jews with the Passover lamb ([Exodus 12](#)) and the lambs used in the daily sacrifices for the sin offerings (see [Leviticus 14:12, 21, 24](#); [Numbers 6:12](#)). In calling Jesus the Lamb of God, John pointed to Jesus as the substitutionary sacrifice provided

by God. Had the Jews considered the Messiah would be a lamb led to the slaughter ([Isaiah 53:7ff.](#))?

LIFE APPLICATION

PAID IN FULL

Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people ([Exodus 29:38-42](#)). [Isaiah 53:7](#) prophesied that the Messiah, God's servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given—God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. When Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice, he removed the sin of the world and destroyed the power of sin itself. Thus God forgives our sin ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#)).

The "sin of the world" means the sin of each individual. Jesus paid the price of *our* sin by his death. We claim the forgiveness he provided by first taking ownership of our sin. If we insist we have no sin, then we gain no forgiveness. Repentance precedes forgiveness. If you don't think you need to repent, check your life again. The Ten Commandments can help you evaluate how you're doing by God's standards.

"Who takes away the sin of the world!"^{NKJV} The Greek word for "takes away" can also mean "take up." Jesus took away our sin by taking it upon himself. This is the image depicted in [Isaiah 53:4-9](#) and [1 Peter 2:24](#).

1:30 "This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'"^{NRSV} This verse, which reiterates [1:15](#), is here put in its chronological context. Although John the Baptist was a well-known preacher who attracted large crowds, he was content that Jesus take the higher place. John demonstrated true humility, the basis for greatness in preaching, teaching, or any other work we do for Christ. Accepting what God wants us to do and giving Jesus Christ the honor for it allows God to work freely through us.

1:31 "I myself did not know him."^{NRSV} Since John and Jesus were cousins, John must have known Jesus before this time. But this statement means that John had not realized that Jesus was God's Son, the Messiah, until God provided the sign of the Spirit descending upon Jesus.

"The reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."^{NIV} Though John had not yet clearly seen the Messiah, he knew that the

Messiah was coming and that his mission was to prepare the nation of Israel for the Messiah's arrival. But, as John would soon explain, he had been instructed to baptize, and as he was baptizing he saw a sign that indicated the arrival of the one he had come to announce.

1:32 "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."^{NIV}

Evidently, the action of the Spirit descending from heaven in the form of a dove was a sign for John. Only John and Jesus saw this (see [Matthew 3:16](#)). The other Gospel writers tell us that a voice accompanied this divine sign: A voice came out of heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" ([Matthew 3:17](#) NKJV). John the Baptist did not add this detail; rather, he himself declared—"this is the Son of God" ([1:34](#) NIV).

1:33 "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me"^{NIV} The phrase, *I would not have known him* repeats the statement in [verse 31](#). *The one who sent me* is God, who had sent John to baptize and to prepare the way for the Messiah. This same God would reveal the Messiah to John by sending his Spirit upon the Messiah.

"The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."^{NIV} In well-known prophetic passages, the Messiah was depicted as having the Spirit resting upon him (see [Isaiah 11:1-2](#); [61:1ff.](#)). The statement that *he will baptize with the Holy Spirit* foretells Jesus' divine mission. It does not just point to the Day of Pentecost on which Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to baptize the disciples (see [Luke 24:49](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [2:4](#)); it characterizes Jesus' entire ministry. Jesus came to give eternal life to those who believe in him. But no one could actually receive that life apart from receiving the life-giving Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist's baptism with water was preparatory because it was for repentance and symbolized the washing away of sins. Jesus, by contrast, would baptize with the Holy Spirit, imparting not only forgiveness but also eternal life. He would send the Holy Spirit upon all believers, empowering them to live and to teach the message of salvation. This outpouring of the Spirit came after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven (see [20:22](#); [Acts 2](#)).

All true believers have been baptized by Jesus in the Holy Spirit (see [Romans 8:9](#)). As such, we have been immersed in Jesus' Spirit. Now we can experience the life-giving Spirit and enjoy his presence day by day.

1:34 "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."^{NIV} John was declaring Jesus' special position with God. God had told John that he would reveal his sent one to John—the Spirit would descend upon the Messiah and remain upon him. John saw this and declared his belief in Jesus as God's identified Son. Those who receive the

Spirit can also declare that Jesus *is the Son of God*, for the Spirit enables us to believe and confess (see [1 Corinthians 12:3](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

Today people are looking for someone to give them security in an insecure world. We must point them to Christ and show them how Christ satisfies their need. They must hear it first from us. We cannot pass on to others what we do not possess. If we know Jesus, we will want to introduce others to him.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES FOLLOW JESUS / [1:35-51](#) / [21](#)

This last section of [John 1](#) records how the earliest believers became disciples of Jesus; it is a drama of salvation revealing the formation of Jesus' first band of disciples. Andrew and John became Jesus' followers through the testimony of their teacher, John the Baptist. Peter, Andrew's brother, became a follower through the testimony of Andrew. Philip became a disciple by Jesus seeking him out and calling him to follow him. And Nathanael became a believer through the testimony of Philip and the revelation Jesus gave to him. This progression provides a model for evangelism.

