Lesson 2: Desert Days

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That as followers of Jesus, we can have confidence in facing our own temptations by knowing that Jesus encountered and resisted every temptation we will ever face.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: To embrace Jesus' model of resisting temptation by responding with the powerful truth of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: Luke 4:1-13; Psalm 23; Deuteronomy 8:2-5

KEY TAKEAWAY: Jesus overcame Satan's temptations and lies by responding with truth from the Word of God, and so can we.

OVERVIEW:

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus was called into the desert (wilderness) by the Spirit so that He might be tempted, and Satan took advantage of this time by continually tempting Jesus. Jesus overcame temptation by responding with the Word of God. Three separate times in Luke 4:1-13, Jesus used God's Word to refute Satan's temptations. Despite the harsh conditions of the wilderness that left Him hungry and tired, Jesus modeled what it looks like to lean into God's Word when temptation comes along. Encouraged by Jesus' example, followers can find refuge in God when life's difficulties make temptation all the more enticing.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *This Is Jesus* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* give you background info for each book. *The Setting* informs you of what's happening in and around the passage. *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible Study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context," we mean, at the very least, helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

Luke

- *Author*: Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian, and a companion of Paul.
- *Time frame:* The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 A.D.
- *Purpose:* Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

Deuteronomy

- *Author*: While there's no specific author named within the text, Moses is the accepted author for Deuteronomy, with some editing and additions done after his death (such as the account of his death!).
- *Time frame:* The dating of Deuteronomy is a point of debate. The issue is that no one knows for sure when the Exodus occurred, whether it was in the mid-1400's B.C. or a later date around the mid-1200's B.C. The writing would have occurred around those general dates.
- *Purpose: Deuteronomy* means "second law." It was a reminder of the law of God for the second generation of Israelites in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. It reminded the people that the Lord is God. He is faithful to keep his promises to His people.

THE SETTING

Jesus' temptation is included in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This lesson focuses on Luke's account. This passage of Scripture is important because it emphasizes the power of Scripture even in the life of Jesus Himself. Luke's Gospel draws a deliberate distinction between Adam and Jesus. Adam did not resist Satan's temptation even though he was in the paradise of the Garden of Eden. However, Jesus resisted every temptation even in the unfavorable conditions of the wilderness. His temptations are also reminiscent of Israel's wilderness journey in Deuteronomy 6-8. Like Jesus, the Hebrew people experienced many tests. The 40 days Jesus fasted in the wilderness parallel Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

THE MAIN POINT

After His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness, led by the Holy Spirit. During this time, Satan (the devil) tempted Him. Although He was tempted throughout His time in the wilderness, only three specific temptations are recorded for us. These occurred after Jesus had fasted for forty days, at which time Satan tempted Him with special comforts and eternal power. Jesus met each temptation with truth from Scripture, exposing Satan's deceit and triumphing over temptation.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In;* the Bible Study section called *The Main Event;* and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word.*

THE LEAD IN

- *Goal:* To introduce the idea of temptation.
- *Set-Up:* Decorate three paper bags in bright colors. Number the bags 1, 2, and 3. One bag should have a nice gift such as a gift card, journal, or T-shirt. In one of the other bags, place a common item such as a rubber band or ball of aluminum foil. In the third bag, place a less special gift such as a golf ball, a shoestring, or candy. Also, prepare three similar bags with the three types of gifts that will not be displayed (but you will use them later).

FIRST, place three (pre-decorated) bags in a spot that everyone can see. (Instructions for these bags are found in the Set-Up above). Request three volunteers to play a game called "Wanna Deal?" Explain that these three lucky contestants will soon be the recipients of some great prizes. (Try to make a big deal of them, even if they are small prizes.)

THEN, **say something like:**

- **Once you are given your prize, you can choose to keep what you are given, or you can trade it for what's in one of my mystery bags. However, if you trade, you have to keep what's in the other bag. No going back to the first prize.**

Make sure volunteers understand the rules, and pass each of them one of the numbered bags. Allow the students a moment to open their bags and reveal to the class what is inside.

NEXT, offer each student the opportunity to make a trade. If students choose to trade, hand them one of the unmarked bags that you prepared (see Set-Up instructions). Allow them a moment to reveal their new prize. Once all three volunteers have made their decisions and revealed their final prizes, **ask:**

- **Can each of you walk our group through why you chose to keep or trade your gift?**
  - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, **ask all students something like:**

- **The temptation to trade made the game fun. In life, are there times when temptations lead people to give up something good? Do they ever end up with something worse?**
  - *Answers will vary.* This can also be a moment of quiet reflection, if students don't want to give examples.

