



## Part I—Finding Our Resilience

### LESSON THREE

# Jesus Is Tested



#### SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:1–13

#### MAIN IDEA

Christ's wilderness experience shows us that when our lives are dangerous and frightening, we are not alone.

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#### Opening Prayer

*O Christ, you are within us, above us, and surround us—we worship you. You are our protector, our redeemer, our Savior—we adore you. Be present with us as we study your word. Gather us together as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, that we may grow as faithful disciples of Christ Jesus. Amen.*

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#### SUMMARY

How do we find resilience and what helps us survive difficult challenges? We are tested, and so was Jesus. When Jesus was in the wilderness, the first thing the devil said was, “If you are the Son of God . . .” He attacked Jesus’ identity as God’s child. Does this sound familiar? How many times has your identity and value been challenged? You may find that peace can suddenly turn into peril and when challenged, you forget who you are. In contrast, Jesus’ testing and temptation shows who he is, God’s child, and so are you. When we survive difficult times, we have the chance to discover or rediscover that we rely on God.

**LESSON**

All of us go through times of testing. After the testing and even in the midst of it, there are lessons we often learn. In the Bible, we read about people being tested and how testing produces endurance (cf. Jas. 1:3, Rom. 5:3–4, Luke 8:15). Endurance is similar to resiliency, both refer to one's ability to withstand and recover from the difficult challenges we face in life. One of the best role models for resiliency and endurance is Jesus.

It is startling that our Savior Jesus would have to endure testing, after all Jesus is divine. And, if you read the scripture passage closely, you will see that the Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness. So, apparently, it was in the divine plan that Jesus be tested (see Luke 4:1). He is led to the wilderness for forty days, and he fasts during this period and is tempted by the devil, so I can imagine that he was nearly depleted.

**Questions of Identity**

When the devil tested Jesus, he began by saying, “If you are the Son of God.” The devil intentionally questioned Jesus’ identity as God’s child. A person’s integrity is an integral part of their identity and when your name and identity are attacked, it is very painful. Your identity does not ultimately lie in your occupation, your possessions, your spouse/partner, family, or your net worth. As Christians our identity, and who we really are when everything else is stripped away, is found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus had no need to prove to the devil what he and the devil already knew—that he was God’s child. Similarly, when our core identity is challenged, we do not have to prove what we already know, that we are God’s children.

*Activity*

Take a moment to reflect upon the activities that have helped you through stressful times of testing—praying, worship, Bible study, singing, volunteering, journaling, painting, spiritual retreats, connecting with others. How did these activities lead you through times of testing?

**Mary the Tower Is a Model of Resilience**

Jesus is a good model of resilience because he knows where his identity is found. It is not coincidental that this passage in Luke follows Jesus’ baptism, where the Holy Spirit descends upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (see Luke 3:21–22).

Even though people, and even demons, in the Bible seem to know who Jesus is, his identity is questioned by some throughout his ministry and at his crucifixion and trial. In Luke 22:67, Jesus is brought before the council, and they said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” This is a trick question, which has dire consequences no matter how Jesus answers. And, in Luke 23:37, soldiers at his crucifixion mock him saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” Matthew 27:40 reads, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

People of color, who have experienced structural racism and oppression and are people of faith, have a special relationship to Jesus, as he has been tested and experienced suffering and persecution just as they have. Though they have experienced oppression, trials, and testing, so has Jesus. In the funeral liturgy we often say, “There is nowhere that we can go where our faithful protector has not preceded us.”

### Answering with Scripture

Jesus models resilience, as he practices spiritual disciplines. He fasts, prays, studies, and interprets scripture. In Luke 4, when the devil asks Jesus to turn a stone into bread, as if to say, "After all, you have been fasting. Aren't you hungry, O divine one?" Jesus answers Satan by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Next, Satan offers to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world saying, "If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answers, "It is written, 'Worship the LORD your God, and serve only [God]'" (cf. Deut. 6:13, Deut. 10:14, 1 Sam. 7:3, and Matt. 4:10).

Notice that Jesus cites scripture twice, and when the devil comes at Jesus a third time, the devil gets wise and cites scripture back to Jesus. He quotes from Psalm 91: "Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." In other words, "You can jump off this temple, and God will protect you! Come on, throw yourself down, O Holy One!"