[1:35-36](#) John again was standing with two of his disciples.^{NRSV} These disciples of John the Baptist were Andrew (see [1:40](#)) and John, the writer of this Gospel. Both these men had followed John the Baptist until he pointed them to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Why did these disciples leave John the Baptist? Because that's what John wanted them to do—he was pointing the way to Jesus, the one John had prepared them to follow.

"Behold the Lamb of God!"^{NKJV} This was the second time John made this declaration (see comments on [1:29](#)).

[1:37](#) The two disciples . . . followed Jesus.^{NIV} These disciples followed Jesus in two ways. They literally turned and walked after him, and they also became two of Jesus' close followers, or disciples. This was a great tribute to John the Baptist's preaching—they heard John and followed Jesus.

LIFE APPLICATION

TIMED RELEASE

The opportunity to be an example or leader to others has its benefits. It is affirming when people depend upon us. But if we have led someone to faith in Jesus Christ, the time will come when they must follow Jesus beyond the influence of our relationship with them. Both mentor and disciple grow when the time for release arrives. John allowed his disciples to follow Jesus and in that act sealed his obedience to God. The disciples did follow Jesus, demonstrating that they had benefited from John's teaching.

In our relationship with other Christians, we must keep a healthy balance between dependence and independence. Mentors are helpful, but they cannot replace Jesus in our lives. We must also encourage those who follow us to keep their eyes on Christ.

1:38-39 Jesus . . . asked, "What do you want?"^{NIV} Those coming to Christ, whether for the first time or each day in worship, should ask themselves this question—"What do I want? What do I expect to receive from Jesus?"

"Where are you staying?"^{NIV} This indicates that John and Andrew were serious followers. They wanted to know where to find Jesus. This indicates a commitment, not an experiment.

Curiosity about Christ or occasional spiritual interest is not enough; we must follow him for the right reasons. To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us—to align with us to support and advance our cause, not his. We must examine our motives for following him. Are we seeking his glory or ours?

You are standing in front of God and in the presence of the hosts of angels. The Holy Spirit is about to impress his seal on each of your souls. You are about to be pressed into the service of the great king.

Cyril of Jerusalem

They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.^{NRSV} John recalls the exact time he first stayed with Jesus. It must have been a special opportunity for John and Andrew—a time never to be forgotten. We can only imagine their wonder as they spent those hours alone with Jesus. From this time forward, these two men became his followers.

1:40-42 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah."^{NIV} After spending a day with Jesus, Andrew immediately went to find his brother Simon (who would later be named Peter) and tell

him that he had found the *Messiah* (the Hebrew term), or "the Christ" (the Greek translation of "Messiah," meaning "Anointed One"; see [Isaiah 61:1](#)).

He brought Simon to Jesus.^{NRSV}

Andrew appears two more times in this Gospel; each time he is bringing people to Jesus (see [6:4-9](#); [12:20-22](#)). The idea that we must somehow convince people about Jesus places too much importance on what we say and do. We must trust God's Spirit to work in a person and understand that our part may be little more than bringing that person into contact with Jesus. The question "What do you think of Jesus?" ought to fit in our conversations.

Dost thou live close by them, or meet them in the streets, or labour with them, or travel with them, or sit and talk with them, and say nothing to them of their souls, or the life to come? If their houses were on fire, thou wouldst run and help them; and wilt thou not help them when their souls are almost at the fire of hell?

Richard Baxter

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).^{NIV} Jesus changed Simon's name to *Cephas*, the Aramaic word for "stone," because Jesus foresaw that Peter would become a pillar and a foundation stone in the building of the first-century church (see [Matthew 16:16-18](#); [Galatians 2:9](#); [Ephesians 2:20](#); [1 Peter 2:4-5](#)).

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – John.

2. Why did John get excited and started sharing with others the moment he saw Jesus?

John knew that his mission was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. The only thing was, he did not know who the Messiah was or where it would be when he ran into him. Think for a moment, if God told you a special person was coming into your life that would change your life for the better forever. But God did not tell you when or where, you'd want to know, how would you recognize the person. If God said, the moment you see him/her a rainbow would appear above his/her head, you would probably get excited the first time you saw a person with a rainbow. The only way John was going to know the Messiah was that a dove would descend on the Messiah's head. When John saw the dove, John knew his ministry was right on target with God, and he knew that he had accomplished God's will for his life and ministry up to that point. Seeing that dove on Jesus was truly one of the greatest spiritual moments of John's life.

3. How did John know that Jesus was the Lamb Of God?

God told John in advance, the one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain on, that is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Messiah.

