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Well, good morning, everyone. Love the worship. Loved opening a service with baptisms. Isn't that amazing? Amazing.

Yes.

Yeah. Two little girls are going to enjoy their first communion today. That's exciting. That is exciting. Hey, Summer is here.

I'm not sure if you're aware of that, but if you've got kids, you are aware that summer is here. Someone else now has. Is no longer feeding your children lunch and you have to provide three meals for them. Now what. What is this about?

Who signed up for this?

Everyone's been talking about their vacation plans. One of the things I love to ask people when I'm getting to know them is if they are. If they're mountain people or beach people. Any mountain people in the room? Any beach people in the room?

Almost no one has a hard time deciding. Everyone seems to easily fall into one category or another with ease. Now, beach people love the blistering sun and the hordes of partygoers playing their loud music while trying not to get sand in their ice cream or in their eyes. Mountain people are different. They like a quiet hike with maybe the chance of seeing a bear.

Bear sightings are preferred to shark sightings. They like the sound of a burbling brook or cascading falls. They find that more peaceful than the sound of mothers screaming at their kids to get out of the water and put more sunscreen on. Sitting in an Adirondack chair with a cup of coffee with a view of the mist rising up through the valley. I'm a mountain person.

You may be a beach person, and that's all right. We're all wrong about something. You just.

Some of you may be both. And when we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, I think he was. He was a both because when we see him in his earthly ministry, we see him at both sorts of locations. He called his first disciples by the water, and then he revealed his transfigured glory on a mountain. This summer, as we're journeying through the Scriptures and you're journeying through the summer in different places, we're going to be focusing on lakes and mountains.

And I think through the process, we're discover how our own lakes and mountains can be pivotal in our own spiritual walk as it strengthens our faith and we grow in Jesus. So I'm going to pray and then we'll

get started. If you want, you can go ahead and turn your Bibles to Matthew, chapter four. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. It's one of four of the gospels of Jesus or the life of Jesus that the.

That his disciples told about. So Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are stories about Jesus that are remembered and passed down to us. Matthew is the first one. If you got a Bible with red letters, it's the first book you're going to find with red letters. So you can be looking for that.

The Bible says watch and pray. So you get permission to keep your eyes open and turn in your Bibles as I pray. Heavenly father, we pray that you would instruct us, give us insight, wisdom, warning, correct us, challenge us, and through your word, make us more like you. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen. Well, the boys and I are starting to plan our summer trip.

I've got an idea towards the end of the summer of doing something with them. Armando wants to see the mountains. He wanted to see Colorado. But Colorado is just a bigger road trip than what I'm prepared to endure with three teenagers. Robert wants to fish.

Mason wants to reconnect with some family down in Tennessee. And so right now, our plan, tentatively, is to spend some time in the Smokies, enjoying those mist rising up through the valley and a cup of coffee on a peaceful July morning, maybe do a little hiking and fishing for Robert, and then head down towards the Nashville to meet up with the family and then. Then make our way back home. So I'm mapping out this trip, and I'm trying to find the route that gets us to our various goals fastest. There are reasons to take the slow country roads that lead us through these little charming towns and enchanting forests.

But when you're traveling with three teenagers, the goal is just to get there as quickly as you can get there. Anyone know this story? Yeah. So I'm looking for shortcuts. Looking for shortcuts can be really smart, but it can also be dangerous, especially when you're driving through the mountains.

The car can break down or run out of gas, and you could get attacked by a bear. Do we have our little bear picture there? I mean, look at that guy right there. I mean, he's. It's like he's waiting on me.

It's what he looks like. He's like, I know you're coming. I'm just gonna stand here real still, and maybe you'll not see me in. I read some of the stats on this. There are about 750,000 black bears that they've identified in.

In North America. Less than one person a year gets killed by a black

bear encounter. So I feel like our odds are pretty good that we're going to be fine, if we. If we get off the road and the shortcut leads into bear territory. But even if we survive the bear, there's avalanches.

I don't know. Does the Smoky Mountains have a lot of avalanches? Maybe there's roads that taper off into gravel and then taper off into mud, and then you're stuck and you don't have signal. Mountains can come with their own challenges. Spiritual mountains are the same.