To that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16, "It is said, 'Do not put the LORD your God to the test.'" That's when the devil leaves. Luke 4:13 reads, "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time." The devil doesn't go away defeated. He just leaves until an opportune time.

### Testing as Teaching

In this passage the devil is, in some ways, an instructor—a bad instructor with ulterior motives, yet still one who enters the classroom and gives Jesus a devilish test. He presents Jesus

with a series of exercises intended to measure his faithfulness and divinity.

Teachers who give tests are seeking to determine whether the person being tested has knowledge, competency, integrative thinking skills and, in many ways, the person's character is being tested. So here is Jesus, fairly early in the Gospel of Luke, being tested by the devil. Part of Jesus' calling was to withstand the pressures of the temptation. As God's child, his calling was also to stand up to and call out the forces of evil.

We do not want to be tested, but it is part of the human experience. Jesus knew that even in his lowest moments, he could trust and rely upon God. Likewise, we can endure hard times by trusting God to handle whatever evil is thrown our way.

### Finding Our Resilience

Occupying wilderness places is difficult. In the midst of challenge, not being consumed by chaos is hard. How do we find and celebrate our resilience in the midst of stressful life circumstances?

Stress is not always bad. A certain amount of stress can energize and motivate us to achieve our purpose. This kind of stress perks us up, gets us out, and gives us focus. I have a friend who was CEO of a local nonprofit. The mission of the organization was a passion of hers, so she felt particularly called to the work. She loved her work, even though it was stressful. She had her ups and downs, sometimes in response to arbitrary things like politics or the number of volunteers to be recruited.

She was incredibly resilient, and if she had low moments, they didn't last very long. She bounced right back and recommitted to her work. She was a great leader, but even great leaders have detractors and those who are unhappy with



decisions that they and the board of directors make. But, instead of dwelling on something that happened years ago, she looked to the future.

We tried to have lunch when we could, which unfortunately, was not often enough. But every time we met, I left feeling renewed. We discussed our vulnerabilities and shared our difficulties, but she always directed our conversation to finding ways to love our neighbor and care for those who were underserved in our communities. In many ways, she embodied faith and resilience.

Resilience is the ability to spring back into shape and adapt well in the face of adversity, threats, or stress, such as from family, relationships, health, workplace, and financial difficulties. People who survive and thrive well in change are resilient.

### *Activity*

Identify a time in your life when you were most resilient. Discuss with another person what belief you had about God during that time that led you to be resilient.

We find our resilience when we recognize that we are not alone. The Spirit didn't lead Jesus into the wilderness only to abandon him there.

We haven't been abandoned, either. God is with us, even in times of testing, struggle, and stress. Christ's experience of being tested shows us that the wilderness places in our own lives are dangerous and frightening, but they are also places where our faithful protector has been.

In Luke, the devil departs from Jesus until an opportune time. The devil doesn't leave the stage but lurks in the wings. We will continue to face temptation and testing throughout our lives, just as Jesus did, but we are not alone. Our struggles in the wilderness help make us who we are. Even though they are challenging times, they provide opportunities for our growth and spiritual renewal. They give us a chance to prove to ourselves and to everyone else, even to the devil, that in life and in death, we belong to God.

### *Closing Prayer*

*Thank you, O God, for your many blessings.  
For your saving grace, we give you thanks.  
We have moved through challenges to joy and resiliency, by your grace. Continue to journey with us, our ever-present companion, and guide us toward increased hopefulness, as we follow you in faith. Amen.*

### *Reflection Questions*

1. Why do you think that Jesus the Messiah was tested?
2. Why are testing and trials part of the human experience?
3. As stress is not always bad, what is an example of good stress?
4. Have you known very resilient people? What do you suppose keeps them resilient?
5. In what ways is Jesus a good model of resilience?
6. What is the benefit and blessing in being resilient people?

## LESSON THREE NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration or foxing, particularly towards the edges. There is no handwriting or other markings on the page.



*Suggestions for Leaders***LESSON THREE: Jesus Is Tested****Central Concept**

Accompanied by the Spirit, Jesus endures an intense encounter with the devil in the wilderness. Tempted to feed his own needs, worship the devil over God, and test God's power and purpose, Jesus instead rebukes the devil by trusting God's ways and God's will. Jesus shows us that grounding our identity in God and accepting God's claim on us as beloved children empowers our resilience, our witness, and our place in community. We are not alone. In life and in death we belong to God.

