

Practice Guide for March 17th 2024

Into the Wilderness, pt. 4—Duel in the Desert

Suggested Ice Breaker (5 minutes)

Guilty Pleasure

A guilty pleasure is something such as a movie, tv show, song/musician, or an activity that one enjoys that some people might think is odd or not enjoyable. Go around the room, each sharing one of your more unique, but generally harmless, guilty pleasures.

Opening (5 minutes)

Before beginning, open the meeting time with 2 minutes of silence to help you focus on interaction with God and one another. At the end, ask someone to open the gathering time with prayer asking for grace to lean on the Lord when we are enticed by the world.

Question for the group: How would you define the word “temptation”?

Reflecting On Scripture (20 minutes)

Read Matthew 3:16-17, 4:1-11 and the following quote:

Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, and easy, and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.—Brené Brown

Questions for discussion:

1. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the Wilderness for 40 days; an important part of his journey was to face temptation. What implications do you think this passage had in the life and work of Christ?
2. Examine the first temptation. Turning stone into bread doesn't seem like a particularly “sinful” thing. What do you think is going on beneath the surface?
3. What are some temptations you have seen in your life (from the world's culture, or even in the church) that are not considered “sinful” but can still do great harm to our soul? (hint: It might be helpful to focus on what the temptation is asking you to give up in order to obtain it).
4. In the second temptation the devil quotes Scripture (accurately) to try to entice Christ. Do you find this alarming? What might be the implications of this?

Community Practice (25 minutes)

Have someone read aloud the following quote:

“Beware of surrender that is motivated by personal benefits. For example, “I’m going to give myself to God because I want to be delivered from sin,” or “because I want to be made holy.” Being delivered from sin and being made holy are the result of being right with God, but surrender resulting from this kind of thinking is certainly not the true nature of Christianity. Our motive for surrender should not be for any personal gain at all. We have become so self-centered that we go

to God only for something from Him, and not for God Himself... Gaining heaven, being delivered from sin, and being made useful to God are things that should never even be a consideration in real surrender. Genuine total surrender is a personal sovereign preference for Jesus Christ Himself.” —Oswald Chambers

Group Discussion: What is most unsettling and challenging about Oswald Chambers’ quote? Do you agree or disagree with it?

Take 3-5 minutes to journal your response to these questions for reflection from Sunday’s teaching:

1. In what ways do I sometimes find myself trying to gain something while sacrificing my integrity, God-given identity, or dependency? (this could include seemingly “noble” causes)
2. Has anyone ever misused the Christian faith and/or Scripture as a means to control, belittle, or devalue me? How may I have done the same to others?

Share your answers in groups of two or three.

Gather back together as a group and have someone read the following quote out loud:

“In the wilderness Jesus faced different facets of the greatest temptation of the human experience—the temptation to trust in that which is not God for our security and survival, affirmation and approval, power and control.” —Ruth Haley Barton

Group Practice:

Have the group sit with their eyes closed in a comfortable, receptive posture to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Have someone open with a simple phrase such as “come Holy Spirit.”

Pausing for 15 seconds of silence, then have someone read the following prayer slowly:

“Lord, show me the actions or areas of my life that I have recently been tempted to grasp for control, and reveal to me how you are inviting me to release it.”

Pause for another 1-3 minutes to allow the Holy Spirit to speak.

Afterward’s ask anyone if they’d like to share what the Spirit is speaking to them.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Have one person close in prayer, and/or slowly read aloud this poem from Ruth Burgess called “Bread of Tomorrow”:

*The desert waits, ready for those who come,
who come obedient to the Spirit’s leading;
or who are driven, because they will not come any other way.
The desert waits, ready to let us know who we are—
the place of self-discovery.
And while we fear, and rightly, the loneliness and emptiness and harshness,
we forget the angels, whom we cannot see for our blindness,
but who come when God decides that we need their help;
when we are ready, for what they can give us.*