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Moving Mountains: Mount of Temptation—It's No Big Deal Matthew 4:1-11

I made a promise to myself this year: **no** Easter candy. I'm a sucker for dark chocolate marshmallow bunnies. But I am determined to eat healthier. So that was my plan. No bunnies! **Then along comes Grandma.** Grandma goes Easter candy shopping for Cooper. And she doesn't just give him a basket of Easter candy. She gives him a **basket** of Easter Candy. More like an Easter casket. How wrong is this!? What kind of mother would put temptation like this in front of her beloved son?

But I was handling it... until last Monday night when Cyndi and Cooper were nibbling away upstairs. I decided to flee to the basement to avoid temptation. And there, in the dark—like a chocolate land mine—sat Cooper's Easter casket. It called to me. Like the siren song of temptation, it called to me. I knelt down; I sifted through its contents in the dark. I began to negotiate with myself, "OK... I can't eat a big bunny. How about one, teensy little chocolate egg?" I found one near the bottom. I pulled it up, looked at it, caressed it—and then, realizing how I was about to fall—**flung** it back into the basket crying, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Or something like that.

This Mother's Day morning we are going to continue our theme with the first mountain in the New Testament: the Mount of Temptation.

Moms, I have Mother's Day gift for you this morning. I am going to give you tools to help your kids face temptation. Would you find that helpful? Are you at all concerned about the smorgasbord of temptations our kids must navigate every day? Have you equipped your kids to do battle with those temptations? This morning's story provides some great, practical helps for us to make our kids strong and courageous in the battle for their lives and souls.

Let me set this story in context. Jesus is thirty years old. For three decades he stayed in Nazareth, running his late father's carpenter shop, taking care of mom and the sibs. Then along came John the Baptist and Jesus appeared at the Jordan River to be baptized by him; to begin his ministry as the Savior. So, after Jesus' baptism, **what is the very first thing God orders him to do?** Verse 4:1. "Then Jesus was **led** by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Mark's gospel puts it even stronger: the Holy Spirit **cast** Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

Doesn't that seem odd? Jesus has a spectacular baptismal experience! He stands there in the water, the heavens split open, and the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove. Why, God even speaks words from heaven! What an amazing inauguration to his ministry. So, what's next? Go preach some sermons? Heal some people? Cast out demons? How should the Savior start his ministry? Temptation! **The very first thing God does** is cast Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. From baptism—to temptation. **And there's a reason for it.** Why did Jesus come to earth? To save us! From what? Temptation and sin. If Jesus fails here, in this test in the wilderness, He's toast! And so are we. There is no point going forward. Might as well hang it up. What kind of savior would He be? How can He save us if He can't even save Himself? Jesus' ministry of salvation starts with His own temptation.

But some people will say, "But Jesus wasn't **really** tempted. After all, he's the Son of God, right? He wasn't **really** tempted like we are, was he?" Yes, he was. A later New Testament writer says this about Jesus: "**...we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**" (*Hebrews 4:15*) Aren't you glad that Jesus understands our temptations and struggles? And can help us conquer them?

Our son, Cooper, is a freshman at Gig Harbor High, and we know he faces a lot of temptations. Every day. And all three of us are learning how to deal with this stuff. I told him the other day, "This is a first for all of us. It's the first time we've ever **raised** a teenage boy. It's the first time you've ever **been** a teenage boy. We are all rookies." All the more reason, then, to stay close to each other, to talk often about important stuff and to deal honestly and openly with the challenges. Alcohol, drugs, sex, internet porn, suicide—compared to what we faced when I was in high school, I cannot imagine the pressures kids face today. We want to give Cooper the tools he needs to face these temptations with integrity and courage. This story—of Jesus' temptation—helps us with that. Are you ready?

The first tool for facing temptation: **God's Word.** When Jesus was hungry and tired, the devil began to tempt him. Three times the devil tempts Jesus and three times he responds in the same way. How? "It is written!" Notice how Jesus **doesn't** respond. He doesn't argue, doesn't negotiate, doesn't try to "talk it out" with the tempter. He fights the devil's words with God's words from scripture. "It is written!"