Explain to students that today, we will talk about a different temptation than the one that the volunteers experienced in this game, although it functions in a lot of the same ways.

Make sure there are no questions, and then transition to The Main Event.

THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal:* To examine Jesus' time in the desert (wilderness), the ways that Satan tempted Him, His response, and why this was a crucial moment at the beginning of His ministry.
- *Set-Up:* Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, instruct students to turn to Luke 4. While they are turning, provide context from the Bible Background section (if helpful). Then, read or have a student read Luke 4:1-2. **Say something like:**

- **Luke said the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. Throughout the history of Israel, God spoke to His servants, including Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and John, in the wilderness. Think about the classic opening line of every fairytale. "Once upon a time, there was…" and then the fairytale starts. Similarly, when we read that God leads someone into the wilderness, it is our clue that this person will be used by God for really great purposes… and that's no fairytale.**

Remind students that part of our goal in this lesson is to examine the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus' time in the wilderness was an experience He shared with some of God's greatest servants. **Say something like:**

- **Here is a fun fact: The desert or wilderness where Jesus was led was most likely not sand and cacti. It was probably a rocky, mountainous area. Traditionally, this wilderness is believed to be located northeast of Jericho, a few miles from the place where Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. Only "wild animals" inhabited the area. This would have been very similar to the wilderness that God's people wandered through in the Old Testament.**

Ask students:

- **Why do you think that God leads some of His servants into the wilderness as a part of their ministry?**
  - *Answers will vary.*

- **One more question: Why do you think it's important that we read about Jesus' hunger?**
  - *Answer:* Jesus had needs and hunger because He was fully man (even though He is fully God as well). This helps us understand one of the very human pains that His body was experiencing.

THEN, explain to students that God often uses the wilderness for its unpredictability and harshness. Read or have a student read Psalm 23:1-6. **Say something like:**

- **Any shepherd could lead some sheep through a safe little pasture. But God is the only Shepherd who leads His sheep through the valley of death while they walk comfortably and confident beside the One who will protect them from any harm. Jesus was in the wilderness because it underscored the reality of His humanity, affirmed His role as the second Adam (Messiah), revealed His faithfulness and obedience to the Father, strengthened Him for His ministry, and proved that the Father is our Provider Who can bring good out of what the enemy means for harm. At no point did God withdraw His support and provision from Jesus. In fact, as we read on, Jesus gives us a perfect example of how to respond to the temptations of sin, even when we feel at our weakest.**

Read or have a student read Luke 4:3-13. **Ask students:**

- **That's a lot to unpack. Let's start with this question: How many times did Satan tempt Jesus in this passage?**
  - *Answer:* Three times.

Say something like:

- **This passage gives us three concrete examples, but we actually don't know how many times Jesus was tempted by Satan. In verse two, Luke suggests that Satan continually tempted Jesus throughout His time in the wilderness. For now, however, let's focus on the three examples that are given in this passage.**

NEXT, **ask students:**

- **Who among us has been tempted to turn rocks into bread?**
  - *Answer:* None (students may laugh a little at the thought!)

- **Why do you think that Satan tempted Jesus with such a thing?**
    - *Answers will vary.* Draw students back to Jesus' hunger.

Explain that, of course, none of us is tempted to do something like that, because we are incapable of such a thing. However, we do understand the temptation of taking shortcuts and going about things in the wrong way. **Say something like:**

- **Satan tempted Jesus to feed Himself by using His power to turn rocks into bread. The devil was essentially suggesting that God the Father would not provide for His Son. It seems he was even suggesting Jesus could not accomplish the Father's purposes if He died from starvation before His ministry began. This may seem like something that only Jesus could face, but take a moment to think about your own life. All of us, at some point, will face obstacles in our calling to serve God. It may be literal hunger, but it may also be whether or not we have enough money to travel where He calls us, whether we pass a class and graduate on time, or even whether we work that Summer Camp that we have been dreaming of working at. In moments where things seem difficult, or even impossible, where should we turn? How should we avoid the temptation to abandon God's provision and try to work things out on our own?**

Read or have a student re-read Luke 4:4. Explain that Jesus, in His humanity, was truly hungry and so this temptation was just as real, difficult, and wearying as any of ours. But Jesus refused to perform an act that was inconsistent with God's purpose. Instead, Jesus confronted the tempter and this temptation by quoting a passage in Scripture from the days when God's people wandered through the wilderness as well. Read or have a student read Deuteronomy 8:2-5. **Ask students:**

- **Jesus didn't have to quote the entire passage to Satan to make His point. However, how does knowing the full context of what He referenced help us understand that this is about more than being tempted to eat some bread?**
    - *Answer:* God provided His people with exactly what they needed. In fact, they were very well provided for in the midst of a dangerous journey!