3a. John and Jesus had grown up as cousins with each other. What kept John from knowing who Jesus was before this time?

God has a time and a place for everything. There were certain things that had to be fulfilled before Jesus could be revealed to the world as the Messiah. Even with us, there are certain things that must happen in our lives, before God can fully use us in the way that God desires. We cannot see the spiritual dimensions in a person's life until, God brings those qualities into the forefront. Sometimes our familiarity with a person, keeps us from seeing the hand of God in their lives. Jesus said, "a prophet is without honor only in his hometown among his relatives." Mark 6:4 John may have been very surprised to know that his very own cousin was actually the Messiah they had all been waiting to receive.

4. Does God still speak this clearly to people today as he did with John then?

God probably does speak to people today as clearly as He did with John. When God has specific tasks for people to perform, God can communicate to people in whatever way God desires.

5. How many more times in John's life is God going to speak to him this clearly? What can we learn from this?

This will be the last time in the recorded Scriptures where John is going to get such a clear and specific word from God. When John is later going to be arrested and put into prison, he will be seeking a word from God as well as one from Jesus, but John is not going to get one from either. John will have his head cut off without fully understanding why it is taking place. We need to be wary of those who speak of direct conversations with God as a weekly event. God does speak audibly to people, but it's a rare occurrence in the life of the saints in both the old and new testament. There is a danger involved when a person consistently justifies their actions by saying that "God told me." The bible also teaches that in the multitude of counselors, there is wisdom. God guides us in many ways, but one of the primary ways is through what the Lord has revealed in the Scriptures.

6. The next day when John saw Jesus, he pointed Jesus out again as the Lamb of God. As a result two of John's disciples left him and went to follow Jesus. One of the disciples was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. If Andrew was one of the first to follow Jesus, why do you think he is not as prominent as Peter, James or John among the disciples?

God does not distribute gifts and talents based on who came first or how long one has been in a certain place. God's mission in Andrew's life was to reach out and bring Peter to Christ. God is not calling us to positions of prominence. God calls us to places of service. We envision that each time God calls us to ministry, it's going to be something to touch many, when in fact God may be calling us to touch the one. The whole idea of prominence and importance are words that we assign to people and events. God has a different scale as to who is prominent and what is important to and in the kingdom. All that we do, we ought to put our whole heart in, because we are doing it for the Lord.

6a. Do you think it was a problem for Andrew, to have been the first to follow Jesus, but watch others who came later play a much more significant role in the ministry? Why do we have such a hard time when issues like this come up in the church as to who should get to do what?

It's hard to say what Andrew's feelings were, but we do know what ours might have been. I have to confess there has been envy on my part as I have looked at other leaders who have come into the kingdom years after I did, but who seemed to have had a much more significant role in the kingdom. I keep forgetting that God called me to serve in the spot God placed me, and God called them to serve in the spot God placed them.

One of the cancers in the church is the desire to be seen which is stronger than the desire to work for what is best for the team. We forget that when someone scores, the whole team gets the same amount of points. God didn't call us to be the best this or that in Cleveland. God called us to make the body of Christ at Glenville, the most effective body that Glenville could be in ministering in the name of Christ. Sometimes that means being in the forefront, but more times that not, it may mean remaining in the background and making a difference there.

7. Andrew's heart was in helping others to find Jesus. The first person he went to find was his brother Peter. Who would you like to help find Jesus in 2011?

I would like to help more of my cousins in Syracuse to find Jesus. On the neighborhood level, I'd like to help my neighbor Sam find Jesus.

8. When we lead a person to Christ, can we even begin to know what impact that person may have for the kingdom of God? Who touched your life for Christ early on, that have no idea how much of what they did helped you grow in God?

No, we do not know who God is going to use in a specific way. It's been amazing seeing some of the fruit of the saints from Glenville who have gone on to be with the Lord. Some of the people that are active in our church today, are here because of the labor of some of our former saints who brought them to our church before they died. The former saints had no way of knowing, how critical that lost person they brought to our church, would be to our ministry today.

Rev. Baker was the pastor of the church in which I gave my life to Christ. I gave my life in September and went away to college in June. Rev. Baker left the church while I was in college back in 1974. In 2009, I was able to track him down to let him know how God had used me since the last time I saw him back in 74. He had no idea, that his investment in me, had continued to reproduce itself again and again. His faithfulness in that small church in Hornell, NY, made all the difference for my life.

9. How does our Excellence in Giving Campaign have a rippling effect on the lives of other people in helping to bring them to Christ?

Many of the people that we impact for Christ, most of us will never see. When we send a message over the airways, the internet, or the tv, somebody is listening and somebody is being changed. When we pour dollars into Haiti, India or Nigeria, we are working in the background of another ministry who is working to make a difference for Christ in the lives of

others. Our background role, allows the other ministry to do what we could never do on our own. When we improve our facilities, it makes it possible for later saints to do ministry without having to worry about financial concerns with the building. They are able to reach out to others with a greater freedom. Our Excellence in Giving Campaign is going to send forth waves that ripple out in all directions in people's lives.

