

It's all about relationship with God
Genesis 2:1-17, 3:1-7, Matthew 4:1-11

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The story of the temptation of Eve is one of the first bible stories we learn. I remember the story from the bible I had as a child and the picture that first comes to mind is Eve and Adam hiding in the bushes from God after disobeying God and eating the fruit they were not supposed to eat. However, one of the fascinating parts of this story, which I have missed in the past, is the conversation between Eve and the serpent which was the focus of our Old Testament reading.

The serpent starts out with a seemingly innocent question - Did God say not to eat of the fruit of any tree in the garden? Eve replies – we can eat of any tree in the garden except for the one in the middle. We can't even touch it or we will die. The serpent responds – "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

You will be like God – knowing good and evil. This is the moment where Eve is swayed – not so much over the goodness of the fruit although she saw that the fruit was good to eat. Eve was tempted by the opportunity to be like God, to have knowledge like God, to know the difference between good and evil.

Humans don't do a very good job of deciding between good and evil when we leave God out of the picture. The bible is full of those stories.

- When Moses goes up to the mountain to get the ten commandments from God and stays a little too long for the people, they ask for another God to worship and Aaron, Moses' brother makes them a golden calf. When Moses finally comes down the mountain, he is so upset that he drops the stones with the 10 Commandments on them and they break.
- When King David wants to keep another man's wife, he sends the man into battle so that he dies and he can marry her. God sends the prophet Nathan to tell King David of his sin.
- Think about how many prophets God sent to tell the Israelites to that they have sinned, to stop worshipping false Gods, and to return to the Lord.

This temptation to want to be like God and decide for ourselves between good and evil is very much present today. How much of our sin comes from trying to be like God? To choose the good that works for us, rather than the good God calls us to? To rely on false Gods such as money, food, alcohol, work, popularity or praise from others? We so easily get distracted.

In our gospel, Jesus shows us wonderfully how to deal with these temptations. It is easy to say well Jesus is the son of God – of course he can resist these temptations, but notice that these temptations are very relatable to us – ones that tempt humans.

“The first temptation is food - bread one of the most basic staples, after a forty day fast. I suspect like most fasts, it was a way to leave that empty space so to make room to listen to God as part of his preparation for ministry. It has been 40 days, but Jesus is not done. Satan tempts Jesus to end the fast early. Who’s going to know? You made it 40 days. That’s good enough for your preparation. Just turn these stones into bread.

The second temptation is to put God to the test. Does Jesus think God means what God says? Is he really the Son of God? Satan knows how Jesus can find out for sure. Go to the top of the temple and throw yourself off. Scripture says angels will catch you.

The third temptation is about power. Satan offers power – all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. If Jesus had the kingdoms of the world, how much more easily could he spread God’s message. All Jesus has to do is worship Satan. And each time Jesus returns to God through God’s word. His response three times, it is written

- One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
- Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”
- Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

For every temptation, Jesus returns to his relationship with God - his love of God and the love he knows God has for him. Jesus chose life with God over idols that our world so often offers to us to make us feel better, feel whole, feel powerful, feel we have enough.

How can our relationship with God help us in our times of temptation?

Scripture is a great way. Scripture is part of our relationship with God. It is how we hear God’s word and let it work on us. Just as Jesus uses scripture as a touchstone to respond to his temptations, so can we. Regular prayer is another. Having a relationship with someone means talking with them. Prayer will bring you into the presence of God and remind you of your dependence of God which will sustain you in ways that the things of the world never will. And reflect – reflection on your actions in this world – are they borne out of your love for God and the love God asks you to have for others or are they coming from somewhere else?

As you face temptation, remember your relationship with God and ask how this temptation is taking away from or hurting your relationship with God? I’ll give you a personal example. One of my Lenten disciplines is to take time away from Wizards Unite –a cell phone game very much like Pokémon Go in which you have to walk around outside to rescue objects or characters which appear on your screen. I usually play it when I am walking my dogs. The past two nights, I found myself catching myself pulling my phone out of my pocket as I led my dogs out the door for a walk. I put the phone back, and instead of playing the game, I talked to God. I notice that at times

during the day, as the temptation comes to pull out the phone and see if any hard to find “foundables” have popped up, I remind myself of the power of those conversations with God, because even in those two nights at the time of this writing, I find these conversations with God are different than the ones in my daily prayers and I want more of them.

When you encounter temptation, remember your relationship with God – that relationship you are striving for and strengthening. Whether you are engaging in prayer, some kind of fasting or an action for your Lenten discipline and temptation comes knocking on your door, remember that God loves you, is longing for you and that the relationship you have with God will give you more than anything this world can offer.