Spiritual mountaintops can be exhilarating. But if you read Matthew, chapter 17, Jesus and His disciples have an amazing spiritual experience on this mountain. But it also turns into a spiritual sort of crisis point where they have to make. Have to have some hard lessons taught. Spiritual mountains, great worship, great spiritual experiences by ourselves or shared with others are amazing, but they can also become a spiritual trap.

And so we have to be very careful. It is on a mountain that Jesus receives his first challenge to his ministry. As we go through the summer, we're going to be really looking at these mountains and lakes as almost a survey of the life and ministry of Jesus. And so Jesus begins his ministry in the desert. I want to read it.

Matthew, chapter four. If you've got your Bibles open, you can read right along with us in Matthew, chapter four. It begins this way. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

There's a sermon right there to be tempted by the devil. There's another sermon. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Verse 2. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.

The tempter came to him and said, if you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Hmm. Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down, for it is written he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up with their hands so that you'll not even strike your foot against a stone.

And Jesus answered, it is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test again. The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you, he said, if you'll just bow down and worship me. Jesus said, away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. And the devil left him and the angels came and attended him.

It might surprise you to learn that Jesus was himself tempted. Yeah. Hebrews makes it clear, however, that we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who is tempted in every way, just as we are. Yet he did not sin. Jesus didn't experience a whole gamut of human temptation, let's make that clear.

But he did. But he did find himself in places where he was tested in the same ways that we are tested, in the same manner that you and I are tempted. Now, temptation is an interesting thing. When we think of temptation, it's very often the temptation to do something bad. You know what I'm talking about.

James talks about this. He says In James, chapter 1, verse 14, each one of us is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. We've all experienced that. Anyone who says they are without sin, the Bible says, is a liar. So we're all going to just admit that we get enticed to do bad things.

The world and the devil conspire with our flesh to offer us something that satisfies a spiritual or a physical craving of some sort. So drugs, alcohol, pornography, debt, sexual and relational sin. In anger, we hurt and we damage people. We lie, we steal. Satan does tempt us to do bad things.

But. But as Christians, his goal in tempting us isn't to get us to do more bad things. There's plenty of people to do that. Satan's primary goal in tempting us is to get us to lose sight of the purpose and the power of God in our lives. Think about this.

The temptations that Satan offered up to Jesus were not to go steal, murder, commit sin, sexual or otherwise. They were intended to seduce him from his mission and offer him something almost as good. Almost as good. So think about this. Turning stones to bread.

Can you imagine if we could turn stones to bread? World hunger would cease. That would be a good thing, wouldn't it? Turning stones to bread. No one would be hungry again.

Amazing. Maybe some miracle that would just demonstrate how much God loves us and protects us. And to do something crazy and risky and for God to step in and rescue us, we go, oh, we are loved by God. And he proved it to us by rescuing us from this stupid scenario. Well, that would be a good thing.

We would know God loves us and looks out for us. Maybe it's to have control over all the kingdoms of the world. I don't know if you've been paying attention to the world. The news around the world in the last, I don't know, 3,000 years. It would be great to have, like, someone in charge, just to do all the good stuff.

Jesus says, listen, you've come to save the world.

Here you go, I'm offering it to you. All the kingdoms of the world and all their splendor. Just do it my way. It's easier. He says, no suffering, no humiliation, no betrayal, no crucifixion.

Just here it is on a platter. Jesus, go do your Jesus stuff. Do the Jesus magic. Make it all better. A shortcut of sorts.

But Jesus turns it down. Jesus says, wait. Bread, as important as it is, is not the most important thing in life. And testing God makes God testy. And controlling the world isn't the same.

Saving the world. And in the end, Jesus rejects the shortcut, offers with the reminder, worship the Lord and serve him only instead of choosing what was right in front of him. Jesus chose the kingdom that was ahead of him. And taking the shortcut. Instead of taking the shortcut, he took God's path.

He took. We're going to call it the long cut. He took the long cut. We are often tempted by shortcuts. Grocery line, getting to Tennessee, and even spiritually.

In Acts, chapter 19, there's a story. There's a Jewish high priest. His name is Sceva. And this guy was prolific. He had several children.

