

JJ<sup>1</sup>

**We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin** (Hebrews 4:15).

You may have heard of the term *captology*. It's a technology that is designed "to change people's beliefs and behavior." Social media has used it to get us to upload our pictures and divulge our personal information so that others can know where we vacation, what diet we are on, how funny our cat is, or how frustrated we might be with our lives. The technology is used to get us to click on links, buy stuff, or watch the next YouTube video and the next and the next so that we watch all accompanying commercial ads, of course. The designers understand human nature and have a well-laid-out plan to manipulate our behavior (<http://captology.stanford.edu/resources/thoughts-on-persuasive-technology.html>).

Changing people's beliefs has been going on for centuries. Someone has been at work on that since Adam and Eve. We know the enemy. He hates us. He has enough of an understanding of our sinful nature that he knows how to use it well in his war plan to hurt us and turn us against our gracious God. You know how successful he was against Adam and Eve in Eden. You know how he has won battles against all of us. The horrible thing is that the enemy had a bigger target than just us—our hero. Our enemy targeted his attacks on our champion when our champion lived on earth.

Without a doubt, the devil made many attacks on Jesus. But he never won. Jesus always overcame his attacks. The writer to the Hebrews says it clearly: **We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

When Jesus entered his public ministry at age 30, the devil stepped up his attacks on Jesus. He was desperate to destroy the world's Savior. The word diabolical comes from the name Matthew uses to describe the devil when he came to test/tempt Jesus in the desert: evil to the core.

Matthew (4:1-11) gives us the account of the skirmish between Satan and Jesus. Jesus did not hide from this battle. In fact, the Holy Spirit actually led our Savior into the desert to be tempted. God's purpose in doing this was to show Satan that the perfect man, Jesus, was the perfect substitute and would win where Adam and Eve had failed.

When Satan appeared on the battlefield, Jesus had been fasting for 40 days. He had to have been physically weak—thin and tired. The devil is a confident, powerful evil angel. Picture him smiling, friendly, acting as if he cared. After all, he is able to masquerade even as an angel of light.

His first attack was an attempt to exploit his advantage. Jesus had been without food. The devil comes with a temptation for Jesus to listen to him and put food before the Word of his heavenly Father and the purpose his Father had sent him to accomplish. He says in effect, "You are obviously starving. You need

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

to eat, otherwise you will never get to the cross. Here, turn these stones into bread before you die." Jesus holds firm, resists the words of Satan, and depends on God's Word, not Satan's: **It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"** (Matthew 4:4).

Satan's second attack distorts the Word of God to tempt Jesus to do what his heavenly Father never told anyone to do: "You trust your Father, I see. Show that you believe him and that he will take care of you. Just jump off this point of the temple to the Kidron Valley below. God will send his angels to preserve you. What an amazing and impressive demonstration of God's power." Jesus turned away the temptation by again trusting in his heavenly Father's words and not Satan's: **It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"** (Matthew 4:7).

Satan was not finished. He chose once more to manipulate Jesus and turn him from his goal of saving humanity. So many people place the world's wealth before God, and Satan had been successful with so many using this approach. He thought Jesus would stumble here too. He said, "This is such a dusty, poor part of the world. You are better than this. You are worth so much more. Think of all the good you could do if you had wealth and power. Worship me and let me give it all to you!" Jesus responded, **Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only** (Matthew 4:10).

But Jesus maintains his priority: God first. With the Scriptures, he answered all the temptations of Satan. Though weak, Jesus

told Satan to jump back into his lake of fire. The devil stopped smiling, the dark anger boiling inside him, and, defeated, he gave up that day.

Jesus stayed strong, calm, determined, and loving through all this! He would remain obedient to his heavenly Father and follow through on the plan of saving humanity, of winning the final great battle. For now the skirmish ended in victory.

Score: Satan: 0, Jesus: victory every time! But there is one more lesson in this skirmish: Jesus is a mighty warrior. He understands our every temptation because he faced them all.



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Satan would not be alone in his attacks. Satan's battle plan shifted away from Jesus to include the high priest and eventually us. He enlisted into his army both the retired high priest Annas and his son Caiaphas in the plot to kill Jesus. Annas and Caiaphas betrayed their God and their purpose as high priests! They wanted to rid the world of Jesus just as Satan wanted to do.

