

Struggles of Leadership

We're finishing up our series today. When we started it I said, leadership is influence. Every time you interact with anyone, even a brief conversation, you're influencing them. So you **are** a leader. The question is, are you a good or a not-so-good one. If you're willing to lead in a godly way, God will give you gifts to lead and influence others. But the thing to remember is Satan will try to tempt you to use those gifts for your own benefit - for selfish purposes. People use God-given talents and abilities for wrong reasons and in selfish ways.

Today we're going to look at temptations in leadership. Matthew 3:16-4:1 says, *"After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.' Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil."*

Notice the timing. After the mountaintop, a valley. After a spiritual high, a spiritual low. After spiritual victory, a spiritual challenge. That sort of thing will happen in life. After being blessed by God you'll often have times of tempting. Temptation often comes after affirmation.

There are three basic temptations. You're going to fight all three of them the rest of your life. Let's look at them:

The first enticement of leadership is **1. The Maturity Challenge**. A distinctive hallmark of spiritual development is an ability and willingness to endure pain and delay pleasure. You do the hard, uncomfortable stuff when it is needed and you're willing to forge on and wait for the time when you can do the easy, rewarding, comfortable stuff. Immature people just want the comfortable stuff that benefits them. They don't want to wait or delay gratification. They want it now.

A great example of this on a physical level is a baby. A baby doesn't want to wait. A baby cries if it's not having its needs met. A baby doesn't know how to endure pain or wait for satisfaction. That's why one of the goals of parenting is to teach your kids how to wait. You get dessert after the meal. Things like that.

We live in an immature culture that doesn't want to wait. We want everything and we want it all now. We're impulsive as a culture and unwilling to delay gratification. People say, Why should I wait until marriage for sex? Why should I wait to buy what I want, even though I don't really have money for it. Maturity is having the character to delay gratification.

Matthew 4:2-4 says, *"For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. [That's an understatement! If you fasted for forty days, would you be hungry? You'd be starving and in a moment of low resistance. Jesus had spent almost six weeks alone, without solid food. It's that moment that Satan comes in.] During that time the devil came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.' But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Jesus is tired and hungry. The devil says, "You're God. See these stones here? Just do a miracle and turn them into loaves of bread. You can eat and be full." So what's wrong with that? Was it wrong for Jesus to be hungry? No. Was it wrong for him to want something to eat? No. Did He have the ability to turn stones into bread? Yes. So what's the big deal?

The problem is, Jesus is being tempted to use his abilities for selfish reasons. God didn't give Jesus the power to work miracles so he could serve himself and be comfortable. The same is true with you. God gave you some abilities, some talents, gifts and resources. But God didn't give them to you for your benefit. They're for the benefit of other people. God designed the universe so that we need each other - so we wouldn't be selfish. My talents and abilities are for your benefit, not for me to have big ego about or serve myself. Your talents and abilities aren't for you. They're to serve other people. The purpose of strength is service not status.

1 Peter 4:10 says, *"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another."* Talents are meant for serving, but let me warn you: you'll be tempted where you're gifted. The devil doesn't just tempt you in weaknesses, he tempts you in strengths. You're particularly tempted in the things you're good at. The devil doesn't mind you being good at things as long as you don't use them for God. You don't even have to use them for the devil. He just wants you to use them for yourself: to make yourself more comfortable, more important, more secure, more liked, more in control. But God didn't give you those gifts for your benefit. God gave them so you could serve God's purpose and serve others. Any other use simply plays into the hands of the enemy.

So the enemy will encourage you to use your talents, but in the wrong way or for the wrong reasons. Have any of you ever been tempted to turn stones into bread? No. Because you don't have that ability. But you've got other

abilities the devil's tries to subvert. For instance, if you're persuasive, he'll tempt you to manipulate people for your own benefit. If you're good at something, he'll tempt you to use your ability to boost your ego or to make yourself look better.

Jesus' temptation was to use his abilities for selfish purposes and not wait on God to meet his needs. The test for us is, when I'm empty or hurting or confused, will I trust God to meet my needs or will I rush to satisfy them my own way?

You know, there's that old saying - God helps those who help themselves. Some people assume that's from the Bible, but the phrase originated in ancient Greece and is illustrated by two of Aesop's Fables. God doesn't help those who help themselves. God helps those who trust God and follow. Not the ones who just take matters into their own hands. When you're empty, hurting, or confused, will you trust God to meet your needs or rush off to satisfy them?

Certainly, we're supposed to make an effort and work hard in life - in fact, Proverbs 12:24 says, "*Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and become a slave.*" and Proverbs 6:10-11 says, "*A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber.*" But there's a big difference between working hard because it's the right thing to do and taking matters into your own hands, your own way for your own benefit.

