

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

In the Wilderness

Goal for the Session *Children will act out the story of Jesus' temptation and wonder what it means to be tempted.*

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

Focus on Luke 4:1–13

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Sharon H. Ringe

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

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Lori Brandt Hale

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

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

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

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

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

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

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

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:1–13

Focus on Your Teaching

The notion of temptation is familiar to most children this age but may be difficult for them to define. They are learning to “do the right thing.” This includes learning the rules that go with their expanding environments, and often there are different rules for home, school, and church. Children may understand temptation as someone trying to convince them to make a bad choice. As they continue to learn about making good choices, be quick to assure them that God is always there to guide them and to forgive them when they make a mistake.

*Ever-present God, bless my Lenten journey with your love and mercy.
Strengthen me to learn and grow and teach in Jesus’ ways. Amen.*

LEADING THE SESSION

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ purple cloth
- ❑ battery-powered candle
- ❑ Bible
- ❑ Color Pack 1, 2, 30
- ❑ Resource Sheet 1
- ❑ *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022; CD player

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock; crayons; small heart or cross stickers, zip-seal sandwich bags (optional)
- ❑ option 2: blankets, beach towels, or floor cushions; assortment of children’s Bibles or storybooks about Jesus; quiet music, CD player (optional)
- ❑ option 3: construction paper, plain paper, pencils, scissors, masking tape, glue sticks, dry sand, newspapers

GATHERING

Before the session, recruit two adults or older youth to help with the Bible drama and give them copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Storytelling Guide). If you are using option 1 in Responding, place forty small heart or cross stickers in a zip-seal sandwich bag for each child. If you are using option 2, plan how you will set up the quiet area described in the activity description.

Greet each child by name. Invite learners to arrange the purple cloth in the middle of your learning space, and place the candle on it. Explain that the church is now in the season of Lent, the time when Christians prepare for Easter. Purple is the church color during Lent. As you light the candle, say, “Lent is a time for us to remember how Jesus’ love shines on us and guides us in living God’s way.”

Pray aloud, encouraging the children to repeat each phrase:

Dear God, I thank you for the quiet season of Lent. / Help us to journey with Jesus every day. / Amen.

Show Color Pack 1. Invite the children to wonder about what this child is doing. Ask:

- ✧ Do you think she is supposed to eat the cake? Why or why not?
- ✧ What do you think she is thinking?
- ✧ Do you think she will take a piece of cake? Why or why not?

Invite the children to recall times when they really wanted to do something that they knew they shouldn’t do (for example, eat too many sweets, take a toy that belonged to someone else, or join with a friend in misbehaving/breaking a rule). Define such situations as “being tempted.” Discuss:

- ✧ How does it feel when you really want to do something that you shouldn’t?
- ✧ When is it easy to say no when you are tempted? When is it hard to say no?

Say that today’s Bible story is about a time when Jesus was being tempted.

If learners ask about the devil, explain that in Jesus' day, people thought the devil was the leader of the powers of evil that work against God. Some learners may be frightened of the devil. Assure them that God is more powerful than anyone or anything.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 2 and say that this is a desert wilderness, a place that doesn't get much rain. Invite learners to imagine what it would be like to be in this place. Ask:

- ✠ If you were in a place like this, where would you rest? What would you eat? What would you drink? How would you get help if you needed it?

Say that the Bible story today is about a time when Jesus was in a place just like this. Open the Bible to Luke. Recall that this book of the Bible has many stories about Jesus. Follow the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 (Storytelling Guide) to tell the story.

Afterward, discuss the Bible story:

- ✠ What did you like about your part in the story?
- ✠ What did the devil tempt Jesus to do?
- ✠ If you had been tempted like Jesus was, do you think you would you have said the same things he did? Why or why not?
- ✠ Jesus was in the wilderness a long time. What do you think helped Jesus to remember that God loved him?
- ✠ How do you think Jesus stayed so strong when he was tempted?
- ✠ How does God help us to stay strong when we are tempted?

Say that after Jesus left the desert wilderness, he was ready to carry on with doing God's work. Comment that Jesus knew that God loved him and trusted God to guide him. Praying—talking with God—helped Jesus to remember these things when he was tempted. Wonder how Jesus was strong enough to do the work God wanted him to do. Comment that praying can help us to be strong, too.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

Play "Dona Nobis Pacem" (track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2021–2022). Tell the learners that the words mean "Give us peace." Encourage the children to sing along with quiet voices as a singing prayer.

