

Week 1

Transforming Lives: choosing God's way



In the desert – Matthew 4:1-11

This week looks at Jesus in the desert, where he makes crucial decisions about the way he will live out his life. The session reflects on our own life choices.

Welcome and Icebreaker

Everyone is welcomed and the course is introduced.

You are given £100 as a birthday present.

How would you spend it? (No conferring until you've decided!)

Share your answers.

(10 minutes)

Introductory Prayer

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
 give us grace to discipline ourselves
 in obedience to your Spirit;
 and, as you know our weakness,
 so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

OR

From the cowardice that does not face new truths,
From the laziness which is content with half truths,
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all the truth,
deliver us today, good Lord.

Reading – Matthew 4:1-11²

Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. After spending 40 days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry.

Then the Devil came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread." But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.' "

Then the Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the Holy City, set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says: 'God will give orders to his angels about you; they will hold you up with their hands, so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'" Jesus answered, "But the scripture also says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. "All this I will give you," the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me." Then Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!' "

Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him.

Choosing God's way

- In each incident in the story Jesus faces a choice. What do you think he is choosing between?
- If Jesus had made the other choice, what difference do you think it would have made to his ministry? (Remember the impact that one wrong choice had on Adam in Genesis chapter 3).

An image



Take a minute to look at the picture by Berna Lopez/Marie-Dominique Minassian.³ Consider how easy was it for Jesus to make these choices.

Share with your neighbour any thoughts or reactions you have.

- Are these temptations only relevant to Jesus?
- Are we as Christians tempted in similar ways?

Knowing God's way

There has been a craze for WWJD wristbands (What Would Jesus Do?).

- What would Jesus do?!
How easy is it to know God's way in ordinary life?
- Can you think of examples from your own life where you have been clear what God wanted you to do (or not do!)
- What empowers or helps you to choose the way of Christ?

Guidance

Are there any areas of life where you seek guidance?

Reflect on this quietly for a moment. You might like to share this with the group and offer it in prayer.

Desert

Read one or more of these poems or quotes.⁴

The Desert Waits (an invitation to Lent)

The desert waits,
ready for those who come,
who are obedient to the Spirit's leading:
or who are driven,
because they will not come any other way.

The desert always waits,
ready to let us know who we are –
the place of self-discovery.
And whilst 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.

Ruth Burgess

"We usually learn about God only during periods of adversity. Few, if any, of us really seek after a deep relationship with God except during periods of disaster, suffering and pain."

Gene Edwards

The desert is not remote in southern tropics
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.

From 'Choruses from the Rock' by T S Eliot

God in desert places and times

In the Bible, God often seems clearer to people in bleak deserted places.

- What experience of 'desert' times or places have you had?
- From these experiences, what have you learned about God?

Out of God's way

*Sometimes things happen to bring us up short and make us realise how far from God's way we've moved. Here is a brief example from Samuel Moor Shoemaker.*⁵

The other morning some of us were together in a church where the rector was saying Morning Prayer, and leading us in guided silent prayer. He said, 'Let us pray for those whom we love.' And that was easy.

Then he said, 'Let us pray for those whom we do not love.' And there rose up before my mind three men for whom I had to pray.

As you move to worship in your group, pause to think of:

- 1) An area of your life where you are not living in tune with God's way.
- 2) People and situations where you struggle to be Christ-like.

Worship

Jesus, the Son of God... is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, he was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Choose one or more of the following for the closing worship.

Confession⁶

Almighty God,
long-suffering and of great goodness:
I confess to you,
I confess with my whole heart
my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments,
my wrong doing, thinking, and speaking;
the hurts I have done to others,
and the good I have left undone.

O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you;
and raise me to newness of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR

Lord God, our maker and our redeemer,
this is your world and we are your people:
come among us and save us.

We have wilfully misused your gifts of creation;
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have seen the ill-treatment of others and have not gone to their aid;
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have condoned evil and dishonesty and failed to strive for justice;
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have heard the good news of Christ, but have failed to share it with others;
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

We have not loved you with all our heart, nor our neighbours as ourselves;
Lord, be merciful: **forgive us our sin.**

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For personal reflection:

A pattern

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

A choice

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. (Joshua 24:15)

A choice

Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

A prayer to conclude, by Gerard W Hughes:

Grant, Lord, that as we contemplate Jesus in the desert, our hearts and minds may be enlightened by his truth, so that we may recognize the deceits and lies of the evil one masquerading under the appearance of good in ourselves, in our churches and in our nation. We ask you this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

OR ⁷

In the desert Jesus showed his commitment to God and God's purpose for his life.

Let us commit ourselves to God's will:

Leader: Look at your hands, see the touch and the tenderness,

All: **God's own for the world.**

Leader: Look at your feet, see the path and the direction,

All: **God's own for the world.**

Leader: Look at your heart, see the fire and the love,

All: **God's own for the world.**

Leader: Look at the cross, see God's Son and our Saviour,

All: **God's own for the world.**

Leader: This is God's world,

All: **And we will serve God in it.**

Leader: May God bless us, may God keep us always,
and lead our lives with love.

All: **Amen.**

Here are two prayers for personal reflection during the coming week. One is from John V Taylor, the other from St Teresa ⁸.

Take away

Prayer – John V Taylor

Lord Jesus Christ,
alive and at large in the world,
help me to follow and find you there today,
in the places where I work,
meet people,
spend money,
and make plans.

Take me as a disciple of your kingdom,
to see through your eyes,
and hear the questions you are asking,
to welcome all others with your trust and truth,
and to change the things that contradict God's love,
by the power of the cross
and the freedom of your Spirit.

or

Prayer – St Teresa

Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
All things pass away;
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
He who has God
Finds he lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

**** NOTE ****

Please bring a photograph of yourself as a baby or young child for next week... but keep the photo a secret!