

Tempted to Doubt

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[0 : 00] I'm going to snag it. All right, well, good morning, everyone. You may be seated. Yeah, I'm going to do the scripture reading a little bit later. All right, yeah, so my name is Jeff Kriesel.

I serve as the RUF campus minister at USAPHA. If you would like to learn more about our ministry at the academy, please grab me afterwards. My wife is also on staff. Raise your hand, Jennifer. She's on staff.

And then Daniel Sachs, he's one of our volunteers. He's here as well. Just grab one of the three of us, and we would love to. Just tell you about how God is at work at the Air Force Academy. So this year, I've decided to work through the Gospel of Luke with our students.

And the Gospel of Luke is a uniquely applicable book for college students. College students that struggle with doubt. College students who are surrounded by so many reasons to doubt the goodness and the plan of God.

And so we're working through the Gospel of Luke. And I was kind of struck by Luke's purpose statement that he gives for the entire book. He says this in chapter 1, verse 3.

[1 : 07] It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly, detailed account for you, most excellent Theophilus, which is a name that means lover of God, so that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught.

Certainty is what Luke is after, because he knows that we, living in a fallen, wrecked world, will struggle with doubt. We will struggle to believe with certainty what Christ has accomplished on our behalf.

And this certainty is something that not only skeptical college students need, it is something that all Christians, from all times, all places, something that we all need.

We need to experience certainty. And so the Gospel of Luke was written for people like you and I, people who struggle with doubt, people who struggle to experience full certainty about the events surrounding Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

In Luke's Gospel, it reminds us that experiencing doubt doesn't mean that you aren't a Christian. In fact, Luke's Gospel shows us that experiencing doubt is because we are fallen humans living in a fallen, wrecked, confusing wilderness of a world.

[2 : 29] And so the question isn't, do I have doubts? The question that the Gospel of Luke presents is, what do I do with them? What do I do with my doubts?

Do I ignore them? Do I sweep them under the rug and act as if they don't exist? Do I downplay them? Do I distract myself with other things so that I don't have to deal with my doubt?

Do I feed my doubt? Or do I attempt to identify the root of my doubts and then I do the hard work of uprooting those doubts before they cause me to spiral?

Even Martin Luther, the great theologian author during the Reformation, struggled with doubt. He said this. He said, I cannot stop the birds. His word for doubts.

I cannot stop the birds from flying around my head, but I can stop them from making a nest in my hair. I love that.

[3 : 31] Luke's Gospel, it helps us. It helps prevent doubts from nesting in our head. It helps prevent doubts from nesting in our hearts.

And so as we look at this passage this morning in Luke 4, it's particularly relevant given that you guys worked through Isaiah 7 last week. A prophecy is given about the coming Messiah who would know how to choose right and how to choose or how to not choose evil or how to refuse what is evil. And so we see this prophecy in Isaiah 7 that is actually lived out in Luke 4. When Jesus goes into the wilderness, he is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he is tempted for 40 days and 40 nights.

He goes toe-to-toe with Satan himself. Satan throws all of his best temptations to doubt at Jesus, and we're going to see how Jesus responds. The stakes are high.

The stakes are really high in this passage. If Jesus fails, if he falters, kind of like Adam did back in Genesis 3, if he falls and Satan's doubts start to nest in his head and in his heart, the wilderness world in which we live will remain a wilderness world.

[4 : 50] But if Jesus succeeds where Adam failed, then the wilderness will become a paradise that we all get to enjoy for eternity.

Isaiah 7 prophesied that the coming Messiah would know how to refuse evil and to choose good. And in Luke 4, Jesus is going to show us how to deal with our doubts.

So I invite you all to please stand for the reading of God's word. Luke 4, verses 1 through 13.

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days, being tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing during those days, and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread. And Jesus answered him, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.

[5 : 51] And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.

If you then worship me, it will all be yours. And Jesus answered him, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you. And on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. This is the reading of God's Word. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we live in a wilderness world, a world in which we are surrounded by so many reasons why we should doubt your goodness, and your plan for our lives, and the reality that we are redeemed through the redemptive work of Christ. We pray, Lord, that we would doubt our doubts this morning, that we would see Christ more clearly, and that we would have greater certainty concerning the things surrounding his life, death, and resurrection.

