

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Knock Out! Jesus Won**  
Matthew 4: 1-11  
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*Pastor Michael Novotny*

Do you ever find yourself being intensely tempted in ways that you feel like you just can't resist? How do you overcome that temptation and win your spiritual battles? Well, studying the time that Jesus was tempted will give us a perfect view on the only way to truly overcome and conquer temptation. It's coming up here on Time of Grace.

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David and Goliath – do you know the famous story? If you've been to church more than twice, you probably heard it. If you raised kids with children's Bibles, it's always the most entertaining picture in the entire book. You may have heard the story but I wonder – I wonder if you know what was all at stake? Choose the man, Goliath said. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects. But if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.

Whatever happened to little David, happened to everyone. And back in B.C. times there were no civil rules of war. If Goliath picked up a sword and with one stroke cut David to the ground, you can bet the men would be imprisoned, enslaved, their wives and daughters would be raped, and their sons would be killed. Can you just imagine what they felt as this puny runt volunteers to fight on their behalf? When David ran out into that valley, everything for everyone was at stake. Which is exactly how you and I should feel as we hear today's Scripture lesson. A fight that happened about 1,000 years after David and Goliath, not far from that valley, between one of David's human descendants, Jesus, and Goliath's spiritual father, the devil. Maybe you read the stories in the gospels of the temptation of Jesus Christ, but do you realize what was at stake? If a devil won that fight – in fact, if he just won a single round, if he landed just one punch, if Jesus slips with his words, with his thoughts, with his actions, with his motivations – the things that you love most about your faith would be gone. Just think for a moment the things you love most about God – that he's forgiving, he's merciful, he doesn't bring up your past, he doesn't keep a record of your wrongs, you don't have to be afraid of death because there is something that is a far better place than this one. He has a plan for you when you suffer like he does for his entire family. That there's always hope that there's always a brighter future because God has promised if Jesus slips just once, it's all gone. He doesn't become a Savior; he ends up being a sinner. And another sinner who dies on a cross does nothing for you and for me. Think of what's at stake!

And today, hold your breath as we see Jesus walk out to the battlefield and fight the greatest enemy of all time and we hear the story in Matthew four. In verse one, Matthew says, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Now the wilderness is the reign where these two cosmic giants are going to fight. Have you ever been there? I got to tour Israel a number of years ago and as the tour bus went from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem

in the south, we stopped and I looked out the bus window and I said, “Why?” There was rocks and dirt and out the other window was rocks and dirt and out the front window was rocks and dirt; it was rocks and dirt on repeat. There was absolutely nothing and that’s the point. There was no one there. No one there to pray for Jesus, to encourage him, to help him, to feed him. There was no coach in his corner giving him advice. It was just Jesus.

And if you can hear the boxing announcer introducing the two champions, it might sound something like this: In this corner, in the white trunks, he is the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, undefeated in 30 years of temptation. Folks, that’s 11,000 sinless days, that’s 16 million sinless minutes. Introducing the Son of God, Jesus! Is that a bit much? Yeah, perhaps.

Well, in this corner, in the red trunks, he is the Father of Lies. He is the ruler of the kingdom of the air. He is undefeated in billions of battles. He is the enemy who enticed Eve, he is the deceiver who duped David. He is the serpent who sucker punched the smartest man on planet earth, King Solomon, the devil. And it’s the rematch. You know, these two have fought before but it was a long, long time ago in a very different place. Up in heaven, Jesus knocked the devil out and cast him down to earth as a fallen angel. But that time, things were so different. That was on Jesus’ home turf and this is down where the devil reigns. He’s the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

Last time, Jesus was just divine, just God, but now he’s very different. He is God and man in one person. He’s emptied himself of his constant use of his power. He doesn’t do miracles every single moment; he’s weak and tired and hungry. This time, it might be very different because Jesus is very different. In fact, he’s as different as can be. Matthew says next, “After fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry.” Jesus’ pre-fight training is the worst.

Let me ask you a personal question: How holy are you when you’re hungry? I miss a meal and you would probably tell your pastor that I might be demon possessed. Have you been “hangry” before? Do you know what happens to your body if you don’t skip a meal or two, but days and weeks, like Jesus did? Let me tell you – after about six hours, your body starts to eat its own fat supply. It’s desperate for glucose to feed your brain and it will start to cannibalize itself. Give it a few days or weeks and it will turn on your muscle. And when the muscle is gone, your body literally falls apart. Your gums bleed, your teeth fall out, your skin starts to sag, there’s vomiting, there’s aggression, but the worst is what happens in your mind. You start to suffer dementia, Alzheimer’s, forgetfulness. Can you imagine being patient and kind and selfless and thoughtful and self-controlled? Can you imagine trying to remember the right passage at the right time during the right temptation after 40 days without food? The devil is wicked but he’s also wicked smart and he watches and he waits, he watches and he waits, and he watches and he waits until Jesus can barely stand on his own two feet. And he rings the bell and he starts the fight.