10. Why is it important for us to see Jesus as the lamb who takes away the sin of the world?

When we see Jesus in this matter, we see Jesus as a necessity and not as an option for our lives. If Jesus does not take away our sin, then we are stuck with it and hopelessly doomed at the judgment. The reality of Jesus taking away our sin, means that things can be different for us right now. We don't have to wait until death to benefit from what Jesus has done. Jesus makes it clear, that all of us are in the same boat, in need of a Savior to deal with our sin. None of us are so called good people.

11. Why is it important for us to help bring someone else to Christ?

One of the reasons we received the Holy Spirit was to be witnesses for Christ to the ends of the earth. When we help bring someone else to Christ, we are making a difference in that person's future forever. We are helping that person to understand who God is, and that God wants to be a part of her/his life. Bringing a person to Christ is putting into action what our mission statement is really all about. When we help to bring someone else to Christ, we grow in our own spiritual development and we gain a sure reward in heaven.

12. Pray for someone God sends across your path on a regular basis that maybe God wants to use you to impact.

LifeSharing & Pioneers Lesson 4 Jesus' Test After The Anointing Matthew 4:1-11

1. Why is there temptation in the world?

Temptation exists in the world because we all are born with a nature that is in rebellion to God. That nature demands that we satisfy ourselves regardless of the cost that may be involved. There are many things that are pleasing to the eye and pleasurable to the body that must be used in a particular way to keep them from becoming destructive. We resist putting limits on our pleasures. Sin offers a lot of wonderful promises and it can be fun, but it only lasts for a season.

2. What do you think is the purpose of temptation in a Christian's life?

Here is what a saint wrote many years ago: Yet temptations, though troublesome and severe, are often useful to a person, for in them he is humbled, purified, and instructed. The saints all passed through many temptations and trials to profit by them, while those who could not resist became reprobate and fell away. There is no state so holy, no place so secret that temptations and trials will not come. No one is never safe from them as long as he lives, for they come from within us—in sin we were born. When one temptation or trial passes, another comes; we shall always have something to suffer because we have lost the state of original blessedness.

Some, guarded against great temptations, are frequently overcome by small ones in order that, humbled by their weakness in small trials, they may not presume on their own strength in great ones.

Matthew 4:1-11 (Today's New International Version, © 2005)

Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^[a] by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'^[b]"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."^[c]

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'^[d]"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'^[e]"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Commentary

SATAN TEMPTS JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS / [4:1-11](#) / [18](#)

From Jesus' temptation we can learn that following our Lord can bring dangerous and intense spiritual battles. We won't always feel good; we will experience times of deprivation, loneliness, and hostility. Jesus' temptation also shows that our spiritual victories may not always be visible to the watching world. Above all, it shows that we must use the power of God to face temptation and not try to withstand it in our own strength.

[4:1](#) Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.^{NKJV} The word "then" indicates an important connection of the end of [chapter 3](#) and the beginning of [chapter 4](#). The same Holy Spirit that sent Jesus to be baptized, then sent Jesus into the wilderness. The temptation was a divine necessity to prove Jesus' messianic purpose. *Led up by the Spirit*, Jesus took the offensive against the enemy, Satan, by going into the lonely and desolate *wilderness* to face temptation. In the Old Testament, the "wilderness" (or "desert") was a desolate and dangerous place where wild animals lived (see, for example, [Isaiah 13:20-22](#); [34:8-15](#)).

"Devil" in Greek means "accuser"; in Hebrew, the word "Satan" means the same ([4:10](#)). The devil tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, and here he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Satan is a fallen archangel. He is a real, created being, not symbolic, and is constantly fighting against those who follow and obey God. The verb "to be tempted" describes continuous action because Jesus was tempted constantly during

the forty days. The word "tempted" means "to put to the test to see what good or evil, strengths or weaknesses, exist in a person." The Spirit compelled Jesus into the wilderness where God put Jesus to the test—not to see if Jesus was ready, but to *show* that he was ready for his mission. Satan, however, had other plans; he hoped to thwart Jesus' mission by tempting Jesus to do evil. Satan tried to get Jesus to declare his kingship prematurely. Satan tried to get Jesus to take his messianic power into his own hands and to forsake his Father's will. If Jesus had given in, his mission on earth—to die for our sins and give us the opportunity to have eternal life—would have been lost. For more on Satan, see [1 Chronicles 21:1](#); [Job 1–2](#); [Zechariah 3:1-2](#); [Luke 10:18](#); [Revelation 20](#).