[7 : 16] We pray all these things in his name. Amen. You may be seated. Let me move this a little bit more. So living in the wilderness is hard, is it not?

Living in the wilderness is hard, and it is especially hard when you are trying to resist the wilderness's temptations. When you are trying to resist temptation, the wilderness is hard.

If you are tempted to lust, tempted with greed, tempted with power or control, maybe you are tempted with self-righteousness or self-hatred, you name the temptation.

When you face that temptation in the wilderness, if you try to resist it, it is going to be difficult. Caving is easy. Fighting temptation is hard.

And the harder that you fight temptation and refuse to cave, the better you actually understand the power of temptation. C.S. Lewis, in one of his great writings, he gave this summary for how Jesus experienced the wilderness temptations.

[8 : 29] He says this. He says, No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means.

This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down.

A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness.

They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside of us until we try to fight it. In Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.

Do you hear what C.S. Lewis is saying here? He's saying, to truly understand the power and the weightiness of temptation and how hard it is to fight it. You have to fight it for a long period of time, and no one knew this better than Jesus.

[9 : 47] Throughout his life, not just for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. We can't even begin to grasp the depths, the degree of the temptation that Jesus experienced, and the reason why is because we cave.

When we're walking against the wind, we don't like it, so we lie down. We end the temptation before it gets too hard and heavy. But Jesus never stopped walking into the wind.

Every day of his life, Jesus more than anyone else knew the power of temptation. And because he never laid down when he was faced with those temptations, we actually have a Savior who can resonate with us when we ourselves are tempted.

This is what the author of Hebrews brings out. He says, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus was fully human, and he walked into the wilderness, and he goes toe-to-toe with Satan himself, and he faces every temptation that we could ever face, and he wins.

[11 : 08] For 40 days and 40 nights, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into this wilderness experience where he would be bombarded by Satan with all of these reasons to doubt, to doubt the character of God, to doubt various attributes of God, to doubt the very plan of God for his life, and to make things even harder.

During this entire time, he fasted. He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, and the text says that at the 40-day mark, he was starving. He was kind of at the end of his rope.

He was in really bad shape. He was probably close to death at this point after 40 days of fasting.

And so here he is, he's at his weakest, and Satan goes on the attack for one last attempt, right, to get Jesus to finally lay down, to get Jesus to finally cave to the pressure and give in to temptation.

Now imagine going without food for one week. Now imagine adding five more weeks to that week. I can't even fathom how difficult this must have been for him.

I've been watching the TV show alone recently. It's on Netflix and Hulu. It's essentially a survivalist show. And usually around the week mark, they start to think to themselves, why am I here?

[12 : 37] Why am I doing this? This is miserable. And they usually tap out. Lower the stakes even more. I've been intermittent fasting over the last few months, trying to lose a few pounds.

And so for every day, I fast for 16 hours. So I stop eating at 9 p.m. and then I get to eat again at 1 p.m. the next day. And so 16 hours, I go without food.

And so between 10 and 11 a.m., I'll tell you what happens. Every single day, my stomach starts to growl and I start to think, why am I doing this? Like I can just eat.

Like I have the power to go into my kitchen and open the fridge and just eat something. It takes like all of my willpower to not cut a corner, to not cheat my fast, to end my fast prematurely, to stick it out every day and just go 16 hours.

Now imagine 40 days without food. And you have no distractions. Like I can distract myself when I'm hungry.

[13 : 42] I go on a walk. I listen to a podcast. I read a book. I play with my kids. I can do things to distract myself from my hunger. But in Luke 4, Satan wouldn't even allow Jesus to distract himself for a minute, for a moment.

His tempting whispers, they never stop. He says, I bet you're really hungry, Jesus. You don't look good, Jesus.

You look like you're in really bad shape. You look like you might be close to the end, in fact. Just satisfy your cravings. You have the power.

Just turn this rock into bread. You know you want to. You starving can't be a good thing. You starving can't be a purposeful thing.

It would be easy for you just to break your fast a day early. What's a day? It's only a day. You've gone 39 days. Well done. What's one day?