Here’s round one. “The tempter came to Jesus and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” Just a sneaky little jab, isn’t it? Miracle bread. What’s so bad about that? Read a couple of chapters later in Matthew’s gospel and Jesus will do that very thing, won’t he? He will feed thousands and thousands of people with the miracle – why is this so

wrong? Don't put your gloves down just yet because the devil's trying one of his oldest lies; a way that he knocked out Jesus' ancestors, the children of Israel, when they were in a wilderness many years before. Way back in the days of Moses, the prophet wrote this in Deuteronomy 8: Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness, these 40 years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart? Whether or not you would keep his commands? He humbled you, causing you to hunger. To teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Way back then, God caused his kids to hunger; he waited until their stomachs were growling and here's why: He wanted to see what was in their hearts. Did they actually love God? Or did they love the free meals that he would float down from heaven. Did they care about him as the most amazing giver or did they just love his gifts so much? If God stopped giving, stopped feeding, stopped providing at their beck and call, would they love him and trust him? It worked before and the devil wonders, "Maybe it will work again." And he throws this jab at Jesus, wondering if he's willing to wait for God.

Let me ask you: Does the devil ever try to hit you with that same punch? When God allows you to wander out into the wilderness, a season of your life that you never would have chosen, never would have expected, never saw coming, and he makes you wait, what does he find in your heart? When your body's breaking down and you've been to doctor after doctor after doctor and you have prayed and prayed and prayed and nothing, are you willing to wait? When that situation in your family that's not easily resolved – there's drama and drama and you have begged God and you have begged him to change people's hearts and attitudes and opinions and you have to wait some more – do you wait in faith? When your finances are a mess and you feel your heart tensing up when you go to the mailbox, what bill is going to be waiting that you can't pay. When there's something that you just wish you could change - "God, if you love me". When he doesn't seem to answer you and he makes you wait to test you, what does he find?

I'm not sure if that ever works with you but here's the most amazing thing: It didn't work with Jesus. The devil throws this sneaky jab and Jesus' replies, "It is written, man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus punches back with a passage and he says, "No, no, no, no. You liar! No, I see what you're doing. I know when you did it back then but it's not going to work now. No, I live not on physical bread but on the bread of my Father's word. I have seen him face to face; he is pure goodness. He has never done me wrong and I love him and I trust him when life is easy and when life is hard. And when I'm licking my lips from a feast and or when my stomach is growling, it doesn't matter what he makes me go through; I know him too well. So no, no, no, no, I'm not going to take a shortcut. I will wait as long as God asks me to wait because my God is good. You, liar!"

And the bell rings; round one? Untouchable. So the devil bursts out of the corner for round two. And he's ready to throw his classic hook that has knocked out far too many of God's people; a punch that I want to call, "Twisted Scripture." It's the same punch that knocked out a kid I knew years ago. I was teaching this seventh and eighth grade Bible class at my church and the day's lesson was on grace and I preached grace as God meant it to be preached; that it is nothing about you and all about the beautiful heart of God. It's unconditional. There's nothing he won't forgive; there's nothing he can't forgive. There's nothing he didn't forgive. It doesn't matter

what you did, doesn't matter what you're struggling with, it doesn't matter what you do, God's love is purely no strings attached and what a powerful lesson I thought it was! Until he came to the front of class and I hope I'm wrong and, you know, I can't read hearts, but he was the kid that I always wondered what he thought about Jesus. And he came up with this look in his eye that was the opposite of holy and he said, "Pastor, so you're saying I can do whatever I want because God forgives everything?" He took unconditional love and he twisted it and it wasn't his idea.

That's the same thing that the devil tries with the Son of God. It says in Matthew 4: Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city 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 God will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. The devil somehow whisks Jesus off to the temple in Jerusalem and puts him, perhaps, at the southeast corner that plunges down hundreds of feet into the Kidron Valley. Or maybe to the southwest corner of the temple that towered above one of Jerusalem's busiest intersections. Just jump, he dared him. God says in the Bible he'll send his angels, they'll swoop down and save you, and the crowds will love it; they will worship you, Jesus. Just try.