He had seven sons. These seven sons were following him in ministry, or at least wanted to. And so they were demonstrating their spiritual prowess out there. And they were. They were doing good things and trying to.

Trying to make the world a better place, because I think their hearts were in the right place. They had seen Paul cast out some demons. Now, that's a big deal. They'd seen Paul do this and how Paul did it. They watched.

Paul used the name of Jesus to cast out these demons. And the sons of Sceva talked to each other like, I think the key is you have to use the name of Jesus. And if you use the name of Jesus, the demons will be cast out. So they tried to do that. What ends up happening is the possessed man, rather than being freed, he just gets riled up.

And the demons in him and his own physical strength. He beat up the seven sons of Sceva. Seven. One against seven. He beat them up.

Here's what the evil spirit said. I recognize Jesus. I recognize Paul, but I don't know who you are. The seven sons of Sceva had to recognize that there are no spiritual shortcuts to ministry. There's no spiritual shortcuts to Life.

Just pasting Jesus onto your life and your activities doesn't make them God approved. It's not sufficient. One must have a genuine relationship, an understanding with Christ. And you don't get that with shortcuts. Philip Yancey, great author, wrote this.

Human beings grow by striving, by working, by stretching. In a sense, human nature needs problems more than solutions. Why are not all prayers answered magically and instantly? I've asked that myself. Why must every convert travel the same tedious path of spiritual discipline?

Here's why. Because persistent prayer and fasting and study and meditation are designed primarily for our spiritual benefit, for our sake. These are not things that God needs. They are things we need. And so God says, here's what you need to grow spiritual maturity.

That destination is the result of a journey that requires consistent obedience and reliance on God's guidance. So let's go back to Jesus there on the mountain. The devil took Jesus to a physical mountain, but Jesus was coming off a spiritual high, a spiritual mountain place. And you say, what do you mean? He was hungry, he was exhausted.

True, he was hungry, he was exhausted. But he's been fasting and praying for many, many, many days. He is on a spiritual. If you've ever done this, you know you are at the point where you're like man. I know the presence of God.

I know God's plan for me. I'm trusting Jesus. I'm in it. I'm in it to win it with Jesus. You have so much clarity those spiritual mountains offer that you're up high, you feel spiritually up high.

You can see, you have increased spiritual vision. The air is clear. It seems you can, you can breathe deeper. There's some spiritual vitality to your life. When you're in these spiritual high places and you've just conquered a climb.

You fasted, you've prayed, you've put the effort and time in you. You have an incredible amount of just optimism about what God can do with you. Now, those are all amazing things, but they come with some risk. When we find ourselves in this place of spiritual vitality and vision and vigor, we must be very careful that we are not tempted to jump ahead of God and do more than God has asked us to do. We've got to be very careful that we don't get seduced with a shortcut to the path of God's promises.

Jesus said no to that temptation. He says, no. Yes, I'm in this amazing place. But I. But I'm going to stick with the plan.

I'm going to stick with the path in the height of our spiritual high,

we are tempted to find our own path to the promise and the mission God has for us. Sometimes we take a shortcut. We just try to get there faster. But to avoid that, we need to do several things. Just remember these things.

We don't chase the experiences. I'm telling you, those spiritual highs are amazing. I want all of you to experience this deep closeness with God and a sense that he's right there directing every step you take. I want you to experience that. But those experiences are not what we chase.

We chase God. Yes. Amen. We chase God, not experiences. And how do we do that?

Well, this goes back to just the basics. We focus on God's word.

That's where we learn the heart of Jesus. We meditate on scriptures, we pray, we pray. The Bible says pray without ceasing. And by that it just means listen every time you need to pray. Pray every time there's a moment where you're unsure.

Pray. Pray without ceasing. Pray consistently. Seek God's will through his word on the essential things and what you think is non essential. Just make it a matter of prayer.

This is essential for staying on God's long cut path. Reject the shortcut, embrace the long cut. Focus on building consistent habits, routines and practices that lead to long term spiritual growth, maturity. What's that look like? It looks like showing up, showing up.

Commit deeply to others and be willing to sacrifice and serve others as well. This is how we grow, by giving of ourselves. And then Jesus teaches us something that is really hard for us to sort of get our minds around.

Take periodic breaks from the stuff of the world. Now the Bible calls this fasting.