Now let me ask you this: how is it that Jesus had those words at the ready? Did he whip out his iPhone with a nifty Bible app and do a quick search for a clever retort? Is **that** how he was ready with those passages from the Bible? Or maybe it was magic? All of those verses were magically stored up in him from birth! Is that how it worked? Why did Jesus have God's word tucked away in his soul, ready to deal with temptation?

Because mom and dad put it there! There's nothing magic about it. Jesus knew the Bible because his mom and dad took him to church and took him to Sunday school and taught him those things at home. Mary and Joseph prepared Jesus to face temptation because they taught him what the Bible says about what is right and wrong and good and evil.

That's why the Toones sit together after many dinners and read a passage of scripture and talk about it. Not all the time. And honestly, we've been sporadic about it over the years, so don't feel like we have this all together. But we know it is important for all of us to have God's word in us. So we are working hard to make this a regular part of our life together. And we are not our own in this, thank God! It's why we bring our kids to Sunday school and youth group and mission trips and D groups and confirmation classes. It's why church activities are a **priority** for our children. We need help from the church in putting God's word into the souls of our children. Don't you? Don't your kids need that kind of ongoing, consistent nourishment, too? Can you really afford to make everything else in the world—music, sports, vacation—a priority in your children's life ahead of their church activities?

Now I don't expect that when someone offers Cooper a beer that he is going to whip out a scripture verse. But in a world where anything goes; where there's no such thing as truth, no such thing as good or evil... when we pour Bible stories and Bible heroes and Bible truths into Cooper's heart, we are teaching him to know the difference between God's voice and the Tempter's voice. So, moms... dads... what are you doing to fill your kids up with God's Word?

First tool: God's Word. Second tool: **Parents' words.** Back to Jesus' baptism for a moment... Do you know what the climax of that event was? When God the Father spoke from heaven: **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** Mark makes it personal: **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."** How was Jesus prepared to face temptation? He had the words of his father still ringing in his ears. Words of love, approval, pride and praise. Words that said, "I believe in you. I know what you are. I know what you are capable of. I love you. Go get 'em, Son."

Do you want to equip your children to face temptation? Then speak words of praise and pride and approval and blessing and love into their lives **every day.** Dads, especially you! You have no idea the power of your blessing upon your kids' lives. We often joke about how kids don't listen to their parents; how they blow off everything we say. In fact, that is exactly wrong. According to Chap Clark, the number one influence in the lives of children is the voice of their parents. Moms, dads... you have more power, more influence in those lives than you can ever imagine. **Especially** if you season your words of correction with ten times the words of blessing and love and praise. And when you are speaking words of blessing, it is the perfect opportunity to coach!

About two weeks ago, Cooper and I had a conversation about some of the temptations he is facing in school. I told him that I love him and am proud of him and that I respect his desire to live the way God wants him to live. I also said, "But you are going to be tempted. There will be friends who offer you a drink or drugs or a joint or a girl who will offer herself. And you cannot wait until that moment—in the heat of the battle—to decide what you are going to do. You need to decide right now what your response will be at that time so that it comes automatically. If not, it might be too late... and too hard to do what I know you want to do. Right now is the time to make those decisions, not then. And I know you can do it!"

I had a similar conversation with Rachel when she was at home. I told her, "Sweetheart, I'm not so concerned about drugs and alcohol and sex as being your greatest temptations. I know you. Your temptation will be danger. You are a daredevil and when people are egging you on... that is going to be the time that you will be tempted to do something stupid and reckless. You need to know this about yourself to prepare for it." Of course last Saturday she called me from a Spokane emergency room having been knocked out while Sumo Wrestling at Whitworth. Apparently our little talk didn't quite take. So we'll talk some more this summer.

