

I. The series this fall will be an extended study of the temptations we face.

A. We're calling it *Seven* because it's based on the Seven Deadly Sins – a list of major categories of challenges we face. This list is not found in the Bible as a list – they are all there. Instead, a list was initially compiled in the fourth century by a couple Desert Fathers – namely Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian. Ponticus put forward the first list, which contained what he called were Eight Evil Thoughts. Cassian later organized them – sort of prioritized them from carnal to spiritual (from sins of the flesh like gluttony and lust to things like envy and pride). A couple hundred years later, Gregory the Great, modified the list, switching some things around in an effort to reduce it down to seven, which he believed was a more biblical number. And then, about a thousand years later, Thomas Aquinas, modified it again.

B. We are going with the seven that most people believe are the real seven because these are the seven used in the 1995 movie starring Brad Pitt, Gwyneth Paltrow and Morgan Freeman: pride, greed, envy, anger, sloth, gluttony and lust.

C. There is not much difference between all of the lists. There is some confusion surrounding sloth. It was called sadness for a while, equated with emotional and spiritual lethargy and apathy. Under Gregory the Great this was paired with laziness, but that doesn't really work. The word that fits best is *acedia*, but no one knows that word. You will after the series! The other point of contention surrounds pride. Gregory the Great pulled it out of the list and made it the root of all the sins, adding vainglory in its place. Vainglory is not exactly pride or vanity. It's, "image is everything." Those with vainglory have a strong desire for recognition and approval of others.

D. Let me note that I'm aware that some of you have problems with this list. For starters, you're a bit confused as to why a couple words – namely gluttony and sloth – are on the list. You're thinking, "really? We leave murder, rape, racism and genocide off the list but include super-sizing your order at McDonalds and hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock? Who thought that was a good idea?" And, well, your most frequent temptations are not even on the list. According to the latest poll, gossip, lying and cheating at work are the sins we commit most often, followed by: worry, overeating, spending too much money, being lazy, feeling jealous, viewing pornography, abusing alcohol or drugs and doing something sexually inappropriate with someone.

E. As I said, I'm aware that some of you might think you could do better than the seven who have made the list. Let me say three things:

1. First, that's called pride. Let me suggest you keep that one on your list.

2. Second, the Seven Deadly Sins are perhaps more appropriately referred to as the Seven Cardinal Vices. A vice is a corrosive or destructive habit – we call those habits that help us *virtues* and those habits that pull us down *vices*. Cardinal refers to “root, chief, of greatest importance.” One of the ways to think about what we’ve been given is to imagine a tree. Pride – and this is especially true under Gregory the Great’s model – pride represents the roots and the trunk. The Seven Deadly Sins – that is, the seven cardinal vices – are the main branches, out of which come all the others. The claim is not that these are the worst sins, but that these habits lead us to them. Pride fosters greed, anger, envy, lust, sloth, gluttony and vainglory, which in turn lead to all of the other sins.

3. Finally, let me note that after six months of studying these sins and the tradition behind them, I think they got them right. I think you will not be disappointed. I’ve been amazed at the wealth of insight into the human condition that surrounds the seven deadly sins. Every other day someone publishes a self-help book based on their insights over the last ten years if we’re lucky. Ten months is more likely – and sometimes I think it’s just ten minutes. This list is one that has been refined and pruned for nearly 2,000 years. It is full of insight. I do not think you’ll be disappointed.

F. So, this fall, we will turn our attention to the Seven in a big way.

1. As we have done in the past – most recently with *The Life of Jesus Christ* study – we’ll combine sermons, readings, small group discussions, videos, testimonies daily devotions and more to help you grow in your relationship with God. And we are looking for you to invite your family, friends, neighbors and colleagues to church or into a small group.

2. The small groups are set up to be very easy for you to invite a few friends and work through. All you need to do is add people.

G. By way of preview let me assure you:

1. First, that *Seven* is not going to be one long lecture about the evils of sin. For starters, many of the things on the list describe the misuse of good things. They are not inherently evil – food (which is linked with gluttony) and sexual intimacy (which is linked to lust) are not bad. But they can be misused.

2. Second, this will not be a series of motivational speeches telling you to go try harder. “Stop being angry. Stop lusting. Stop being greedy. Just stop it.” That would be unbearable - remarkably unhelpful and unbearable. The Gospel is not a self-help project, it is a Spirit empowered one.