[14 : 43] Stop walking into the wind and just lie down. You see, while the fasting for 40 days was hard, Jesus knew that it was purposeful.

And he wasn't motivated to lose a few pounds like me. like Jesus was motivated in the wilderness because he was preparing for greater suffering.

He was training and testing his spirit in preparation for the next three years of very difficult public ministry that would ultimately culminate in the cross.

Now, if he couldn't resist temptation for 40 days without food, how was he going to bear the sins of the world as he hung on a cross? And so he needed to go through this period of testing and training.

He was learning how to rely on the Holy Spirit even when he was starving. He was learning how to pray thy will, not my will in the wilderness so that he could pray the same prayer in Gethsemane.

[15:54] Thy will, not my will as he's looking straight into the reality of the cross. But man, was he hungry.

I can't imagine how hungry he must have been. So with this temptation, the first temptation, it's pretty obvious what Satan is up to. Satan is trying to get Jesus to doubt God's provision, God's ability and willingness to take care of Jesus' physical needs.

Now this temptation worked on Israel as they were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. God told the Israelites, I will be faithful to my promise to provide for your needs.

I will send you manna from heaven every single day to care for you. But there's one caveat. God, you are to only gather enough manna for that day with the exception of the day before the Sabbath. You gather for two days. But you are to trust me that I'm going to provide for you even when you're hungry, even when you're in the wilderness. And what did the Israelites do?

[17:03] They doubted God's ability to provide, his willingness to provide, and they start hoarding the manna. Start hoarding it. But Jesus was different.

He knew, as Isaiah 7 says, how to refuse evil and how to choose good. He trusted that God was going to be faithful to his provision, promise.

He knew that he didn't have to take matters into his own hands. God was faithful even while he was starving in the wilderness. but there's more to this temptation than simply trusting God's provision.

The preceding story in Luke's gospel flows directly into this story. And what happened directly before Jesus is led into the wilderness? Well, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the Jordan River where he was baptized and the clouds open, the skies open, the heavens open, and God says, this is my beloved son.

With him I am well pleased. This is the backdrop of this temptation. You see, the deeper temptation here was to get Jesus to doubt God's pronouncement at his baptism which had just occurred.

[18:28] He's essentially tempting Jesus to doubt that he is God's son, that he is loved by God, that he is delighted in by God. You can hear Satan's whispers.

Like, did God actually say that you are the son of God? Did he actually say that you are his beloved son? If that's true, then why are you starving?

Given your current condition, it seems as if God doesn't love you. In fact, it would seem as if God hates you, that you are his enemy. Why would he allow you to starve if he loves you?

Are you sure about that? Are you sure you're his son? Are you sure he loves you? Are you sure he's pleased with you, that he is proud of you? Maybe he was lying at your baptism.

Do you see what Satan is doing here? He wanted Jesus to doubt his very identity as the Messiah. He wanted him to doubt his identity as a child of God, as the son of God.

[19:32] He wants Jesus to doubt God's love for him, and he wants Jesus to doubt that God is pleased with him. Satan was casting doubt on what God said to be true, which is what Satan has been doing since the very beginning of time.

Satan casts doubt on what God says to be true. But Jesus doesn't cave. Instead, he responds to this temptation by quoting a passage from Deuteronomy that the Israelites so quickly forgot.

He says this, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, including the words that he just heard at his baptism. This is my beloved son.

With him, I am well pleased. You see, Jesus was not only relying on God's promise to provide for his physical needs, he was also relying on God's pronouncement at his baptism that he was God's son, that he was loved, and that he was delighted in.

Now, if we're being honest with ourselves, I think that we're more like the Israelites in the wilderness than Jesus in the wilderness. When life throws us a curveball, when things get difficult, we tend to take matters into our own hands, and we start to doubt God's pronouncement that we are his child, that he does love us more than we can imagine, that he is pleased with us because of the redemptive work of Christ applied to us.

[21:13] We are so quick to doubt God's word about us. While starving, Jesus reminds us that God's word about us, it never changes.

In God's word, it can never fail, it can never falter. Jesus had no doubt in his mind about who he was. He knew that he was, in fact, the son of God.

He knew that he was loved by God. He knew that God was pleased with him. Why? Because God said it. Because God's word spoke truth.

