

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: In the Wilderness

Lesson: Luke 4:1-14

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² 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. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'" ⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. ¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

(Slide 1) Let's imagine a scenario. One day, you make a trip to Walmart. You pick up all the essentials: veggies, fruits, meat, bread, a couple of t-shirts, some toys for the grandkids, and your necessary medications, tossing them all into your cart. After a friendly exchange with the cashier at the checkout, you settle the bill and load everything back into your cart before heading out to your car. Once you've put all the items in the trunk and settled into the driver's seat, you take a moment to review your receipt. And there it is, a curious discovery: several items seem to have slipped through the cracks. You should have paid around \$100, but it looks like you only paid about \$60. It seems like the cashier may have accidentally missed scanning a few things.

How do you think you'd feel in a situation like that? Would you be over the moon, thinking you've struck gold? Or would it leave you feeling downhearted and disheartened? Perhaps you think this scenario I painted is a bit detailed? Fair point. It's because this was actually a situation we encountered a few years back when we were in California. I remember sitting in the car, looking at the receipt over and over again.

My next question is this: In a situation like this, would you go back to Walmart, explain the situation to the cashier, and pay the correct amount? Or would you consider it the cashier's mistake and just head home? What would your choice be?

Let's add a bit more detail to the scenario. Your financial situation isn't exactly comfortable. Each month, you're juggling various expenses like rent or mortgage payments, loans, car costs, insurance, and groceries. Money is tight, and if you were to head back home instead of returning to Walmart, you'd be saving about \$40. That \$40 could be put towards gas or perhaps something else you need. So, would you go back to Walmart, explain the situation honestly, and pay the missing \$40? Or would you head home and use the \$40 for your own needs? What's your call?

I believe meeting and marrying my wise wife to be the best decision of my life. Honestly, when I looked at that receipt, I thought to myself, "Wow, it seems like God knows our situation and arranged this! This is a gift from God." But Esther didn't see it that way. She disagreed, saying this situation wasn't orchestrated by God but was simply a mistake by the cashier, and we shouldn't take advantage of it. She said, "Hakki, we are Christians. We need to go back to Walmart, explain the situation, and pay the correct amount." So, we returned to Walmart and paid the exact amount.

(Slide 2) Friends, in Day 2 of the Dynamite Prayer that we read during the Lenten season, it talks about how in our lives, we experience situations like the wilderness as well as situations like being on the mountaintop. Perhaps we all want to stay on the mountaintop of life for a long time because when we're on the mountaintop, we feel the thrill, the freshness, and a surge of confidence that we can do anything.

However, life isn't just a series of mountaintop moments. Each of us encounters the wilderness, deserts, and valleys at least once. The wilderness represents the most difficult, weakest, and loneliest times in our lives. In these moments, we often feel more defeated than hopeful, and sadness and loneliness overshadow joy and happiness. It's a time when progress seems stagnant, and temptation feels stronger. Sometimes, when faced with such situations, we might seek solace in anything but God.

(Slide 3) In Day 2: The Wilderness, Luke 4:14 was chosen as the key verse: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power (dunamis) of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside." However, because it's important to understand where Jesus returned from to Galilee, I selected Luke 4:1-14 as our scripture lesson for worship.

When Jesus was about thirty years old, he went to John the Baptist before starting his public ministry, and he was baptized by him. When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

After being baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit to a place before starting his public ministry. That place was the wilderness. Jesus went there for spiritual training. He fasted and prayed for 40 days in the wilderness and was tempted by the devil.

(Slide 4) Satan approached Jesus and asked him three questions. First, knowing that Jesus had not eaten anything for 40 days and was very hungry, Satan asked him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Then, Satan led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. This signifies that Satan placed Jesus on the mountaintop, a place we all desire to stay. Satan then asked Jesus, "If you worship me, it will all be yours." After that, Satan led Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and asked him to prove his power by saying, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."

We all have desires to satisfy hunger and thirst, desires for acceptance and respect from others, and desires to prove and show off our abilities to others. Specifically, when we find ourselves in life's wilderness and when we are in fragile situations, it's very difficult to resist the temptations that Jesus faced.

However, Jesus overcame all temptations. He relied on the power of the Holy Spirit and overcame every temptation.

The message that Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome all temptations is an invitation for us, too, to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit

when we find ourselves in the wilderness, just like Jesus did, to overcome difficulties.

When we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit rather than our own abilities, and when we lean on the power of the Holy Spirit instead of our positive thinking, we can break through the dark and cold wilderness that lies before us.

I recently came across a post on social media discussing the relationship between depression and suicide. While we may not typically think about suicide, if we experience severe depression, it's reported that the impulse to commit suicide can increase by up to 66 times. When experiencing severe depression, individuals may come to see ending their lives as the easiest way to escape their suffering. However, this is neither a solution nor a way to overcome the wilderness. In such situations, what we should do is rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to not give up on life, actively seek medical help, and seek assistance from professionals.

If we find ourselves in the wilderness, navigating through very difficult and dark passages, these are opportunities for us to experience the presence of God and encounter the power of the Holy Spirit.

People of God, rely on God and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. By relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, overcome the obstacles, wilderness, deserts, and valleys before you. Remember, you are all the time beloved and precious children of God. Amen.