3. What this series will be is an opportunity to get better. It's based in part on the idea that our problems often lie a few levels deeper than we think. And understanding exactly where our thinking goes wrong will help us understand a bit more about how we might work at moving in the other direction. Sin is always ultimately stupid. It's a bad choice. We need clarity around that and we also need to see how others have overcome the challenges we are facing.

H. Well, that is coming up in the fall. And our passage today is the launching point. Let me read it for you again. I was going to have a clip played from *The Bible*, the mini-series that came out this past year. But this scene was very controversial. Many thought that Satan was cast to look like President Obama. That's not a helpful message, so I am just going to read it for you again.

II. Luke 4:1f

A. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

B. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

C. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

D. The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

E. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

F. The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

G. Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

H. When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

III. So, what we are told here is that:

A. While he's still dripping wet from his baptism, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into battle.

B. He goes into the desert by himself for forty days of fasting, prayer and hand-to-hand combat.

1. The number *forty* would have jumped off the page for first century readers for a few reasons: first, because of forty day fasts done by Moses (who is associated with the Law) and Elijah (who is greatest of the Old Testament prophets).

2. A forty day fast done in the desert would remind them of the forty years Israel spent wandering around in the desert, and suggest that Jesus is, in one sense, taking their place. He is the true and better Israel.

3. The face-off that unfolds between Jesus and the devil would have had clear parallels with Genesis 3 where Adam failed.

C. There are a lot of similarities between the events of Genesis 3 in the Garden and Luke 4 in the desert. Of course there were differences: 1) Adam had a companion while Christ was alone; 2) Adam was in a garden paradise while Christ was in a desert wilderness; 3) Adam's needs were met while Christ is weak with hunger. But the big difference is, Adam failed – and in him all of humanity fell as well; Christ passes his test. He withstands the temptations set before him which no one else has ever done: not Adam, not Abraham, not Israel, no one.

D. The Apostle Paul will make much of the similarities here, going so far as to call Jesus the "Second Adam" and arguing that both Adam and Jesus took the test as representatives for the rest of humanity.

E. Volumes have been written about this high-stakes encounter. Theologians discuss the nature of Satan's offers, the Old Testament passages Christ used in his defense, and what might have happened if Jesus had failed.

F. It's worth noting that little of what Satan encouraged Christ to do was inherently wrong. For example, Satan told Christ to turn stones into bread. Jesus refused, but later multiplied bread to feed the five thousand. If Satan's requests were not wrong in themselves then why did Christ reject them? Because: 1) they were designed to honor Satan; 2) they suggested that Christ's mission might be accomplished without the cross.

IV. The big point here is that no one had successfully survived this kind of frontal attack before. But Jesus did. He maintained his righteousness even in the midst of this focused attack.

A. This is yet another reason to believe that He is the one. The primary purpose of this passage is to persuade us to trust Christ. Luke's Gospel – the report he files with Theophilus after investigating the life, work, teachings and claims of Jesus – is designed to help us understand who Jesus is and that we need him. The main message is that Jesus is God, Savior and Lord.

B. Alongside all the other evidence: 1) the supernatural activity around the announcement of his birth; 2) the virginal conception of Mary; 3) the testimonies of Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna; 4) the reaction of John the Baptist to Christ; 5) the voice of the Father speaking from Heaven, "this is my Son;" 6) the genealogical record that supports the claim that he fulfills the profile for the Messiah – alongside all of this other evidence we now add this: he withstood a challenge from evil personified that no one else could withstand.

C. The main thing is always to keep the main thing the main thing. I want to be sure the main thing is clear before we move on. You may not yet be convinced, but let's at least be clear on what is going on: Luke is building his case. There is no one like Jesus. He is Lord, God and Savior.

D. With that settled, let me steer you away from something and point you to something else.

V. First, in an effort to keep your small groups on track, let me recommend you avoid spending too much time trying to figure out exactly how Jesus was tempted.

A. I'm imagining that someone may bring up James 1:13 and send everyone into a deep theological hole. James 1:13 reads, "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one."

B. Here's the dilemma: If God cannot be tempted, then either Jesus wasn't tempted or He isn't God. Again, James 1:13 reads, "God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one." So, either Jesus was not really tempted or He is not God.

C. If you want the full graduate level seminar on this, sign up for a theology class at Trinity. Here's the Cliff Notes:

1. Jesus is God. That's the thrust of the whole book. That's the argument Luke is making. That is why they put him to death. He claimed to be God.

2. Two, Jesus was tempted. That's what we are told here and also in Hebrews 4:15 and other places. He was tempted in every way we are but did not succumb.