Truth. And he believed God's word. Even in the wilderness. So the first temptation doesn't work. So Satan moves on to the second temptation, and he shifts his tactics.

He is cunning and clever, and he shifts his tactics. Instead of focusing on a lack of food, Satan now focuses on a lack of power. And so he gives Jesus, he takes Jesus, like, up, and he shows him, like, a panoramic view of all of the kingdoms of the world.

[22 : 24] And the text says that he did this in a moment. So clearly something mysterious is at work. Something supernatural is happening here. He shows Jesus, in a moment, every kingdom on the earth.

And I imagine this wasn't just the existing kingdoms, but every kingdom throughout all time and space, right? And so he probably showed him the Greek empire and the Roman empire and the Ottoman empire and the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Maybe the Mongolian empire was thrown in there. The British empire. And yeah, I think he saw the United States of America, right? He saw all the glory, all the fame, all the wealth that every kingdom has ever possessed.

And at a time when he had nothing, Satan says it could all be yours. All of it could be yours. Satan was offering Jesus all the power, all the glory, all the wealth, all the fame that this world could offer in a moment.

And all Jesus had to do was hit his knees on the ground. That's it. That's all he had to do was just fall two to three feet to the ground and he would have it all.

[23 : 42] You see, the second temptation, it seems as if it's like this simple temptation for power and glory, right? But like the first temptation, there's a deeper temptation at work here.

The real temptation here is to get Jesus to doubt God's plan for redemption, which includes Jesus going through the cross. Satan's offer was a much easier route.

It was a much easier route to get all the glory and power. You know, Satan was essentially offering Jesus the same thing that God the Father was offering Jesus.

Everything. And you can question, you know, if Satan was actually able to promise something like this or to give something like this, but the reality is he's offering it.

Listen, God's road for Jesus was that Jesus would die for sinners on a cross and then he would get everything. Satan's offer is just bow.

[24 : 56] no atoning death, no cross. This is like the easy button option. You can have the crown without the cross.

Take it, Jesus. But here's the thing. Jesus didn't just come into our world and put on flesh to inherit earthly fame and fortune and glory and power.

he came into this world to get us. He put on flesh to make us his treasured possession, to make us a holy nation, to make us a kingdom of priests.

He put on flesh to solve the problem of sin that we can't solve on our own. So there's more that Jesus has on his mind than mere power, glory, fame, and wealth.

above all, Jesus was motivated in this wilderness out of loving obedience to God's plan. The atoning cross on which Jesus would pay our debt was part of God's plan.

[26 : 09] And Jesus trusted God's plan even if God's plan meant that he had to go through the hardships of the cross, that he would have to suffer.

You see, if he took Satan's offer, he would reject God's plan. And if he rejects God's plan, he was rejecting God himself. Instead, he was choosing to worship Satan and follow Satan's plan for his life.

But in the wilderness, Jesus doesn't hesitate to reject the easy button option. Isn't that amazing? Once again, he quotes a passage from Deuteronomy that was so quickly forgotten by the Israelites. He says, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. Listen, sometimes in life, God's plan and your plan may not match up.

Sometimes, God's plan may even include hardship. It may include suffering. I love, so last week, I preached from Luke 8 when Jesus leads them into the storm only to calm it.

[27 : 23] Like, so clearly, like, sometimes Jesus will lead you into hardship to humble you, maybe to prepare you for greater hardship to come, or maybe he's leading you into hardship to reveal the goodness of Christ and the power of Christ to get you through the storm.

easy button options will be offered. I want a promotion. I want it desperately, but am I willing to work on Sundays to get it?

Or how about this one? I really want to buy that new car that I've been eyeballing all these years, but am I willing to stop giving to a missionary or to a local charity to get it?

Jesus answered, no. Or how about this one? I want to enjoy like a nice, restful day just sitting on my couch watching football, but am I willing to ignore my neighbor whose mom just passed away to get it?

Jesus answered, no. He refused to take the easy button option even though it was presented to him on a silver platter. All you have to do is hit your knees on the ground, two to three feet.

[28 : 44] Jesus said no to the quick fix and he said yes to the cross because he firmly believed that God knew what he was doing, leading him there. All right, so two temptations down, one to go.

