

SESSION 4

The Temptation to Place Something Else Before God



QUESTION 1:

Whom do you find it easy to brag about?

THE POINT

The greatest joy comes from exalting God.

THE PASSAGE

Deuteronomy 6:10-15; Matthew 4:8-11

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

If you don't toot your own horn, who will?

We enjoy those moments when good things happen to us. We feel good when we've accomplished something. With those accomplishments and good experiences, we naturally want to tell others. Unfortunately, in the process of telling others, our words can easily turn into, "Look at me!" We don't have to utter those exact words, but it can certainly come across as exalting ourselves. Personal social media pages are overrun with posts that make the person look really good. And the more "likes" a person gets for what he or she has said, the better this person feels.

Self-exaltation is deceiving and fleeting. What happens when our next posting doesn't get as many likes? We can feel defeated.

Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to exalt Himself in a way that was not right. Jesus certainly deserves our praise and exaltation, but He would not seek it in a way that was outside His Father's plan. As we consider this temptation before Jesus, we'll discover the joy that comes with making much of God rather than ourselves.

Matthew 4:8-11

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

One thing Christians can look forward to is living in the presence of Christ in His kingdom. This was prophesied and promised centuries before Christ came to earth.

- ▶ “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:7).
- ▶ “Behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14).

Let’s keep these Scriptures in mind as we look at the third attempt by Satan to tempt Jesus. “The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” Satan is tempting Jesus with something that had already been promised

to Him! So where is the temptation in that? The temptation comes in that Jesus could take the kingdoms of the world now—without delay and without the road to the cross that lay before Him.

The entire chapter of Isaiah 53 points to a Suffering Servant. This prophecy about Jesus points to His suffering on our behalf, His death to give us healing and life, and His victory. Satan offered a shortcut: the rule and reign of a kingdom without having to suffer for it.

Satan does this with us. He is cunning. He offers us good things—even things promised to us—but he entices us to obtain them in sinful ways. We see something similar in Jesus’s parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). The son had an inheritance waiting for him, but out of selfishness, he wanted his father to give it to him immediately.

We often equate idolatry with worshipping images made of wood or metal, but idolatry happens whenever we place anything ahead of God. We can even make good things idols, because when we take something good and place it ahead of God, that is desiring something more than God—and that is the definition of idolatry.

QUESTION 2:

What are some things in our culture Satan tempts us to almost worship?

For Jesus to rule over all the kingdoms of the world is a good thing, but to pursue that over obedience to the Father is wrong. Jesus rejected that and responded by citing the truth found in Deuteronomy 6:13: “Worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Satan is still very much in the business of idolatry today. His goal is to get us to worship anything—anything—other than God. He wants us to bow down to these things because he stands behind them. When we bow down to them, we bow down to the devil. Let’s consider just three good things God has given us that often get turned into objects of worship.

- ▶ **Money.** Money is not evil, but “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Satan uses our desire of money to entice us to bow down to him. For example, the idea of financial security is a good thing. It’s good to work hard and put money away for retirement or a child’s education. But if we’re not careful, we can pin our hopes on financial stability. Before we know it, we’re sacrificing our marriage, our family, even our health at the altar of financial security. A good thing has become the ultimate thing.
- ▶ **Sex.** Sex is a good gift from God, but God has designed a marriage between one man and one woman in a life-long covenant relationship to be the only place where sexual desire is to be satisfied. Satan loves to entice us to find sexual satisfaction outside of marriage: lust, sexual fantasies, pornography, and extramarital affairs. When a pursuit of sexual satisfaction leads to sacrificing holiness, relationships, marriage, and family, we’ve made an idol out of a gift from God.
- ▶ **Authority.** Authority is another good gift from God. He uses authorities to establish order in this world, but when we pursue power to domineer over others and sacrifice their well-being for our own selfish gains, we have taken a good gift and made it a god.

Jesus’s response to such temptation should be ours as well: “Worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

QUESTION 3:

What does it look like to be thankful in our everyday lives?

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

10 And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

11 And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

12 Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

In the words of John Calvin, our hearts are idol factories.¹ We are continually tempted to make idols, and this was Israel's ongoing problem. So, God warned them that when they entered the land and found all the blessings He promised, they were to "beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

This is also our temptation. Yet if we will remember that God is the source of all good things (James. 1:17), we could avoid the temptation to look to other things for the satisfaction only He truly provides.