3. Furthermore, the temptations He faced were real. It wasn't acting or make-believe. He could have failed.

4. This is all possible given what we are told in Philippians 2:5-11, which tells us that Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

5. At one point Jesus was only God. At the incarnation He added humanity to deity, becoming fully God and fully Man. We don't know how. We cannot comprehend the nature of God. But part of what we are told is that when He added humanity He put some of his divine attributes on hold. He retained them but did not access them. He faced some things as a human without access to his divine powers.

6. So, as God he could not die, but as a man he could – and did. As God He could not grow tired, as a man he could and did. And... though as God He could not be tempted, as a man he could and did.

7. You see, Jesus did not use his divine powers for his own benefit. He didn't cheat. When he performs miracles, it's to feed other people, not himself. He used His power to heal other people, not himself. He alleviated the suffering of other people, not his own. He lived humbly and humanly as we do. He accepted those limitations. He suffered like we suffer. He was hungry as we grow hungry. He felt pain as we feel pain. And he endured temptation as we endure temptation.

8. Hebrews 2:14 is a key verse here:

a) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

D. The Bible is clear: Jesus was tempted and he passed that test.

VI. Which leads to the second take-away: There are a number of things we can – and should – learn from the Temptation of Jesus.

A. One: Temptation itself is not a sin.

1. Jesus was tempted yet did not sin. It is not wrong to be tempted. It can't be helped. We will be tempted by a lot of good things – food, sex, power, security, money and comfort – and by some bad things. Being tempted is not sin; and, it is possible to be tempted by not sin.

B. Two: There is a devil.

1. I know that talk of Satan causes some of you to wince, especially those who mistakenly picture him in a red spandex body suit, complete with horns and a tail. The Bible does not describe him this way. But it does recognize evil as real and speaks at some length about “spiritual forces of darkness,” which are led by a fallen angel.

2. I don't think I have had many run-ins with the devil. He is not omnipresent like God. Don't give him credit he doesn't deserve. But there are legions of devils – demons, fallen angels – who do line up against us. I don't know how to make sense of the Bible without this.

3. C.S. Lewis is brilliant here – as he is in so many other places. He warns us to avoid either of two common mistakes. First, seeing Satan under every rock – blaming him for every problem. Hey, the world is broken by sin and we can get ourselves into a lot of trouble without any help. Second mistake, forgetting he exists. Satan, Lewis says, is equally happy with either mistake.

4. One – temptation is not a sin. Two, there are spiritual forces of darkness.

C. Three: Jesus understands what we are up against

1. He knows. That's the amazing thing about the incarnation – it gives us a high priest who personally and perfectly understands what we are up against. We do not have a leader who doesn't know what we are facing. He knows. In fact, he knows better than we do. After all, the one who fully understands the power of temptation is the one who has stood up to it throughout the entire ordeal, not the one who gives in.

2. The person who can't make it through the workout is not the one who can tell you how hard the workout is. The person who can't bench press 300 lbs is not the one who can tell you how heavy 300 lbs is. Jesus knows the full force of temptation. For forty days he did battle – and preserved.

D. Finally – number four – we should fight temptation with Scripture

1. Here we have a powerful motivation for Scripture memory.
2. What does Jesus use in his battle with evil? What are the weapons He uses to win where everyone else failed? The Word of God. The Bible. Jesus quotes Scripture that he had memorized.
3. He quotes from Deuteronomy. Could you quote from Deuteronomy? Could you find Deuteronomy?
4. Again, this mirrors Genesis 3, where Eve is led astray. The serpent misquotes God and she is thrown off kilter. Here there is no confusion. He is not misled. He knows what the Book says.
5. In times of great temptation I have not found anything as helpful as: being with friends and quoting Scripture.

VII. There is more

A. We should not miss that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit. We should not miss that while Jesus was following the leading of the Holy Spirit He was led into a very difficult ordeal. (Some of you still think that if you God everything will be easy. Why think that? What is the evidence for that? It wasn't easy for John the Baptist. It wasn't easy for Jesus. It wasn't easy for the apostles. It hasn't been easy for people for the last 2,000 years. But it should be easy for you?)

B. There is more here to pay attention to, but the key message is that we have yet another reason to believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. And today we are able to celebrate that the One sent from heaven died in our place.

C. He kept the Law. He did what no one else had been able to do. He lived a perfect life so that He could provide another way. And then, He laid down his life as a sacrifice for our sins.

D. There is no one like Jesus. You will never find anyone better than Jesus. He is more loving and gracious, more holy and righteous, more intelligent and wise than you are – than I am, than any one else. Follow Him. Worship him. Serve Him.