**Connect**

(5 minutes) As people enter, ask a few to help lead the litany below. Ask the group to find this litany in their Bible studies. If you have some who need larger print, make enlarged copies, or project it onto a screen.

Welcome people with an invitation to join this litany. Encourage them to speak their part with gusto, and feel free to celebrate with raised arms and fist pumps, if so moved! (*Common English Bible* (CEB) used for inclusive language).

- One: God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them (Gen. 1:27).
- All: We are all made in God's image!
- One: You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well (Ps. 139:13-14).
- All: I am created by God!
- One: Don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine (Is. 43:1b).
- All: I belong to God!
- One: You received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as [God's] children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15b).
- All: Abba, Father!

- One: You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).
- All: We are all God's children through faith!
- One: See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are (1 John 3:1a)!
- All: Yes! Yes! We are all God's beloved children!

(10 minutes) Ask participants to raise their hands in response to these questions.

1. Who has been called a child of God in the past week? Past month? Past year?
2. Who has told someone they are a child of God in the past week? Past month? Past year?
3. Who has thought, "I am a child of God!" in the past week? Past month? Past year?
4. Who has heard these words on TV or in social media?
5. Who has heard these words in worship recently?
6. Invite the participants to finish this sentence: "When I say I am a child of God I mean . . ."

**Consider**

(10 minutes) Read Luke 4:1–13 with three voices: a narrator, a devil, and Jesus. Ask half the group to listen carefully for the two descriptions of what the devil is doing. Ask the other half to listen closely to Jesus' words for what you think Jesus might be pointing to in his responses. After the reading ask, What did you hear?

(20 minutes) Read or summarize: According to the story in the NRSV, the devil is tempting Jesus (verse 2), and testing Jesus (verse 13). However, this story is usually referred to as the temptation of Jesus, and in some Bible versions the word temptation is used in both verse 2 and 13.

To tempt: to entice to do wrong by promise of pleasure or gain; to induce to do something; to provoke (*Merriam-Webster*).\*



To test: to put to test or proof; to require a doctrinal oath of (Merriam-Webster).\*

The difference may help us look to Jesus, who is "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1), first as example and guide in leaning on our faith to resist the temptation to love self, or other idols, more than God and neighbor; second, as a model for passing the test of remembering who and whose we are, children of God, especially when our identity as a child of God is questioned.

Ask the group participants to turn to a neighbor and discuss.

1. What resources do you find in Jesus' example, and your faith, to resist putting other priorities over serving God and neighbor?
2. How have you thought of God testing people? Does God place challenges or hardships in our path? Does God test our steadfastness of faith when doubt arises? Does God test the strength of our belief that we are God's children? Other?

Invite participants to take some time in silence to recall some of their toughest challenges. Ask them to consider.

1. How did you see God, or feel God presence or absence in those times?
2. Might feelings of abandonment remain, and if yes, how do you deal with that?
3. Who or what sustained you during those times?

### Commune and Commit

(15 minutes) In October 2024, after Hurricane Helene hit the beloved Montreat Conference Center in Montreat, North Carolina, and many other parts of the Carolinas and southern states, Susie Burns, Director of Church Relations at the Center said, "It was and continues to be both devastating and beautiful all in the same breath." And a Christian educator from Florida added, "It's truly beautiful to see community come together to support and care for one another in the hardest of times. As we continue to watch the tropics this season, we also continue to pray

and be the hands and feet of Christ in the world." True resilience and discipleship.

Depending on your group's size, assign these biblical passages to individuals, pairs, or triads and ask them to bring a promise/charge/hope/insight to the whole group:

1. Luke 22:31-32
2. Luke 8:11, 15
3. Romans 5:1-5
4. Romans 8:26-27
5. Romans 8:35-39
6. James 1:2-4, 12-16

Summarize with this prayer.

Mark us with the eternal claim that we are  
your beloved children, O God.  
Build our resilience, O Christ.  
Empower our surrounding presence, Holy Spirit  
—so no one is alone.  
We are not alone. In life and in death,  
we belong to God. Amen.