Yes, I know I would not get an enthusiastic round of applause when I mentioned that word. Fasting is just simply saying I'm going to take a break from the stuff that I really like and focus on a discipline of God. So oftentimes we think about food giving up meat or sweets or chocolate or ice cream or carbs or, I don't know, tomatoes, whatever you love and you give that up, you say, I'm going to take that sensation of liking that thing and eating that thing and I'm going to just sort of turn some energy towards thanking God for that, but abstaining from it for a season. But it doesn't have to be food. We talk a lot about here just taking breaks from technology, man.

Turn off the news for a week and see what happens. Turn off the news

for a week and see how that affects your spiritual heart. And mind say, say goodbye to alcohol for one week. I know. Little glass of wine with your, with your meal Paul recommended for Timothy in his stomach.

But if you're an alcohol drinker, give it up for a week. See what happens Sometimes fasting. When you talk about fasting, it can feel and sound a little bit performative. Do you know what I mean by that? It's like we're gonna do something and it's gonna make us feel good.

But does it really do anything of merit, of value, of weight? Well, it does. Consider fasting. Fasting can be a powerful tool for deepening one's connection with God. Renewing spiritual vision, strengthening faith.

Take periodic breaks from the stuff of the world. You may have something running through your head right now that could be the Holy Spirit speaking to you. Consider taking a week long break from it, or a month, 40 days, 40 nights. See what happens. Listen, temptations come in two ways that I've discovered.

The temptation to obvious sin. We talked about those. They're easy to recognize. Like, we can go, oh, yeah, that's bad, I shouldn't do that. They're easy to recognize.

They aren't that easy to resist. But it's the temptation to do something you know is bad. But there's also the temptation to take a shortcut to something good. And this is where temptation doesn't direct me to evil, but tempts me towards something that everyone around me would say, yeah, of course, do that thing.

And that's where Jesus says, you need to be grounded in my word. Because that kind of temptation can get a little confusing, it seems. Right, and yet there's sort of a check. And you're like, I don't feel like this is exactly what God would have me do. Jesus refused the shortcut.

So here's the question this morning. What spiritual shortcuts are you tempted to take? Do you lean into trying to do things in your own strength? And by that mean, do you sometimes get a little impatient with God's timing and try to make things happen before God has fully set everything where it needs to be for that thing to happen? Are you a walk through an open door?

Are you beat on the door until it opens kind of person? Do you find yourself doubting God's power in your life, maybe God's interest in your life? You're like, I don't know, is he really paying attention to what's going on here? Do I need to step in and do something? You see, if we don't believe God has the power or the interest in directing our steps, then we're very tempted, easily tempted, to step in and do it for him.

And when we do that, we take a shortcut. And that's not what God wants for us when we're taking shortcuts. Oftentimes we're moving quickly from relationship to relationship, from place to place, from ministry to ministry, and we're looking for what seems to be missing. Like, that's not quite it. Maybe I need to try this over here.

Maybe I need to go over here and do this. And those can be wise and necessary moves, but they can also just be temptations to take a shortcut. As we prepare for a time of communion. Jesus said no to shortcuts. He said yes to the path of God, the long cut.

That path led through shame and rejection, discouragement and even death. And even death. But it also led to the establishment of a kingdom that would have no end, an eternal kingdom. And for you and I in this room who have said yes to Jesus, his path, the one that God ordained for him, that he stayed on and did not take the shortcut. That path led to our salvation through the cross life and salvation for all who had put their trust in Jesus.

And communion is this reminder that true eternal life comes from refusing shortcuts and embracing God's path. Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for your obedience to the cross where you laid aside all the glory and honor and the fame, all the things that were yours by right. And then you found yourself tempted by Satan with there in the desert and on that mountain in our own lives. Lord, there are many opportunities for us to take the shortcut and to not wait patiently on the Lord.

We don't know where you will take us when we wait patiently on you, but we know that when we wait patiently on you, you go with us through those long journeys, keep us safe from the tempter, and remind us here in this moment as we take the bread and the cup, that we are deeply, deeply loved by God, who knows what is best for us and will graciously lead us safely through every trial and temptation if we only stay attached to the vine. We put this in this moment in Jesus name. Amen.

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