The devil's temptations focused on three crucial areas: (1) physical needs and desires, (2) possessions and power, and (3) pride (see [1 John 2:15-16](#) for a similar list). This temptation by the devil shows us that Jesus was human, and it gave Jesus the opportunity to reaffirm God's plan for his ministry. It also gives us an example to follow when we are tempted. Jesus' temptation was an important demonstration of his sinlessness. He faced temptation and did not give in.

[4:2](#) He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.^{NRSV}

Jesus *fasted* during his time in the wilderness—going without food and perhaps even water, though some fasts allowed food and water only at night. Fasting was used as a spiritual discipline for prayer and a time of preparation for great tasks that lay ahead.

The number forty brings to mind the forty days of rain in the great Flood ([Genesis 7:17](#)), the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 24:18](#)), the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness ([Deuteronomy 29:5](#)), the forty days of Goliath's taunting of Israel prior to David's victory ([1 Samuel 17:16](#)), and the forty days of Elijah's time of fear in the wilderness ([1 Kings 19:8](#)). In all those situations, God worked in his people, preparing them for special tasks.

At the end of this forty-day fast, Jesus obviously was *famished*. Jesus' status as God's Son did not make this fast any easier; his physical body suffered the severe hunger and pain of going without sustenance. The three temptations recorded here occurred when Jesus was at his most physically weakened state. But Satan could not weaken Jesus spiritually.

LIFE APPLICATION

WEAK SPOTS

Jesus wasn't tempted inside the temple or at his baptism but in the desert, where

he was tired, alone, and hungry, and thus most vulnerable. The devil often tempts us when we are at our weakest point—under physical or emotional stress (for example, lonely, tired, weighing big decisions, or faced with uncertainty). But he also likes to tempt us through our strengths, where we are most susceptible to pride. We guard against his attacks when we start the day with prayer, build our attitudes around the Bible's truth, and depend on God's Holy Spirit to keep us from spiritual harm.

4:3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."^{NRSV} "The tempter" is another name for the devil ([4:1](#)), Satan. Jesus may have finished his fast, but Satan was not finished with his temptations. In fact, his first effort with Jesus was to tempt him to do the obvious. "You've been fasting and you're famished," Satan said. "Why don't you just turn some of these stones into bread and have yourself a small meal?" What could possibly be so wrong about that? But there was much more going on here than a seemingly compassionate offer for a hungry person to have lunch.

Satan phrased his temptation in an interesting manner. He said, "*If you are the Son of God.*" The word "if" did not imply doubt; both Jesus and Satan knew the truth. Instead, Satan tempted Jesus with his own power. If indeed Jesus was the Son of the one true, all-powerful God, then Jesus certainly could *command these stones to become loaves of bread* if he so chose in order to satisfy his hunger. "God's Son has no reason to be hungry," Satan suggested. Satan did not doubt Jesus' sonship nor his ability to turn stones to bread. Instead, he wanted Jesus to use his power in the wrong way at the wrong time—to use his position to meet his own needs rather than to fulfill his God-given mission.

In later miracles Jesus did supply baskets full of bread, but he supplied them for a hungry crowd, not to satisfy himself. And he did the miracles in God's timing for God's purposes as part of his mission (see [14:13-21](#); [15:32-39](#)).

4:4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"^{NRSV} Jesus saw through Satan's scheme. Jesus did not attempt to get into a discussion with Satan (as Eve had done); instead, he answered with words from what *is written* in Scripture, quoting [Deuteronomy 8:3](#). The words in Deuteronomy describe God's lesson to the nation of Israel. This testing was designed to help Israel depend on God:

- *Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that*

one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ([Deuteronomy 8:2-3](#) NRSV)

In all three quotes from Deuteronomy, found in [Matthew 4:4](#), [7](#), and [10](#), the context shows that Israel failed each test each time. Therefore, Jesus conveyed to Satan that while the test may have caused Israel to fail, it would not work with Jesus. Matthew showed the spiritual superiority of Christ over the nation.

Jesus, God's Son, humbled himself in the wilderness, voluntarily undergoing the trial of extreme hunger in order to learn obedience through suffering. Jesus came to earth to accomplish the Father's mission. Everything he said and did worked toward that goal; nothing could deter or distract him. Jesus understood that obedience to the Father's mission was more important than food—no matter what his physical body said, no matter what Satan said.

To truly accomplish his mission, Jesus had to be completely humbled, totally self-abased. Making himself bread would have shown that Jesus had not quite set aside all his powers, had not humbled himself, and had not identified completely with the human race. But Jesus refused, showing that he would use his powers only in submission to God's plan and that he would depend on God, not his own miraculous powers, for his daily needs. Jesus lived not *by bread alone*; Jesus truly lived and served *by every word that comes from the mouth of God*, giving himself completely to God's mission. Matthew shows that we should follow Jesus' example and depend on God.