And that is another important point. You don't have these talks once and call it good. Do the sex talk... and then wipe your brow and check that off your parenting agenda. These are talks you need to have weekly. Every new situation provides another opportunity for conversation. Every drunk driving accident, every suicide, every teenage pregnancy, every suspension from school ... use every event of **their** lives as a springboard for one more conversation about this stuff! You have no idea, parents, the power that your words possess... words of love and praise and blessing and coaching. If you want to prepare your kids to face temptation, you had better start pouring **your words** into their lives.

God's Word, parents' words and third: **their own words**. Did you notice how persistent the devil was? Just like that naughty kid in your class. "Jesus, why don't you try this? No, how about this? No, then how about this???" He just wouldn't let up. Jesus didn't argue with him. Didn't debate or engage or negotiate. He just kept fighting back with scripture. But finally, Jesus has enough and He cries out: **Away from me, Satan!** Finally, Jesus speaks **His own** words and orders the devil to leave Him alone.

You have got to help your kids to find their own words, their own voice, to speak against temptation. One way is to role play. "Son, if your friend invited you to come into his room and look at porn on his computer, what would you say?" Talk it out with them. Help them verbalize the words with you. "No thanks. Not today. Gotta go. I'm not into that." Give them real words to say. And your very best gift might be the freedom to blame everything on you. Make yourself the bad guy. "No, I can't go with you. My mom will kill me if she finds out." Our kids know that they have standing permission to throw us under the bus if it will help them get out

of something they know is wrong....or that they are just uncomfortable with. Give kids their own words to fight with.

God's word, parents' words, their own words and finally, **their friends' words**. Did you notice what happened at the end? "**Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**" After Jesus ordered Satan to leave him alone, he was immediately surrounded by friends who cared for him.

Let me ask this: if Jesus needed good friends to stand strong against temptation, how much more do you think it is true for us? Parents, one of the most important things you can do is monitor the kinds of friends your kids are hanging out with and encourage the relationships with the kids whose families share your values. And honestly, it is hard work. Hard work insisting on meeting parents you don't know. Hard work saying "No" to a request to stay overnight with someone you are not comfortable with. Hard work to haul your kids to youth group and D group and confirmation class and all the other places where they are **more** likely to develop healthy, spiritually encouraging friendships. But that's what you signed up for when you had kids.

So, moms and dads, are you quite confident that the friends surrounding your kids are likely to reinforce the values you are trying to instill in them—or are they tearing them down? **And students**, think about the kids you hang out with. Do they give you the strength to do what you know is right, what God wants you to do and what you want to do inside? Or are they sneaky, always trying to work an angle, always trying to get away with something, always bending the truth? Choose your friends well. They can make or break you.

There you go. Four tools to help your kids face temptation. Are you filling them up with **God's Word**? At home and faithfully at church? Are you filling them up with **your words** of love, pride, praise, encouragement and coaching? Are you helping them find **their own words** with which to say No to what will hurt them? And are you surrounding them with the kinds of **friends** who will build up and not tear down the work you are doing at home? If so, you are giving them great tools to face the temptations that will surely come their way.

Of course, this story and these warnings might not be just for kids. There are a few temptations that we adults face too, aren't there?

Temptation doesn't stop when you graduate from high school, does it? Or college? Jesus was tempted as an adult. And so are you. So am I. Are **you** filled with God's word? Do you have the words and courage to order the Tempter to leave you alone? Do you have angels??? Friends who love Christ and will hold you accountable for your life? A LifeGroup. Want to know the **best** way to teach your kids to fight temptation? Let them watch as **you** fight temptation in the power and Spirit of Christ!

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read the passage out loud.**

- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.

- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **Pray together:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **Dig deeper**

1. Our text says that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted right after his baptism. Why would God begin Jesus' ministry with temptation, especially when the Lord's Prayer says, "lead us **not** into temptation"?

2. Was Jesus **really** tempted? After all, he is God, right?

3. What kinds of excuses do we make for our sinful behavior? What do we learn from this story that helps us deal with our own or our children's temptation? Be specific.