So where are **you** trying to turn stones to bread and meet your own needs your way rather than God's way? Let me give you a little tip. Whenever you think, "I've got to think of myself first." That's a temptation. When you hear someone say, "You've got to put yourself first!" That's a temptation.

So the answer to this challenge is to trust God. Trust God when things don't make sense. Trust God when you don't have enough. In Matthew 6 Jesus said, "*Don't worry. Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.*" God knows **all** your needs. God knows your emotional needs, financial needs, physical needs, health needs - every need in your life.

Jeremiah 2:13 says, "*My people have done two evil things. They've forsaken me, the fountain of living water. And they've dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can't hold water at all.*" A cistern is a hole, lined with clay that you fill up with rainwater. It's not a well with fresh water. It's just a hole to hold water and it gets stagnant and putrid. God says, I'm the source of living water, all the water you could want. But instead of accepting that, you dig a hole in the ground to hold stagnant water and the hole is leaking so you won't even have the stagnant water soon.

After Jesus stood up to even more temptation, Matthew 4:11 says "*Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.*" God waited until after the challenge to provide the answer to Jesus' need. He did send help but waited. God wants to see if you're going to trust God.

The second enticement that every leader and influencer faces is **2. The Integrity Challenge**. Integrity is when your belief matches your behavior. What you say is what you actually do. When you have integrity what you are in public is the way you are in private and everywhere else. You don't act one way here and another way over there.

Interestingly, there are very few things that reveal the level of your integrity more than success. I don't know if you noticed it but when people become successful it can change them and not always for the better. In fact, it can destroy some people. They can't handle it. Some people who get quick success go off the deep end. They don't have the maturity and integrity to handle this challenge.

Let's look at the second challenge for Jesus: "*Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, 'If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, "He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone."*'"

First notice that Satan can quote scripture and the verse he says here is actually in the Bible. It's Psalm 91:11-12. But he twists it and takes it out of context. That's what many people do - take a verse of the Bible and try to make it mean something beyond what was intended. This verse certainly doesn't mean that you should go out and do any goofy old thing you want and expect God to protect you.

Most people don't get the difference between faith and presumption. Faith is when God tells you to do something and it feels really hard to do and doesn't seem to make sense but God told you to do it, so you go do it, that's faith. When you think up some idea on your own and go do it and then expect God to bail you out and make it work, that's presumption.

There are some guys on TV teaching this kind of thing. God's not obligated to bail you out of all the problems you get yourself into. Some people talk like, Whatever you ask, God has to give. God doesn't. God's God; you're not.

What's going on here is the temptation to presume on God's grace. To try to hold God hostage and say, "God, if I do this you've got to protect me."

The devil comes to Jesus and says, "We know you're God. So how about this? We take you to the tallest building in the city and the plan is, you jump off and on your way down, the angels will catch you. Then everyone will know you're God and give you glory and honor."

So what's wrong with that? Would it be wrong for Jesus to receive glory and be praised by people? No. In fact, the Bible says that one day every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord. But this is the wrong way and the wrong time. God's plan was that Jesus Christ would get glory by dying on a cross, not jumping off a building. By sacrificing, not by showing off. Jesus did not come to earth to receive praise. He came to give life.

Temptation often involves taking a short cut to a legitimate goal. But the ends do not justify the means. You may have the right goal but it's not the right way or the right time. There are a lot of things that I can do. But as a leader, as an influencer, I don't do them. As a leader you hold yourself to a much higher standard.

There was a leader in the Bible named Rehoboam. He started off great but he let popularity and praise go to his head. 2 Chronicles 12:1 says, *"But just when Rehoboam was at the height of his popularity and power he abandoned the Lord, and the people followed him in this sin."* When leaders mess up it leads others astray and hurts people. That's why Proverbs 27:21 says, *"Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but a person is tested by being praised."*

Have you noticed that when you give some people a little bit of power they go crazy. I don't know what it is but normally nice people, you give them a little bit of power or position and they just go goofy!

What's the answer to the integrity challenge? Galatians 5:25-26 says, *"Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another."* Listen to God! Follow the Spirit's leading instead of listening to popular opinion. Popular opinion is often wrong. You listen to God, follow the Spirit's leading in every part of life, and you won't need honors or popularity..

The other thing you do is practice humility. 1 Peter 5:6 says, *"...humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor."* It says, humble yourself. That's something you want to choose to do. Don't pray, "God, please humble me!" Never in the Bible are you told to pray, "God, humble me." We're told over and over to humble ourselves. It's something you do to yourself.