LIFE APPLICATION

NORMAL DESIRES

Jesus was hungry and weak after fasting for forty days, but he chose not to use his divine power to satisfy his natural desire for food. Food, hunger, and eating are good, but the timing was wrong. Jesus was in the wilderness to fast, not to eat. And because Jesus had given up the unlimited, independent use of his divine power in order to experience humanity fully, he wouldn't use his power to change the stones to bread.

[4:5](#) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.^{NIV} This temptation is set in *the holy city*, that is, Jerusalem, the religious and political seat of Palestine. The *temple* was the religious center of the Jewish nation and the place where the people expected the Messiah to arrive ([Malachi 3:1](#)). Herod the Great had renovated the temple in hopes of gaining the Jews' confidence. The temple was the tallest building in the area, and this *highest point* was

probably the corner wall that jutted out of the hillside, overlooking the valley below. The historian Josephus wrote about the enormous height from the top of the temple to the bottom of the ravine below. From this spot, Jesus could see all of Jerusalem behind him and the country for miles in front of him. Whether the devil physically *took* Jesus to Jerusalem, or whether this occurred in a vision is unclear. In any case, Satan was setting the stage for his next temptation.

4:6 And said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"^{NKJV} Jesus had quoted Scripture in response to Satan's first temptation. Here Satan tried the tactic with Jesus. Satan used Scripture to try to convince Jesus to sin!

Again Satan began with "*If You are the Son of God.*" As in [4:3](#), Satan was not suggesting doubt, but rather saying, "If you're God's Son, then certainly God will want to protect you from harm. So *throw Yourself down* from this pinnacle so that God will send his angels to protect you." Then Satan quoted words from [Psalm 91:11-12](#) to support his request. The psalm describes God's protection for those who trust him. [Psalm 91:11](#) begins, *He shall give His angels charge over you*; [verse 12](#) continues, *In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

Some scholars believe that Satan wanted Jesus to take advantage of the prophecy in [Malachi 3:1](#); the people believed that this prophecy meant that the Messiah would appear suddenly at the temple. What a spectacular proof of Jesus' messiahship this would be if he suddenly appeared on the pinnacle of the temple before all the people and then jumped off, only to be carefully placed on the ground by God's angels. Surely everyone would believe then.

More likely, however, this temptation did not focus on Jesus proving to the people that he was the Messiah. Instead, Satan was focusing on Jesus' relationship with his Father. Satan wanted Jesus to test that relationship to see if God's promise of protection would prove true.

LIFE APPLICATION

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

What a sobering thought that Satan knows Scripture and knows how to use it for his own purposes! Sometimes friends or associates will present attractive and convincing reasons why you should try something that you believe is wrong. They may even find Bible verses that seem to support their viewpoint. Study the Bible carefully, especially the broader contexts of specific verses, so that you understand God's principles for living and what he wants for your life.

Only if you really understand what the whole Bible says will you be able to recognize errors of interpretation when people take verses out of context to make them say what they want them to say. Choose your Bible teachers carefully. We have much to learn from others. Capable and wise teachers often present the broader context to help us grow in our Bible knowledge.

Satan was quoting Scripture out of context, making it sound as though God protects even through sin, removing the natural consequences of sinful acts. Neither jumping from the roof in a public display or jumping in order to test God's promises would have been part of God's will for Jesus. In context, the psalm promises God's protection for those who, while being in his will and serving him, find themselves in danger. It does not promise protection for artificially created crises in which Christians call to God in order to test his love and care. We should not test God, as Jesus will explain (see the following verse).

4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"^{NRSV} Jesus would not get into a discussion with Satan about this second temptation, as he had also refused to do in the first. Instead, Jesus quoted from Scripture again, but, contrary to Satan's method, Jesus quoted with an understanding of the true meaning. No matter what the words that Satan quoted may have *sounded* like (that is, they seemed to say that no matter what Jesus did, God would protect him), the facts were that while God promises to protect his people, he also requires that they not put him *to the test*.

Jesus quoted from [Deuteronomy 6:16](#), "Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah" (NRSV). In this passage, Moses was referring to an incident during Israel's wilderness wanderings, recorded in [Exodus 17:1-7](#). The people were thirsty and ready to mutiny against Moses and return to Egypt if he did not provide them with water. God supplied the water, but only after the people had "quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" (NRSV).

Jesus could have jumped from the temple; God could have sent angels to bring him safely to the ground. But for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple would have been a ridiculous test of God's power, and it would have been out of God's will. Jesus knew that his Father could protect him; he also understood that all his actions were to be focused on fulfilling his Father's mission, even if it meant suffering and death (which, of course, it did).