Say something like:

- **When we focus on the out-of-reach things that seem good, we miss out on the great things that are already being provided for us. Jesus knew that His relationship with God and the closeness that He gained through His days in the desert were far better than anything He could have been tempted to eat. In the same way, God is calling us to trust that even when the temptation to take matters into our own hands arises, His provision is better, and it is worth waiting for.**

THEN, **ask students:**

- **What was Satan's next temptation in verses 5-7?**
    - *Answer:* To worship Satan, and in doing so, become the ruler of all the kingdoms in the world.

Say something like:

- **For us, the offer to rule the world would be incredibly difficult to turn down. It may be our only shot at finally doing some of the things we only daydream about when we are supposed to be paying attention in class! But for Jesus, this temptation was not about being offered the opportunity of a lifetime. It was actually about Satan offering Jesus something that He was already in line to receive, but without all the "Being Obedient to God" strings attached. Jesus knew that being obedient to God would include being mocked, betrayed, suffering, and death by crucifixion. That is a lot for anyone to bear. However, Jesus would go through every last one of them before worshipping Satan rather than God.**

Explain to students that this is one of Satan's finest tricks. He takes something that God has in store for us and offers a lesser version of it to us if we abandon the ways that God has called us to serve Him. For Jesus, this essentially meant that He could become the King of the world that He was destined to be right then and there… but just give up on that whole 'saving humanity through the Cross and resurrection' thing. For us, it could look like being the star in our school's play, so long as we give up on that whole 'spending time in prayer' thing. Or becoming an incredibly famous and influential person, as long as we give up on that whole 'sharing the Gospel with others' thing. **Say something like:**

- **Jesus did not flinch. He knew Satan to be a liar and deceiver. Using Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus responds to this temptation by saying, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve." With these words, Jesus emphasized that He would only obey God, regardless of the cost. But… what about us? How often do we let the promise of something else distract us from worshipping and serving God? If Jesus, who knew that following God's plan would result in His brutal death on the Cross, could still choose God above all else, then shouldn't that embolden us, His followers, to do the same?**

NEXT, **ask students:**

- **We've covered a lot, but there is still one more temptation that Jesus faced in verses 9-12. What is the last thing that Satan tempted Him with?**
    - *Answer:* The temptation to throw Himself down towards the Temple, or in essence, the temptation to test God.

Briefly explain that this final temptation is not quite what it seems at first. Many Jews believed the Messiah would suddenly appear in the Temple area in some spectacular manner (Malachi 3:1-2). Jesus could have gained great recognition had He jumped dramatically off the Temple and landed unharmed in the valley below. That's right- Satan offered Jesus a publicity stunt. Yet, taking the devil up on his offer would have tested God's goodness. **Say something like:**

- **Satan tempted Jesus with something that we all desire: public acceptance and adoration. And what is worse, he intentionally misquoted Scripture (Psalm 91:11-12) in an effort to tempt Jesus into manipulating God's promises and love to get it. This wasn't about tempting Jesus to ride some kind of adrenaline high with skydiving above the Temple. It was about making a public display at the Temple that would surely have gotten all the religious leaders, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, to kiss the ground Jesus walked on. The people who would give Jesus the most trouble, and eventually play a role in having Him put on the Cross, would instead embrace Him as the Messiah. All Jesus had to do was let Satan take the reins and attempt to force God's hand in front of the Temple.**

Explain to students that Jesus responded to this third temptation by quoting Scripture again (Deuteronomy 6:16) to expose Satan's complete twisting and misuse of God's Word. As Satan was trying to get Jesus to test God by forcing Him to prove Himself, Jesus stood firm in the Word of God. He reminded Satan (and us) that no one is to test God or demand that He prove Himself. Instead, God is to be trusted and obeyed. **Say something like:**