God responds to our humbling ourselves. In Daniel 10:12 God tells Daniel, *"Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer."*

Humility is not denying your strengths. It's being honest about your weaknesses. It's being honest and admitting your dependence on God. "God, I can't lead this family without you. I can't lead this business; this team; this small group; this community, I can't lead my friends without you. I need help."

The third enticement of leadership is a big one: **3. The Priority Challenge**. Jesus often covered the subject of priorities in his teaching. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus says, *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* He didn't say you shouldn't. He said you can't - it's impossible. Only one can be number one.

Let's look at Jesus' third temptation: *"Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 'I will give it all to you,' he said, 'if you will kneel down and worship me.' 'Get out of here, Satan,' Jesus told him. 'For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"* Nothing else is worth worshipping except God.

Notice that in all the temptations, Jesus answers by quoting scripture. You don't resist temptation with your own opinions. You resist it by knowing what God says. So when the enemy puts an idea in your mind you say, "Yeah, but the Bible says..." The thing is, when you're tempted there's rarely a lot of time to look things up. You need to have some of it in your head - particularly concerning your personal temptations.

If you get tempted regularly by anger you need to memorize some verses on anger. If you get tempted regularly to shoot off your mouth, then you need to memorize some verses on watching what you say. If you get regular tempted by jealousy or greed or pride or whatever, you need to memorize some verses that have to do with that. So that when the devil presents an idea, you can say, "Yeah but this is what God says."

The devil isn't afraid of your opinion. But he does fear the word of God. So learn scripture. You say, "I can't do that!" Of course you can. You learn things all the time. You learn the things that are important to you.

So the devil comes and says, "Jesus, if you'll just bow down and worship me, I'll give you the world." Jesus doesn't even challenge Satan by saying, "You don't even own the world." He just says, "Don't tempt God. You should only worship God."

Jesus wasn't sent to earth to possess the world, but to save the world. You weren't put on this planet to acquire a bunch of things, but to make a difference with your life. This is the test of your priorities. The heart of this temptation is, do you value what you have or could have on earth more than what God has for you? Is your now more important than your eternity? You've got to decide.

Jesus was crystal clear about this and in Matthew 16:24-26 He said this *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"* You're not put on earth to get things you're going to leave behind the moment you die.

What's the answer to the priority challenge? Generosity and sacrifice. Every time you're generous you break the grip of possessions in your life. Beyond that, you help people and causes with generosity. Anytime you give you're breaking the grip of materialism. Because materialism, the third great temptation, is all about getting. The answer to it, is to give.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 Paul instructs Timothy, a leader of the church to, *"Tell them to use their money to do good."* Money is meant to be used not loved. You use money and you love people and love God. If you love money you're going to use people and even try to use God. *"Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life."* Every time you give money away you're banking it in heaven. That's an investment that's never going away.

These three temptations are going to happen in your life and they all represent an attack on the nature of God. The first one is an attack on the sufficiency of God, that I can't trust God. The second is the temptation to abuse the sovereignty of God – to try and take the fast route rather than do it God's way and in God's time. The third temptation is to reject the sanctity of God. You should only worship God and put God over everything else.

Let me give you some bad news and some good news as. Here's the bad news. You're never going to outgrow temptation. I hate to tell you but you're going to have it the rest of your life. Luke 4:13 says, *"When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came."* You'll never get so strong that it will be easy. In fact, the stronger you grow in the Lord the more Satan is going to try to take you down.

But don't be intimidated by temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted. It's sin to give in to temptation. So when the devil puts a thought in your mind you can choose to reject it. Also, temptation is an opportunity to grow spiritually. Temptation is an opportunity to do wrong but it's also an opportunity to do right and to grow by doing it. Temptation can be a stepping stone to growth rather than a stumbling block into sin.

The good news is when you meet and overcome a challenge you grow and get more power. Luke 4:1 says, *"Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness."* The Spirit went with him to his time of temptation, and then after he passes the challenge, Luke 4:14 tells us, *"Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power."* Now, when he comes out he's in the power of the Spirit.

After Jesus' temptation he uses that power to start his public ministry.

Now I have to ask you: what are you going to do about these temptations – temptations that you will face in life? Given what we've learned today, there are three questions I want you to seriously consider:

First, will you make God the primary concern of your life? Will you say, "Lord, I'm living for Your kingdom, for Your purpose for my life so I can trust You to meet all my needs because You're number one in my life."

Second, will you dedicate your God-given abilities, talents, gifts and resources to serve God and others rather than just be comfortable, and use selfishly?

Third, will you count eternal rewards in heaven as more important than having things here on earth. Will you put people before possessions?

We know how Jesus answered – now it's up to us. I invite you to commit yourself this morning to trust God, to give yourself in service to God and others and to give your gifts to God so that others may benefit. Let's pray.