4:8-9 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."^{NRSV} The obvious impossibility of being able to see the entire world from one mountaintop makes little difference to this story, but it supports the view that this experience may have been visionary. The focus

is not on the mountain, but on the *kingdoms of the world* that were (and are) under Satan's dominion. Presently, Satan is "ruler of this world" ([John 12:31](#) NRSV). Luke records Satan's words at this temptation as: "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please" ([Luke 4:6](#) NRSV). Satan offered to "give" dominion over the world to Jesus. Satan knew that one day Jesus Christ would rule over the earth (see [Philippians 2:9-11](#)). The offer wasn't evil, but it challenged Jesus' obedience to God's timing and will. Satan's temptation was, in essence, "Why wait? I can give this to you *now!*" Of course, he would never really give them away because the offer had a catch. Jesus would have to *fall down and worship Satan*.

Satan tempted Jesus to take the world as an earthly kingdom right then, without carrying out his plan to save the world from sin. For Jesus, that meant obtaining his promised dominion over the world without experiencing the suffering and death of the cross. Satan offered a painless shortcut. But Satan didn't understand that suffering and death were a part of God's plan that Jesus had chosen to obey. Satan hoped to distort Jesus' perspective by making him focus on worldly power, not on fulfilling God's plans. In addition, Jesus would have to denounce his loyalty to the Father in order to worship Satan. Satan's goal always has been to replace God as the object of worship.

[4:10](#) Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"^{NKJV} Jesus once again met temptation with Scripture. Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus dismissed Satan with the words "away with you." The temptations boiled down to a choice between God and Satan. No one can worship and serve both. For Jesus to take a shortcut to the goal, ruling the world by worshiping Satan ([4:9](#)) would be to break the first commandment, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. . . . You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him . . ." ([Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#), [13](#) NKJV). Jesus would take the path of submission to God. Jesus would *worship* and *serve* the Lord alone. Only by doing so would he be able to accomplish his mission of bringing salvation to the world.

LIFE APPLICATION

ENTICED

[4:11](#) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.^{NIV} The devil could not stay when Jesus told him to go away ([4:10](#)). Jesus is Satan's superior; Satan must do as Jesus commands. So *the devil left* Jesus. Luke records that Satan "left [Jesus]"

until an opportune time" ([Luke 4:13](#) NIV). This would only be the first of many encounters that Jesus would have with Satan's power.

That *angels came and attended him* in no way lessens the intensity of the temptations that Jesus faced. The angels may have given Jesus food and drink because the Greek word *diekonoun*, usually translated "ministering" or "attending," can also mean "serving food" (see [1 Kings 19:5](#) where angels ministered to Elijah). More likely, the angels' ministry was spiritual in nature—attending to Jesus' spiritual needs. The verb indicates continuous action. As Satan's temptations lasted continuously during the forty days, so did the ministrations of the angels.

Angels, like these who waited on Jesus, have a significant role as God's messengers. These spiritual beings were involved in Jesus' life on earth by (1) announcing his birth to Mary, (2) reassuring Joseph, (3) naming Jesus, (4) announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds, (5) protecting Jesus by sending his family to Egypt, and (6) ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane. Angels are continuously present. [Hebrews 1:14](#) defines angels as messengers for God and ministers to people. They show compassion for human beings. Passages such as [Matthew 18:10](#); [Luke 15:10](#); [Acts 12:14-15](#); and [Revelation 19:10](#) support the idea of guardian angels. As agents of God, angels bring special help to believers ([Acts 5:19-21](#); [12:7-10](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Jesus was tempted by the devil, but he never sinned! Although we may feel dirty after being tempted, we should remember that temptation itself is not sin. We sin when we give in and disobey God. Remembering this truth will help us turn away from the temptation. [Hebrews 4:15](#) says that Jesus "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (NIV). He knows firsthand what we are experiencing, and he is willing and able to help us in our struggles. When tempted, turn to God for strength by a short prayer, make a phone call to a Christian friend, or find a quiet place to pull out your Bible and read a psalm.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

3. Why does God allow us to be in situations in which we will be tested?

. A person has not shown true obedience if he or she has never had an opportunity to disobey. We read in [Deuteronomy 8:2-3](#) that God led Israel into the desert to humble and test them. God wanted to see whether or not his people would really obey him. You too will be tested. Because you know that testing will come, you should be alert and ready for it. Remember, your convictions are only real if they hold up under pressure!

4. What's the purpose of the devil's first temptation to tell the stones to become bread?

Satan wanted Jesus to use his own power to meet his needs rather than trusting in God. Satan had said "if you are the Son Of God." Satan and Jesus both knew he was, but Satan's is hinting that the Son of God should not have to suffer any kind of physical needs. Like the Pharisees later did, he is trying to get Jesus to do something miraculous to prove a point. Jesus always kept his power under control and kept it beneath the will of the Father.

5. How are we to handle temptations that appeal to our physical desires?

We are often tempted to satisfy a perfectly normal desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time. If we indulge in sex before marriage or if we steal to get food, we are trying to satisfy God-given desires in wrong ways. Many desires are normal and good, but God wants you to satisfy them in the right way and at the right time. True discipleship means learning from Christ how to know the right ways and right times. We need to know that not giving in to our desires is not going to kill us. As powerful as the temptation may be, it is at some point going to past. We need to have someone that we can trust that we can share our temptation with so that we can be held accountable for our actions.