He takes a passage and he twists it and I wonder if he tries the same thing with you? Has God's word, God's promise, God's love ever been an excuse to do something that God doesn't like? I mean, if you think of a truth like prayer works – Christians, we love that; prayer is not in vain in Jesus' name. Seek and you shall find. And so, some people pray; they pray that God will fix their relationships, that he'd fix the drama, he'd fix their marriage, but sometimes they pray instead of doing what God says: Apologizing, owning my side, serving and serving and not asking for anything in return. Or maybe you've heard that God has power to heal even addictions – and he does – and so some people turn to God but they don't confess that struggle to other people. They ignore the way that God heals addictions and they just wait for some divine miracle instead of the very natural way that God works, through the words and encouragement of the family of God. Maybe you've heard that God sends angels to protect his kids; it's true. So do you text while you drive? Put on your mascara? Check your email? If God will protect you, it won't be a tragedy that will ruin someone's life, right?

God provides daily bread, doesn't he? He's the perfect father; he's going to provide meals for his kids. So talk back to the boss and don't work hard and slack off in school; it will probably work out. God is the Great Physician; he heals not just souls but bodies, as well. So live off of butter and cheese and beer, work 60 hours a week, sleep for six, have your coffee in the morning, your soda at night, you'll probably be fine; God will take care of you.

You see what he does? Something's true and he twists it and he socks us all the time. But thank God he couldn't hit Jesus. Jesus answered the devil, "Ah, it is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" No, no, no, Satan, you liar. I see what you're doing. No, the Bible says God protects his people but you shouldn't test them. Oh yeah, that passage you quoted, Satan? The one about God sending angels? Do you remember what the rest of it said? "If you make God your dwelling place, he will command his angels concerning you so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." You forgot that part, didn't you? If you turn to God, if you run to

him and his word and his promises. You liar, I see what you're doing. Jesus stands up on his wobbly legs and he says, "You're not going to get me."

And so, the devil comes out for the final round and he's been saving his knockout blow for last. Here's what happens: "Again, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I'll give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" That's below the belt, isn't it? He's starving and Satan puts a feast in front of him. He's lonely and Satan gives him a glimpse of parties and friends, women and wealth. He knows the suffering is going to get worse; there's going to be a crown of thorns but he shows him a kingdom with a crown of gold. Just one little compromise, Jesus.

Has he ever tried that with you? Offer you something really good, just a quid pro God, and in exchange the guys will all look at you, everyone will notice you, you'll get your way; just compromise for a second. It works with every sin. You take the bait and you give up God. But it didn't work with Jesus. Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Jesus said, "No, you liar, my God, he's the one I worship. I just don't do church, I don't play religion; it's not a Sunday thing. Every day, I love him, I fear him, I trust in him. So you go back where you came from." And finally, the devil looks Jesus in the eye and he says, "No mas." No more.

The story ends: "Then the devil left him and the angels came and attended to Jesus." The Father then sends his angels so Jesus doesn't strike his foot against a stone. They lift him up and they declare him the undisputed spiritual champion of the world.

So what's the big idea? I thought I knew the answer to that question. A few years ago, I went to a pastor's conference and we studied this very story from the Bible and I noticed a pattern: Temptation, it is written. Temptation, it is written. Temptation, it is written. I thought, "Okay, I think I get this." When you're tempted, you should say, "It is written." You should know the Bible so well that even if you were deprived of food for over a month, you could still quote it, you could expose the lie with the truth of God. And I was just about to raise my hand as the brand new pastor in a group of pastors but thankfully before I did, another man stood up – an older, wiser pastor – and here's what he said. He said, "Gentlemen, don't you dare think this story is about what you do. This story is about what he did." And my hand went bloop – because he was right. You know, is there wisdom in memorizing the word of God? Absolutely. But don't let this story burden you as one more thing you have to do after you leave church. Let this story relieve the burden to know Jesus fought for you. The devil tried all the things he tries with you against Jesus but your Savior was so good and so strong and so self-controlled, he stood up for you. And just like King Saul's soldiers got to celebrate when David dropped the giant, we get to celebrate as Jesus walks out of the wilderness sinless. Because now the God who says to him, "You are my Son whom I love, I'm so pleased with you." He can look at you and say the same thing, too. "You're my daughters, you're my son. You're the people that I love. I'm so happy with you." Jesus left the wilderness with holy blood coursing through his veins that he would shed on the cross to redeem us so that sin would never have the last word. So on our tombstone, wouldn't even appear the word "sinner," it would just be "saint." Period. Jesus took the championship belt and he handed it to us. Every spiritual blessing – do you want to be loved in this life? God loves you. Do you want someone not to criticize you but to point out the great

things you do? This is the God who says, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” This great exchange – our sin for his holiness – is only possible because of days like this is ours. So now when God looks down from heaven, he doesn’t put his hands on his hips, doesn’t shake his head, “How could you?” He looks down and the smile, you can’t imagine on his face!

