

"Temptation" isn't a word used much anymore in America. It makes sense. If there's no right or wrong and if there's no such thing as sin, then you can't be tempted to do wrong and sin. So, "temptation" disappears from vocabularies.

"Temptation" hasn't disappeared from our vocabulary as Lutheran Christians, because it hasn't disappeared from God's vocabulary. We're painfully aware of sin. It explodes often in our lives every day. We're also aware that the wages of sin is everlasting pain in hell.

Therefore, we should be very interested in fighting temptation. Which makes today's lesson so valuable and so practical. It teaches us: **"How to Treat Temptation."** Jesus' own experience and his own words give us a simple 2-step approach in how to treat temptation: FIGHT! And when that doesn't work, REPENT!

Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, had just baptized him in the Jordan River. His Father's voice had just thundered from heaven, identifying him as his Son. The Holy Spirit had just descended from heaven in the form of a dove, all to prepare him for his work as Savior.

So, we'd expect he'd immediately begin to preach his message and explain his mission. Instead: **At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness for 40 days.** Why so long? **To be tempted by Satan.**

Do you think this battle with temptation was easy for the sinless Son of God? He was also true man who got hungry and thirsty, who felt the pressures of living in a sinful world. He faced temptation just like us. Why? So that he could help others, like us, with our temptations.

Remember, God doesn't tempt us - the devil, the world and our sinful flesh can take credit for that. But God does permit temptation. We've got to understand his good purpose for permitting temptations into our lives – so we can help others who undergo temptation.

During those 40 days Jesus fasted. We know fasting is to go without food, what we might not know is that fasting always involved prayer. So, fasting was also an exercise in depending on God. That's a way God wants us to treat temptation – we need to constantly pray for God's help in overcoming temptation. We need to run to Christ.

Matthew and Luke pick out three temptations: turn stones into bread, bow down and worship the devil and jump off the temple. These weren't the only temptations Jesus faced. It was 40 days of constant tempting. Jesus continued to face and fight the devil until that final moment on the cross when he said: **"It is finished!"**

But we can still learn something from those three temptations. Jesus responded to and defeated each in the same way you and I can - he quoted Scripture. Jesus beat Satan by storing up God's Word (memorizing it) and deploying it (using it). And that's another way God wants us to treat temptation. We need to know the Scriptures before we can use them as a weapon against temptation.

Here's a way to put 52 Bible bullets in your chamber to use against temptation: Each week take one verse, just one, from our three lessons and psalm. Write it down and read it for the next 7 days until we gather here again. One verse a week will add 52 Bible bullets to use against the devil each year. That makes Satan run for cover because he hates God's Word.

Today's lesson adds this fascinating detail: **Jesus was with the wild animals.** There was the obvious spiritual danger with Satan prowling around, but there was also physical danger, the threat that a lion could find him, a bear could maul him or a snake could bite him.

But during this whole time: **angels were serving him.** While the mightiest of all the demons, and other demons were tempting Jesus, angels were right in there battling them by serving him.

That's another way God wants us to treat temptation – when the devil and his demons are tempting us, angels, sent by God, are also surrounding us to serve us in fighting them.

What have we learned so far about how to treat temptation?

- First, you realize your temptation is a way to make yourself useful to others and help them with their temptation.
- Second, you realize your temptation is an opportunity for you to run to Christ and pray that he would help you trust in him.
- Third, you realize that the angels, along with Jesus, are helping you against your temptation!
- Finally, you realize that your temptation is a way to unleash the power of God's Word you've added to your arsenal:
 1. "*Satan*," Scripture says: "**I can approach God's throne and find grace to help in my time of need.**" (Hebrews)
 2. "*Satan*," Scripture says: "**God is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom, I trust.**" (Psalm)
 3. "*Satan*," my Savior says: "**Repent and believe the good news.**" (Gospel) That's 3 verses from today's lessons and Psalm. See how easy that was? And you only need 1 verse a week.

You can FIGHT temptation and you will triumph over it - but not always. Sometimes you fail and then you need to REPENT. That's where the rest of today's lesson fits in. John the Baptist landed in prison for being a faithful pastor. He pointed out King Herod's sin of marrying his sister-in-law, his brother's wife. For that John was killed.

After John was imprisoned, **Jesus went up north, to Galilee**, to his hometown. The Jewish leaders from Jerusalem didn't live up there. Jesus was getting out of harm's way, which is another help for us to treat temptation. Sometimes it's best for us to leave, to get away from temptation. To get out of there!

In Galilee, Jesus would have the opportunity, at least for a couple of years, to proclaim the good news of God. Here's how he put it: "**The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**" Let's take his exact words apart.

"**The time has come!**" What God has promised since Adam and Eve. What God had promised again and again through Isaac and Isaiah, through Jeremiah and Jacob. What was the greatest glory of Israel's greatest King? That David would have a son who would reign forever. What every faithful OT believer had been waiting for - that time had finally come for the Savior, in the person of Jesus!

"**The kingdom of God has come near!**" God's kingdom isn't heaven. When we pray "*Thy kingdom come*" in the Lord's Prayer we aren't asking for heaven here on earth. We're asking that he set up his rule our hearts with his good news.

Jesus explained the way our hearts can become the place God calls home: "**Repent.**" Repent is to have a change of heart. Jesus is saying: "*Quit thinking that sin is no big problem. And don't reject me as the solution to it. Instead, realize that sin kills you, but I was killed to take your sin away.*"

"**Believe that good news!**" Jesus says. The good news that your Creator still loves you in spite of your sins. That he has forgiven you because of Jesus. That this good news is true! Trust it! Trust Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

That's how to treat temptation. When temptation throws its punch - FIGHT back. You'll win the battle – often. But sometimes you'll lose. That's when you REPENT and trust that your Savior came through for you eternally! Your Lord Jesus spent 40 days - in fact, a whole lifetime accomplishing your salvation.

So, during these 40 days of Lent – in fact, your whole lifetime: Fight temptation! Run to Christ! Pray! Use God's Word! Be glad angels are your bodyguards! And when you fail, repent. God forgives you!