Jesus is a far different kind of high priest. Instead of having others prepare the sacrifice, he did it all himself. Instead of the privacy of the Holy Place where sacrifices were offered, the altar on which Jesus put his sacrifice was out in public view on the cross. Finally, our Great High Priest became the Lamb, the sacrifice! He did all this because his heart is so big. He has room in it for every one of us. He loves us!

He knows our weaknesses. He experienced every kind of temptation possible and saw how a vulnerable person could lose those battles. Our evil enemy has an armory full of weapons as he tries to pry you away from your trust in our Lord Jesus.

So, what is your worst battleground? What temptations are you struggling with? Where has Satan found you at your most vulnerable spot?

In a national religious survey on temptation, people said they struggled most with: worry—lack of self-control (eating too much, too much time on social media, overspending)—lust (including viewing pornography)—and lying/cheating.

Amazingly, when asked why they gave in to temptation, a few said they enjoyed it or that it got them away from their real life. But most said they didn't know why (<https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-explores-the-changing-shape-of-temptation/>).

I find myself tempted by the things on that list and other things too. You have felt Satan's temptations draw you away too. If there were a brain scanning tool that could be focused on my thought life or your thought life and could broadcast our personal thoughts onto a video screen, what would be connected to our names? Would it show us deeply entranced in the worship of our Lord, or would it show you had wandered away during the words of the readings or the well-thought-out words of the hymns?

Would there be invasive thoughts—they just popped up—about paying bills, about what

could be the matter with so many in our congregation because so few are here in worship tonight (today), or other darker things that we could not even put on the screen because of shame? Satan is happy with whatever gets your mind away from Jesus. He wants you damned. And he uses temptation as a sort of cyber virus into our minds.

Think of all the daily skirmishes Jesus had with the devil and the world. Think about all the skirmishes you have had with him over so many different issues. Remember Jesus.

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Every minute during his life here on earth—in thought, word, and deed—Jesus kept the Ten Commandments perfectly, as well as everything else the Father wanted him to do. Don't forget that he was a real human being (100 percent God, 100 per-

cent man). True, he did not have a sinful nature like us. He was pure inside like the original Adam. But Jesus succeeded where Adam and Eve failed. Jesus remained pure throughout his entire life!

**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work** (John 4:34). He loved to do his heavenly Father's will! He was God's Son and loved to talk to his Father. There is a perfect intimacy between them. As you read the pages of the Bible, it's clear that Jesus was in constant contact with his Father in heaven.

The good news is that he didn't come to this earth just to see if he could keep his own commandments as God AND man. It wasn't simply an *exercise*. Rather, he faced those daily battles and the final battle with the devil because none of us could handle the job. There would be no hope for this human race if someone who was pretty good— let's say, St. Augustine, St. Paul, St. John, or someone like that—were to represent the whole human race at God's court. They wouldn't even be able to stand before God because of all the sin in their lives. What chance would I have, or you?

Humanity needed a perfect someone who would be our hero, our substitute, our stand-in who could qualify to take our place at the justice bar of God. Jesus is that one. He did this for us, loving us completely. He gave us his obedience to his heavenly Father. We are covered, clothed, and hidden under the garment of our great warrior's perfect life. His victory is ours so that we may stand forgiven and holy before God.

Yet we use the word *struggle* to define our efforts to be faithful. That is an accurate word. It's really a war. And all of us have lost many conflicts. So when you realize that Jesus was perfectly faithful every second of his life, you begin to understand how massive the battle with temptation and sin really was! What a great warrior!

Our great hero has not left us alone to face the temptations and trials of our enemy. He promises to protect us and rule over all things—Satan included—for our good. When

we face temptation, he has our back. **No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it** (1 Corinthians 10:13). In addition, he asks us to pray for his help in our struggles.

When we are hurting, Jesus knows what we feel like. When we have problems, you know he experienced all kinds of them. He was despised by his enemies. He was rejected by his own people. People told evil lies about him. When we talk to him, we are not talking to some far-off God. He hears the words of our hearts and can certainly relate. He is one of us. And he cares! Over and over again, his words and his life all reinforce how great his love is for us. And most importantly, take comfort in the fact that Jesus has taken away the guilt of every one of your sins. By offering the sacrifice of his perfect life on your behalf, God has forgiven all your sins, including every single time you have ever failed in temptation.

That's why we can sing these words from "What a Friend We Have in Jesus":

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness,  
take it to the Lord in prayer.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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