The big idea is that Jesus did not just beat the devil; he beat the devil for us. That’s what my daughter taught me. A few months ago, we cuddled up as a family on the couch and I opened the kids’ Bible and guess what story we were on? Yep, David and Goliath. And we shook with the soldiers and we listened to Goliath’s big voice and we pretended to sling our own stones and we watched them drop and I asked the kids a question that a pastor told me you should always ask kids after their Bible stories: What does it have to do with Jesus?

And my kids are getting pretty good at this. My eldest said, “Well, daddy, Jesus was David’s great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great something – grandson?” I said, “Yes, absolutely right; he was the son of David.” And my little girl said, “Daddy, just like David fought this big enemy, Jesus fought our big enemy, the devil.” I said, “You are a smart little girl.” But then, my oldest daughter Brooklyn, she pointed at the picture and said, “Daddy,” and it was a little cartoony close-up picture of Goliath’s head with the stone, whack! It’s getting him, and you have the big cartoony splash and she said, “Daddy, David crushed Goliath’s head and Jesus crushed the devil’s head.” And I said, “Dang! I never heard of that before! That’s brilliant! I’m the pastor on this couch; what do you think you’re doing embarrassing me like that?” But she was exactly right. He crushed him. He didn’t sneak away with a 55-45 scorecard; he crushed him. And every time he tries to put your face in the dirt, every time he tries to make you think you were unworthy and you were unlovable and God doesn’t care about you and God doesn’t have a plan for you, you shake a finger and say, “No, no, no, no, no. I remember the day when you fought Jesus. Remember what happened? I do, too. Jesus didn’t just win; he won for me and that’s the good news. Amen.

Focusing on Jesus is the only place to find true peace in our hearts and in our souls. I thought of that when a woman left me a note the other day after church where she called herself a “forever sinner.” I emailed her wondering what she meant by that term and her response was that despite all of her effort and all of her trying and all of her like devout faith, she still struggled, she still stumbled, and she still sinned. Which is a great reminder that what we truly need from God is not just good tips on how to resist temptation but a great Savior who overcame temptation in our place. I want you to know today that you have that kind of Savior; that Jesus fought the devil in the wilderness not just to be a good example but to be an incredible redeemer and rescuer, despite all of your sins.

I would love for you to join me and pray.

Dear Jesus, we pray to you today because you are an incredible Savior. If you had just given us a good example and we had to be completely obedient and sinless to make it to heaven and to be with God, man, I can’t imagine that pressure, that stress, and that despair so thank you for what you did for us. Thank you, Jesus, that you didn’t just die for us one day on the cross. With every day and every minute and every breath, you lived the perfect life that we could be perfect in the sight of God. Thank you, Jesus, that when our Father looks at us because of you, we’re not going

to be forever sinners but forever loved and forever accepted and forever saved. We're so grateful for you and we pray that you would use us to spread this incredible news to all the people that you put in our life. We pray it all in your powerful name, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny, and the true key to overcoming temptation is in Jesus; that's why it all starts now.



TIME OF GRACE®

# Grace<sub>notes</sub>

guides for personal Bible study

## *Knock Out! Jesus Won*

**Matthew 4:1-11:** <sup>1</sup>“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ <sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup>‘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 in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’ <sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ <sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup>‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’ <sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”

## *Points to Ponder*

1. Agree/Disagree: Since Jesus was true God, he never felt truly tempted as we do.
2. Compare your answer to question 1 with Matthew 26:36-38. Were you correct? Why or why not?
3. The reason Jesus appeared was to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8). In what ways did Jesus’ perfect life destroy the devil’s work?
4. Does the devil use some of the same temptations that he used on Jesus on you? Do they work? Explain.



5. Jesus didn't just beat the devil, but who did he beat the devil for? Meditate on that today.

The devil tried all of his usual tricks on Jesus, but Jesus never took the bait. In the famous story of Jesus' temptation, we not only find the key to resisting the allure of sin, but always find a Savior who said no for all the times we sinfully say yes. Jesus won! And so do those who have faith in him.

### *What else does God say?*

**Hebrews 4:15:** For 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.

**1 John 3:8:** The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.