ADULTS

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE™

Sermon Series: Pressure Points
To be used with: Session Two; The Pressure of Temptation
Sermon Title Possibilities:
The Devil Made Me Do It… And Other Lame Excuses
Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Connection to Unit Theme: While small groups are studying Pressure Points from the book of James, this sermon series is examining pressure points in the life of Jesus. As a human being, Jesus faced every pressure we face, and on a much deeper level. And since Jesus is the only perfect human being that has ever existed, we know that He never once caved in to pressure in any of the areas we are studying. How interesting that James was Jesus' half-brother, which means He had a front-row seat to how Jesus dealt with pressure.

Introduction:
In the 1970's comedian Flip Wilson made "The Devil made me do it" a national catchphrase. As host of his own TV variety show, Flip Wilson created a recurring character named Geraldine. And every time her husband accused her of doing something wrong, whether it was buying a dress that was too expensive, or crashing the car into the side of the church, her excuse was always the same: "It wasn't me. The Devil made me do it."

Many of us grew up hearing that catchphrase, and its affected the way we see the devil. We believe he has the power to "make" us do things. Or we imagine him as a little guy wearing a red suit, with a pitchfork, sitting on our left shoulder, whispering in our ear. And meanwhile, there's a little angel perched on our right shoulder, trying to counteract whatever temptation the devil is whispering to us. And in the cartoons, the devil usually won.

Is that how temptation works? Is the devil really equally as powerful as God? Can he "make" us do anything we don't want to do? The short answer is no. Jesus made it clear that the One who is in us is greater than the one that is in the world (1 John 4:4). The truth is, the devil doesn't have any power over us that we don't let him have.

But he can be persuasive. And the closer we are walking with God, the harder he will work to get us off track. Just look at Jesus. In Matthew 4, Jesus was coming off a spiritual high point in His life. He had just been baptized. He saw the Holy Spirit descend on Him. He heard His Heavenly Father say, "This is my beloved Son; with Him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). And that's when the devil started in on Him

We know from Hebrews that Jesus experienced every temptation we face, yet He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). How did He do it? What can we learn from Him? Let's look specifically at how Jesus handled it when the devil tempted Him. Open your Bibles to Matthew 4:1-11.

1. God doesn't tempt, but He does test. (Matt. 4:1) Point out that Jesus was led "by the Spirit" into the desert to be tempted by the devil. We know from our small group study in James that God doesn't tempt anyone (James 1:13). So why would the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness specifically so He could be tempted? Flesh out these ideas:

- Remember from James that "the testing of our faith produces perseverance." (James 1:2). Perseverance isn't just a desired quality for the mature Christian; it's an *essential* one. James goes on to say that "Perseverance *must* finish its work in a Christ follower so that he or she can be "mature and complete, not lacking anything." So God is going to do what it takes to produce that quality in us.
- Every teacher we've ever had tested us, right? And most of us had a mix of two types of teachers: those who tested us to reinforce what we knew, and those who tested us to try to trip us up on what we didn't know. Think about how you understand the character of God. Which kind of test giver is He?

Application Ideas: What is an area of your life in which you are being tempted right now? Is it better to ask God to remove the temptation, or to ask God to help you pass the test. I'm not saying that if you are tempted to binge on sweets that you should go work in a chocolate factory. But realize that not every temptation can be easily removed. But God does provide a way of escape for every temptation (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). So you may be praying for the wrong thing. If the temptation isn't removed, then pray that you can pass the test.

2. THE primary defense against temptation is the Word of God (Matt. 4:4,7,10)

- The three temptations Matthew recorded for us fall into broad categories that can be applied to the temptations we face today.
    - First, there was an appeal to physical needs. Jesus was hungry, and the devil tempted Him to make the stones become bread.
    - Second, there was the temptation to take a short cut. Jesus knew what He needed to do to fulfill the Father's plan. He had to go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be killed (see Matthew 16:21). The devil tempted Jesus to bypass all of that with a dramatic display of God's power that would firmly establish Jesus as the Son of God.
    - Finally, the devil tempted Jesus with power: "I will give you the kingdoms of the world if you will worship me." Point out that Jesus never disputed that the worldly kingdoms were the devil's to give.
- Jesus responded to all three of the devil's temptations with Scripture. Notice He didn't say, "Hold on a minute, Devil, while I look up this verse." He had God's Word hidden in His heart, so that He wouldn't sin against God (Psalm 119:11). As Christ followers, we need to be in God's Word every day, not just pulling the Bible off the shelf "in case of emergency." When Paul described the armor of God in his letter to the church in Ephesus, he called the Word of God the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). It is the only offensive weapon in the entire arsenal. And don't miss the purpose for the full armor of God in the first place. Ephesians 6:11 says it is so that "you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

Application ideas: You can lead your congregation to consider in which of these categories they are falling to temptation in their own lives. Help them consider how much they have hidden God's Word in their own hearts.

3. When we resist, the devil flees and the Spirit strengthens us (Matt. 4:11)

- Verse 11 says that the Devil left Jesus, and angels came and attended Him. When you compare Luke's account of the temptation (Luke 4:13), you see the phrase "The devil left Him until an opportune time." We know that the devil will never leave us alone for long. But the promise we have from Scripture is that when we "resist the devil, He will flee from" us (James 4:7). Don't miss the word "flee." Flee is something someone does when he is on the run from a superior force. The devil's a coward. He picks on us when we are feeling weak, but he turns tail when we show the first sign of strength. And he knows that there are plenty of easier targets than a Christ follower who stands up to him with God's Word!
- The promise of God is that His Spirit will help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). For Jesus, there was the physical presence of God's angels. But we have the same promise from God.

Conclusion
So, let's get practical. How do you resist temptation? We've already looked at the most crucial element: knowing God's Word and hiding it in your heart. And if you are not in a small group that is helping you study and apply God's Word on a regular basis, you have to start there.

The second way to resist temptation is to understand how temptation works. We are tempted when desire and opportunity come together. Think of every time you gave in to a temptation. It always happens at the intersection of desire and opportunity. So when you feel the desire to sin, ask God to remove the opportunity. When you have the opportunity to sin, ask God to take away the desire. Remember, God will always provide a way of escape. Look for it. It may be that you can get yourself out of the situation in which you have the opportunity to sin. That could mean arranging the family computer so that the screen is visible to everyone in the room. It could mean having an accountability partner call you every night you are away from home on a business trip. It could mean changing the way you go home from work. On the other hand, you may not be able to avoid the opportunity. In that case, ask God to remove the desire. Ask Him to create within you such a desire for the things of God that the things of the world pale in comparison.

In small groups this week, you learned that temptation is inevitable but not irresistible. Martin Luther said, "I cannot prevent birds from flying over my head. But I can stop them from building a nest in my hair." Have you allowed any temptations to settle in to your thought life? If so, begin to work this week on destroying their nests.

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