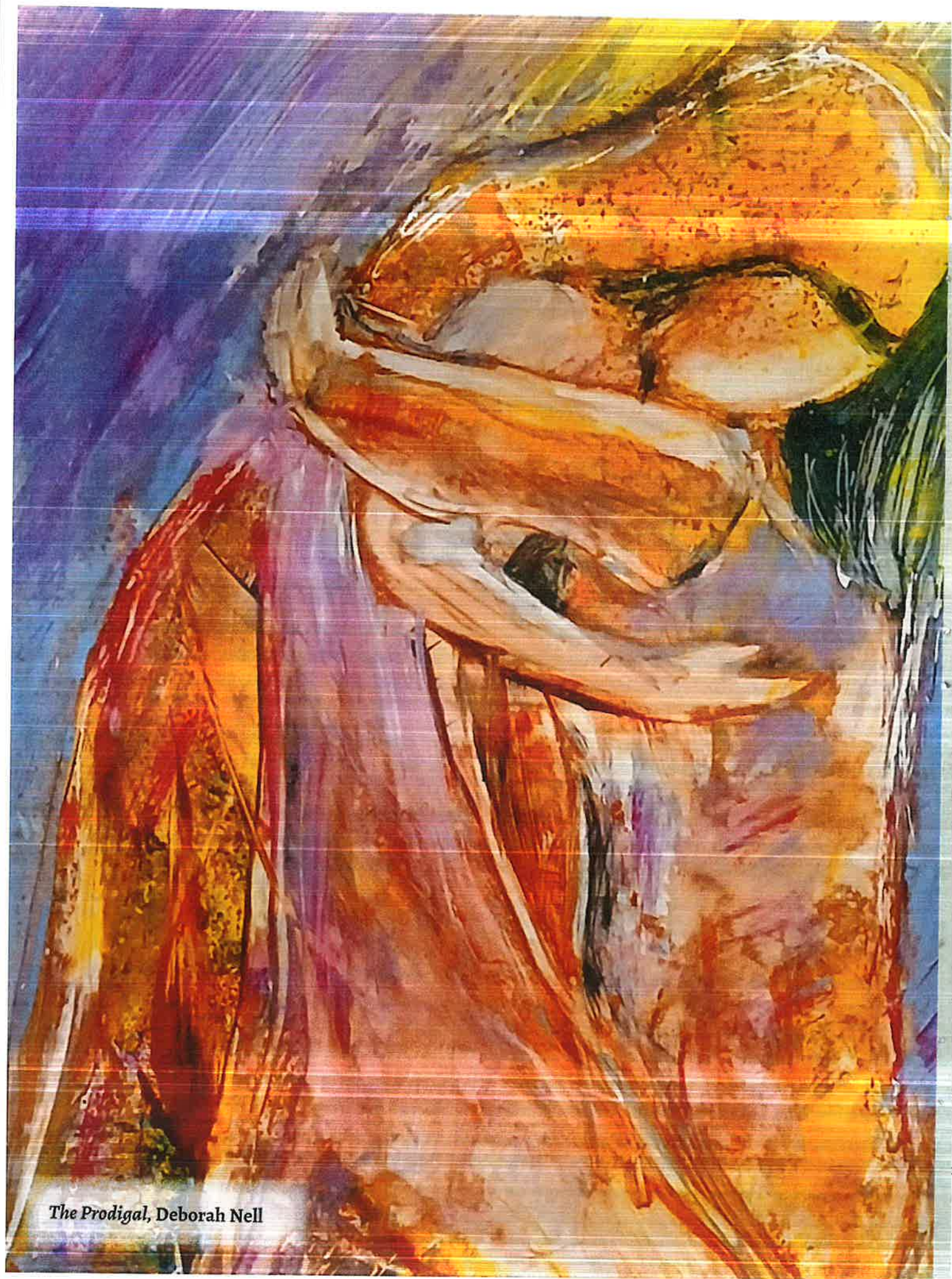
Close by playing this beautiful song, "We Are Not Alone" by the social distance Virtual Choir at [youtube.com/watch?v=5wvtawnpz3w](https://youtube.com/watch?v=5wvtawnpz3w).

Or sing together, "When We Are Tested," hymn 783 in *Glory to God, the Presbyterian Hymnal*. It is a perfect summary of today's exploration and a testimony to temptation in our spiritual life.

\* "Tempt." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tempt](https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tempt). Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.

"Test." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/test](https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/test). Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.





*The Prodigal*, Deborah Nell