And once again, Satan shifts tactics. So twice, Jesus has bested Satan by quoting scripture. And so what does Satan do with a third temptation?

Well, he uses scripture as part of his final temptation to best Jesus. And so he takes Jesus to the roof of the Jerusalem temple.

It was probably somewhere around 550 feet. And so yes, if you fell from that height, you would die instantly. he takes him to the top and he says, I see what you've been doing all these 40 days.

You have been using scripture to best me. Well, I know my Bible as well. So Jesus, please turn with me to Psalm 91. Because here, God promised that he was going to protect his Messiah from danger.

[29 : 54] It says right here, it says right here that God will catch his Messiah if he falls. So if you are the Messiah, then jump. Jump.

Let's see what happens. What's the worst that could happen? God catches you? Cool. Then you prove that you are the Messiah. You see, once again, it seems like Satan is simply tempting Jesus to doubt God's ability to protect him.

But once again, there's more going on with this third temptation. In this one, Satan is tempting Jesus to doubt God's presence. He takes Jesus to the temple, which is where, like, God's concentrated presence was found.

And he essentially says, if God is present anywhere on the earth, it's right here on the temple. This is where he dwells. He is present, right? Do you believe that he's with you?

His presence implies his ability to protect, does it not? And once again, Jesus doesn't bite. Why doesn't he bite? Because he trusts God at his word.

[31 : 04] He didn't need to test God's presence because God said that he would always be with him. If God said it, he will do it.

His word cannot fail. His word is power. His word is the sword of the spirit that cuts down the lies that surround us, that cuts down doubt before it can nest in our hair.

You see, Jesus shows us in Luke 4 how to resist the temptations to doubt God's, there's a lot of P's here, right? Provision, God's pronouncement of who he is, to doubt God's power, his plan, his protection, and his presence.

When you start to hear the tempting whispers to doubt, your weapon is the same weapon that Jesus employed in the wilderness.

Your weapon is God's very word. When you hear the whisper, you're not actually a child of God.

We turn to John 1, verse 12, and we say, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, God gave the right to be called children of God.

[32 : 21] No, I am a child of God. Why? Because God's word says so. How about this one? God won't take care of you. You're in a storm.

You're going through hardship. He must be mad at you. He won't take care of your needs. Matthew 6, 26, look at the birds of the air.

They neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more value than they? You're wrong, whispers.

God does care about me. He cares about me more than I even could ever believe myself. How about this one? God doesn't love you.

Have you ever heard that whispered into your ear? Maybe after you've sinned and you feel the weight of your guilt and shame, do you ever tell yourself or hear that whisper, God doesn't love you. [33 : 21] Where do you turn? Well, how about Romans 5, verse 8? God shows his love for us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Yeah, God loves me. Or how about this? God hasn't redeemed you. You still have debt to pay. Isaiah 43, verse 1.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. No, God knows my name.

He has redeemed me. And so those doubts can get behind me. You see, this is why Jesus came. This is why we celebrate Christmas.

Jesus came to fulfill God's word because we could not. Jesus came to lead us through the wilderness because he's the only one who went through the wilderness unscathed.

[34 : 24] There's no one better to lead us through it. He came to live a perfectly righteous life to give us his righteousness. He came to empower us to pray, thy will, not my will, even in hardship, even when we're suffering, even when we're facing the greatest of storms.

He came to defeat the devil for people who just lay down when it starts to get windy. You know, at the beginning of the Bible, this is an interesting parallel.

Adam faced temptation in paradise and through his failure, he cast humanity into a spiritual wilderness. Jesus faced temptation in a spiritual wilderness and through his victory he secured for us the eternal restoration of paradise.

Amen. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a good and gracious God who is with us, who is for us, who loves us more than we could even begin to realize.

We pray that your spirit would empower us to struggle with temptation, to push against it, to walk into the wind instead of laying down and taking the easy button option.

[35 : 48] We pray that we would be the kind of people who put others ahead of ourselves, who love our neighbors, who pursue them even when we want comfort and security.

we pray, Lord, that you would help us this Christmas season to be mindful of the one who became a servant, who humbled himself and suffered on a cross so that we could receive his righteousness and it's through his name.

Amen.