- **We aren't really talking about doubt here. Asking God if He will show up in your life when you feel alone, or requesting wisdom to understand Him better, are things that God invites us to do when our faith is rocky. Satan wasn't tempting Jesus to reach out to God for help necessarily, although it can read like that. There is something deeper here that we are being warned against. Notice that neither Satan nor Jesus dealt with doubt- they both had an acknowledgement of who God is and what He can do. The temptation rests in that Satan wanted Jesus to put God on trial the same way that he, the accuser, puts us on trial. He essentially tempted Jesus to find fault in God's plan for His life. Jesus replies with an echo of the warning to the Israelites. He did not finish the quote, but the message was clear. The full quote is: You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. This is a classic 'reference within a reference.' Further context can be found in Exodus 17, which tells us the story of how God's people, who were between their freedom from Egyptian captivity and their entrance into the Promised Land, put God to the test. They**

doubted that His plan was good, because they happened to be thirsty. The spot where they wrongly put the Lord on trial for their thirst was called "Massah," which is a word that means testing.

Explain to students that Jesus faced all types of temptations that were characteristic of those faced by every human being. (Hebrews 4:15 records that Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are.") Yet, even in the wilderness when He was weak and weary, Jesus did not give in to temptation. Yes, Jesus was fully God and could have done something miraculous to defeat Satan during His time in the wilderness, but Jesus used the same tool available to us: He fought Satan's temptations with God's Word. He placed His trust in God and depended on the truth of God's Word to sustain Him and remain faithful to God's plan despite the temptations. We can do the same! **Ask students:**

- **When living the life that God calls you feels difficult, how tempting is it to give that up so that you could receive the love and attention from others?**
    - *Answers will vary.* This may be a good moment for quiet self-reflection.

- **Why is it so important to face life's temptations with the Word of God (the Bible) at our side?**
    - *Answer:* Jesus displayed the power that knowing God's Word has during some of the most intense temptations.

- **In what ways do you place your trust in God and depend on His Word to sustain you?**
    - *Answers will vary.*

FINALLY, remind students that Jesus' time in the desert was about more than His time being tempted by Satan. At the end of today's passage (Luke 4:13), we read that Satan departed until a more opportune time. Satan wasn't done with Him just because Jesus rebutted him for 40 days in the wilderness. This wasn't a task that Jesus checked off on His "How to be a Messiah" checklist, never to be bothered by it again. Jesus knew Satan would come back. Just as we are, Jesus was tempted throughout His time on Earth. Instead of thinking of Jesus' days in the desert as the 'one time Jesus was tempted,' challenge students to see it as God's crash course on how to lean into Him during the most difficult moments. This was a crucial step in preparing Jesus for His mission. Jesus knew that He would face far harder circumstances than hunger during His ministry, and, as we read in Luke 4:13, He knew that Satan would be right there, ready to tempt Him.

Allow for questions, and then transition into The Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* To help students examine temptation in their own lives, as well as how to respond to it.
- *Set-Up:* None needed.

FIRST, describe a situation in your life when you were tempted to stray from God (sin). The goal is to give enough context without allowing students to know whether you actually gave in to temptation or not. The answer can be given after the group has a short discussion. **Say something like:**

- **To wrap up our time together, I want you to use my example to walk through these three questions about temptation:**

    1. **What kind of temptation do you think is the hardest for you or others your age to resist, and why: Physical? Mental? Social?**
    2. **What is the difference between being tempted and actually committing sin?**
    3. **How do you locate verses or passages in Scripture that address specific temptations in your life? How would you find a verse for my situation?**
    4. **How can you recognize a temptation to sin? Are some easier to recognize than others?**

THEN, after they have had a chance to discuss the questions as a group, you may want to tell them how you responded in your earlier story. You might include what you learned from that moment, and how you have gotten better (or still struggle sometimes) today.

NEXT, **say something like:**

- **One of the biggest problems with temptation for most of us is that we don't think of normalized sin in our lives as temptations anymore. We've just incorporated them into our lives as normal, rather than viewing them from Jesus' perspective and resisting or combating them with the truth of God's Word.**

FINALLY, challenge students to examine a recent temptation from their own lives. Did they respond with Scripture, or do they still need some work? Encourage them to read a new chapter or two of Scripture each day, with the goal of preparing for temptation. In this way, they will follow Jesus' great example that was set in Luke 4.

Allow Time For Any Closing Thoughts Or Questions From Your Students. Before Leaving, Close With A Prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.