



WEEKLY STUDY

WEEK 1

The problem of evil is a topic that the Christian faith has wrestled with since the beginning. How do we make sense of the presence of evil in a world made by a good and holy God? In his classic work, *The Screwtape Letters*, author C.S. Lewis imagined a conversation between an apprentice devil and his master. One of their tricks was to give Jesus followers a false sense of security by allowing them to be preoccupied with their own thoughts and intellect. We live in a world where evil is evident. At times, it is so evident that we can have trouble finding beauty in the world. Another trick of Satan is to draw us into an unhealthy focus on the darkness so that we miss the light. As you study and pray this week, note how Jesus dealt with the presence of evil as he was about to begin his ministry. Cling to the truth of who God is and how Jesus pointed to Him especially in the face of the deceiver.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from daily readings as well as the additional questions at the bottom of this guide. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Find a time each day to read the passage of scripture and follow the daily prayer prompt.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 4.1-2

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

- Last week we read Luke's listing of Jesus' lineage, but immediately before that was the account of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. Today's reading took place immediately after his baptism. He went up from the waters of his baptism and, full of the Holy Spirit, went into the wilderness and a time of trial. That's one of the realities we face as his followers. Baptism is a beautiful outward sign of what God has done for us inwardly. But it doesn't mean that life will always be easier. In fact, we too may encounter trials and temptations. Like Jesus, we are full of the Holy Spirit.

Have you had times of trial and temptation that seemed to flow directly out of a time of deep communion with God?

- *Jesus, just as I follow you through the waters of baptism, I recognize that I may be called to also follow you out into the wilderness. Prepare me and strengthen me through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 4.3-8

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,⁶ 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.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

*“You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.”*

- The devil begins his temptation attempts at the most basic level of hunger. In a state of fasting, Jesus was surely aware of the physical hunger he was experiencing, yet he refused to turn stone into bread in order to satisfy that hunger. His response revealed that there is a deeper hunger that exists in us. Undeterred, the devil shifts from physical hunger to a hunger for power that seems to drive much of human history. The cost for such power would be worshipping the devil. Jesus’ response again revealed his awareness of the bigger mission to which he was called by God. **Are there verses or Biblical truth that have come to mind for you in times of trial and temptation? How do you remain focused on the bigger picture of God’s plan?**
- *God, help me to feast on your word so that any physical hunger or ego-driven desires will be put in their place. Satisfy my hunger for you. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 4.9-13

⁹ *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,¹⁰ for it is written,*

*“He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,’*

¹¹ *and*

*“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”*

¹² *And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

- Suddenly the wilderness wandering Jesus found himself in Jerusalem. The devil apparently had the power to take him to the top of the temple for his final temptation in this episode. Jesus had demonstrated a deep trust in God’s word and a faith that was unswayed by worldly desires. So the devil’s attack turned to that faith. “If you really believe like you say you do, and you really are the Son of God, you will jump from this dangerous height.” The devil used Jesus’ own defenses

(scripture) against him. It is easy for us to get caught in a moment that is reframed by our enemy. The temptation was set up as a trap. If this/then that. But Jesus wasn't tricked. The devil doesn't set the rules, he only tries to manipulate them.

Luke's ominous last words of this passage hint that the devil would be back. Even though evil still lurks in the shadows, we can (and must) live faithful lives focused on God. **Do you ever find yourself so preoccupied with the evil you see in the world, that you lose track of the beauty of God?**

- *Jesus, I need your presence and the power of your Spirit as I walk through this broken world. Help me to remain focused on your Kingdom. Amen.*

THURSDAY: DEUTERONOMY 6.13-19

Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;¹⁵ for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.¹⁶ Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah.¹⁷ Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you.¹⁸ Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors,¹⁹ thrusting out all your enemies before you, as the LORD said.

- Jesus was a student of God's word in the Torah. He had read these words many times and they took root in his head and heart. So much so that he was able to recall them and cling to them in the face of the devil's temptations. Looking back at these ancient words, it is clear that Jesus (the Word of God) has transformed how God is seen and known. The Father/Son relationship of Jesus and God reveals a previously unknown intimacy. God is jealous when we turn our hearts towards worldly hungers because we are designed for relationship with Him and to do what is right and good in His sight. **When comparing this passage to Luke 4, what parallels and distinctions do you notice?**
- *God, you have shown us so much about your heart for us by sending your Son to walk this earth with us. I thank you for his life, death and resurrection which makes a relationship with you possible. Amen.*

FRIDAY: JOHN 8.44-47

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

- Jesus was speaking about the devil to the Pharisees who had been trying to figure out who Jesus really was and what should be done with him. They were stuck and seemed unable to hear what Jesus was teaching. Jesus exposed that the devil was at the heart of their inability to believe in him. The devil is the father of lies—there is no truth in him. And yet those lies often seem the loudest in the world around us. **Do you ever find it difficult to hear and remember the truth of God in this noisy world?**
- *God, I want to hear your voice. Drown out the voices of evil that have become so loud. I long to hear only you. Amen.*

SATURDAY: 1 JOHN 3.7-9

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

- These words from 1 John provide a simple contrast between right and wrong, good and evil. The seed of God's goodness remains in us when we are born of God. That doesn't mean that we never sinned, but it means that we will not go on sinning. Apart from Christian community, this seems almost impossible. We need one another to point out our sin and offer forgiveness in Jesus' name.
Who do you have in your life that helps to keep you from sin and moving towards God's righteousness?
- *Almighty God, I do not want to go on sinning. Purify me through the work of Jesus and strengthen me through the communion of the saints. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Below you will find the definition of *diabolos* (the word translated as *devil* in Luke 4) from the online resource blueletterbible.org and Strong's Concordance.

Outline of Biblical Usage

1. *prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely*
 1. *a calumniator, false accuser, slanderer,*
2. *metaph. applied to a man who, by opposing the cause of God, may be said to act the part of the devil or to side with him*

διάβολος diábolos, dee-ab'-ol-os; a traducer; specially, Satan:—false accuser, devil, slanderer.

- Based on these definitions, how might the devil be at work in our world right now?
- How do you notice and/or confront lies of the evil one?