For the Israelites, God was about to pour into their lives a host of good things: land, cities, houses, cisterns, vineyards, and olive groves. The people had a role to play; they were to take back the land that God had first given to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some people struggle with the idea that God commanded the Israelites to destroy others as they entered the promised land, but God's purpose was twofold: (1) to bring judgment on those who worshiped false gods and rejected the one true God; and (2) to keep His people holy by removing those who would entice them in their pagan, sinful practices. On occasion, God did call for everything to be destroyed, but the usual practice was only to bring judgment and destruction on the people.

This pattern of conquest allowed God's people to enter the promised land and be provided with ready-made facilities—cities, gardens, and homes—in which to live and work. However, when all these good things were theirs, they would face the danger of resting in these things and losing their reliance and dependence on the One who provided them.

Adversity and difficulties do not threaten our walk with Christ quite like prosperity does. When we get comfortable, we often let our guard down. We can be lulled into complacency and spiritual lethargy. We gradually replace a reliance on God with a reliance on ourselves and what God has provided. The way to avoid this slippery slope is to do as Moses called the people to do: Remember! Moses reminded the Israelites who God is: He is the Lord, the God who established a covenant with them. He is the One who brought them out of slavery and into freedom. The people were never to forget this. We, too, must remember. We must remember all God has done for us in Christ and all He has provided for our enjoyment and contentment.

QUESTION 4:

What can we learn from today's passages about facing temptation?

ENGAGE

List ways God has blessed you:

Spiritually:

Physically:

Relationally:

How can regularly remembering these blessings keep you from yielding to the temptation to put anything else before God?

Deuteronomy 6:13-15

13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you;

15 (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Key Words: A jealous God (v. 15)—God’s jealousy is not a negative emotion. God is jealous for us. His desire is to be our only God and our only real object of worship.

Culture typically treats jealousy as a bad thing, and it is when it reflects an envy of others. But jealousy is also a virtue when it is a sense of protection over something that is rightfully ours. Jealousy can be a righteous response. When Moses described God as a jealous God, he was describing God’s feeling over His people, those who have entered into a relationship with Him. God is jealous over those who are His. Marriage is one of the major images the Bible uses for God’s relationship with His people (Ezek. 16; Hos. 1–3; Eph. 5:22-33). And in that marriage, God is the always-faithful, never-failing, all-satisfying husband. By contrast, we can often be the disobedient, unfaithful bride. Because we are His bride, God is jealous for us. That’s a good thing! While we are continually tempted to turn away from God to pursue other “lovers,” He will pursue us. He will not let us go because we are His.

Another way to understand temptation and sin is turning away from God to find satisfaction in something else. When we turn away from God in that way, the Bible calls us “adulterers and adulteresses” (Jas. 4:4). This was the temptation Israel would face as they entered the promised land; they would be tempted to chase after the things of the world, the things the pagan nations chased. To avoid this, the people were exhorted to do three things:

1. **Fear God.** Fear is a natural response when God reveals Himself. While such a revelation causes a terror-filled fear in many, for those in a covenant relationship with God, that fear is expressed in reverential worship and submission before Him. Only in that mindset can we accurately see ourselves, the world around us, and how God wants to work. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).
2. **Worship God.** With a fear of God, we recognize God for who He is, and we act accordingly. We are drawn to worship God, who inspires respect because of His greatness and sovereignty. As King David declared: “Thine, O LORD is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chron. 29:11).
3. **Take oaths in God’s name.** Israel was to root its integrity in God alone. Only God could guarantee their honesty as they obeyed His word and kept His covenant. It reflected their total reliance on God.

When we live as God calls us to live, we experience our greatest joy. Satisfaction never comes from pursuing other things we think might satisfy us. They won’t satisfy. We can say no to the temptation to bow before the things Satan and the world throws at us as we remember this singular truth: A life spent in worship and exaltation of the One who loves us deeply will always lead to satisfaction.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another put God first?

LIVE IT OUT

The greatest joy comes from exalting God.
How will you live out this truth?

- ▶ **Expose your idols.** Consider where you turn when life becomes difficult. Where do you look for satisfaction and joy? Identify those as idols and turn from trusting them. Choose to place your trust solely on God.
- ▶ **Give thanks.** Write a prayer to God, thanking Him for all the ways He has worked in your life. Be specific about what He has done for you.
- ▶ **Meet together.** Meet with one or two other believers of the same gender and talk openly about those areas where you might be tempted to look to someone or something other than God. Agree to stand together and support one another in making God the sole object of your devotion and worship.



END NOTES

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I.11.8).