6. What's the purpose of the devil's second temptation to throw Himself down from the temple?

Satan is attempting to get Jesus to force God the Father to do something by coming to rescue Him. Jesus knows that his Father will protect Him, and He does not need some artificial crisis to try to force the Hand of God. Jesus does not have to prove the trust relationship that He Has with God the Father. Doing something spectacular to impress others was not Jesus' mission on earth. His goal was to be obedient to the will of the Father in everything. Sure the people would admire Jesus for it, but not for long. Remember in John's gospel after the feeding of the 5000, many of the people left Jesus after the teaching Jesus gave on his body and blood. The miracle was quickly forgotten. The same would have happened if Jesus had jumped off the temple. By the end of the week, it would have just been last week's news.

7. How can we know the difference between doing something great for God, and doing something great to be seen?

This is something every believer needs to ask him/herself. It goes to the motive of why are we doing something. No one else truly knows the motives of our hearts but us and God. What we do know, is that all that is not motivated by either a love for God or a love for others, is something that has already received its reward here on earth. It is very difficult to do even the smallest good work without self wanting to be seen or recognized for having done it. Even the good we do for our children can be motivated by wanting to be admired for being a good parent, as opposed to being solely motivated by the love for the child. Once we want to insist that others be thankful and appreciative for what we have done, we show that our motivation was not solely for the love of God.

8. Jesus responded with, "it is also written." How does knowing more of the word of God help us to stay balanced in our Christian walk?

Jesus was able to resist all of the devil's temptations because he not only knew Scripture, but he also obeyed it. [Ephesians 6:17](#) says that God's Word is a sword to use in spiritual combat. Knowing Bible verses is an important step in helping us resist the devil's attacks, but we must also obey the Bible. Note that Satan knew Scriptures, but he failed to obey them. Knowing and obeying the Bible helps us follow God's desires rather than the devil's. A head knowledge alone will not keep us balanced in our daily walk. It's head knowledge with daily application that makes the difference.

9. When a person refuses all medical treatment in order to believe God for a healing, how do we know if the person is truly walking in faith or if the person is putting God to the test?

We should acknowledge that God is Lord over everything and that every good gift comes from God. There is a difference in a person refusing all medical treatment; 1) if the consequences of the treatment may be more devastating than the illness and the person decides, I'd rather trust God and enjoy my life whatever time I have left, than go through the treatments that's one thing. 2) if the person simply declines the treatment for something which has been shown reliable in order to trust God, then that could be testing God. For example if you break your leg, but refuse medical treatment because you want to trust God to make it straight, that's not walking in faith, that's putting God to the test. The bible is clear that getting the aid of medical professionals is okay. Luke the writer of the gospel was a physician.

10. What is the purpose of the third temptation that Satan offers to Jesus?

The devil offered the whole world to Jesus if Jesus would only bow down and worship him. He was trying to offer Jesus the kingdoms without Jesus having to suffer and die in order to get it. His goal was to take Jesus' eyes off of his true mission and simply receive a reward without paying any price. Today Satan offers us the world by trying to entice us with materialism, sex, and power. The devil would like us to believe that "life is short, get all you can!" Even Christian leaders find themselves tempted to build empires here on earth. But Satan requires people to pay for such success by selling their souls to him. We must resist temptations in the same way that Jesus did. If you find yourself craving something that the world offers, quote Jesus' words to the

devil: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Then follow that advice, with the support and prayers of Christian friends.

11. Why is the adoration of others such a powerful temptation in our society today?

We crave the team that's number one. We want to know who the 10 top most beautiful women or handsome men are in the society. The sin inside of us wants others to think and to say how wonderful we are. All of the praise is really a joke. The team that's number 1, may have won the game because of a last minute mistake of the other team. The top ten most beautiful people is already limited to those who are already famous. So the field is limited from the start. Even though we know this, we still are tempted to bow the knee and treat the people like little gods. Even though we know we are not gods, we do not mind others treating us as though we were.

12. How does the worship plan Satan offers Jesus, differs from the worship plan God offers to us?

Satan's plan always includes a rejection of God as having authority over our lives. Satan's worship plan is always a rebellion against God. God's plan of worship leads us into a closer relationship with God. There are no negative spiritual consequences from us worshipping God, but that's not true with what Satan was offering to Jesus.

13. What can we learn from verse 11 about the power of the temptations on Jesus?

Temptation is real, but Jesus knew that we have authority over temptation through our willingness to resist it. He saw temptation as a rejection of the will of God for our lives. He stayed focused on what was required of Him to do.

14. Pray that the Lord will help you overcome the temptation you are facing in your life now.