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Lenten Calendar** Children will make a Lenten calendar to help them observe the season with their families. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (40 Days of Lent). Take a moment to talk about how your church observes Lent and to encourage learners to take part in Lenten worship services and activities with their families. Count aloud the number of spaces on the path. Explain that the forty days of Lent do not include Sundays. Invite learners to use a crayon to draw a cross on each of the first four spaces and to color the picture of Jesus on the space for today. Option: Give each child a bag of stickers and have each one put a sticker on each of the first four spaces. Encourage the children to take the calendars (and stickers) home to use with their families during Lent.

2. **Quiet Place** Children will create a space where they can pray and listen to God. Explain that sometimes people need a quiet and private place where they can go and be with God. Tell about the space where you go when you want to pray, read the Bible, or sit quietly with God. Invite the children to help you arrange blankets, beach towels, or cushions to create a comfy corner in your learning space. Place children's Bibles or storybooks about Jesus in the area. Option: Play a CD of quiet music. When the space is finished, have children spend a few moments there, reading, praying, or just sitting quietly. If possible, leave this area in place for all of Lent, and encourage the children to spend a few quiet moments there each Sunday.

3. **Sand Footprints** Children will make an image of a footprint in the sand to help them remember to spend quiet time with God, as Jesus did in the wilderness. Trace each child's foot on a sheet of plain paper. Have children cut out their footprints, put a small roll of masking tape to the underside of it, and tape it to a piece of construction paper. Have them rub on a thick layer of glue stick around the edge of the footprint. Lay the paper on newspaper and sprinkle sand on the glue. Remove the footprint and shake off excess sand from the paper. Invite them to write a few words to remind them of God's love with them always.

CLOSING

Gather with the children around the candle. Invite them to pray silently, asking God to help them make good choices, as they listen to "Wherever I May Wander" (Color Pack 30; track 19 on *Singing the Feast, 2021–2022*). When the song ends, pray aloud:

Thank you, God, for being with us when we are tempted. Help us to always trust you. Amen.

Say good-bye to each child by name, offering this blessing: "(Name), God loves you and will be with you wherever you go."

Storytelling Guide

(Based on Luke 4:1–13)

About drama and children

Drama helps children acquire good listening skills and taps into their creativity. Many children love the idea of dressing up, play acting, or pretending, and are eager to participate in dramatizing stories. Some children prefer quieter roles. Encourage learners to participate in ways that feel comfortable, even if that is being an observer. You may find the children will have lots of suggestions as they become familiar with a story. Consider keeping simple costumes—such as shawls, head covering, robes—on hand for children to use as they dramatize stories.

Directions: Form two groups of learners. Option: Ask one adult or older youth to lead each group. Give each leader a copy of the script. Encourage the children to copy the actions of their group leaders.

Storyteller

Jesus went to the desert to pray. *(Fold hands and bow heads.)*
He prayed forty nights and forty days. *(Show ten fingers four times.)*
He was very hungry and wanted to eat. *(Rub stomach.)*
Then the devil appeared and took a seat. *(Bend knees as if preparing to sit.)*

Group 1

The devil picked up a rock and said,
“If you are God’s Son, make this into bread.” *(Pretend to pick up a rock and hold it.)*

Group 2

Jesus said, “Bread is good to keep us fed,
but we don’t live with only bread.” *(Hold up hands, palms facing out and shake head.)*

Group 1

The devil said, “If you are who you say you are,
take all the riches from near and far.” *(Move hands and arms slowly to make a big circle.)*

Group 2

Jesus said, “No way! I serve God and God alone.
I worship God and God alone.” *(Extend arms straight out and then fold over heart.)*

Group 1

The devil said, “Then jump from here, from way up high.
The angels will catch you. You cannot die.” *(Crouch down and then jump in place.)*

Group 2

Jesus said, “I’ll never do what you tell me to do. *(Point thumb to chest.)*
Get away now! We are through!” *(Jerk thumb to the side in a “Get away” motion.)*

Storyteller

Jesus knew that God was with him in the desert. He felt safe and strong. Jesus knew that he was God’s Son, and he was ready to begin God’s work in the world.

40 Days of Lent

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

