



Have you ever been tempted to freak out over something? Or, how about this, have you ever had a back and forth with God over something you had absolutely no control over? It's like, "God I hope you got this, and I know that as a good Christian I'm supposed to believe that you got this." It's like one second you know God is in control and He's going to take care of it. Then the next second, it's as if the most appropriate thing to do is lose your cool and freak out because you feel helpless, and everything seems to be out of your control.

It's a safe bet to say that we all find ourselves in situations and circumstances that are at times a bit beyond our control. We all experience situations and circumstances that have the ability to freak us out! Maybe you find yourself in the middle of something like that right now. Maybe there's something going on at work that's bothering you. Maybe you don't have a job and so you're looking for work. Maybe your bills are starting to pile up. Maybe you or a loved one have some serious health concerns. Maybe one of your relationships isn't going the way you'd like it to go and it's creating hardship in your life. How about a big life change such as moving into a new home, or the end of a marriage, or the end of a career, or you name it, and it's got the potential of producing stress and causing us to freak out!

When we feel a loss of control over the situations and circumstances in our lives, it often leads us into this persistent worry about all the horrific possible outcomes. Now, it's true, as good and faithful believers in God we aren't "supposed" to get all worked up over stuff. But if you experience stress and worry it doesn't mean that you're an unfaithful person. It means you're human. And not only do we as humans get stressed out about stuff, but so did Jesus.

We're told that the night before He was crucified, Jesus went back and forth to God three times and prayed that if there was any other way to go about the whole saving of the world business, that He would rather go that route. When we read about this in Luke chapter 22, we're told that there was so much stress tempting Jesus to freak out, and that He was in such great agony, that He actually began to sweat blood. Because you see, He knew the events that were about to take place. He knew that He was being betrayed by one of His very own disciples. He knew that those who had called Him Messiah on His way into the city just a few days earlier were going to be screaming for His crucifixion. He knew that He was going to be beaten beyond recognition just before He was led off to the crucifixion sight. He knew that He would have to become sin in order to conquer it.

We have a tendency of catastrophizing situations and making things seem like our world is about to end. Jesus didn't have to do that because He already knew what time it was. He knew He was about to be crucified on a Roman cross. It's hard for us today to understand the full brunt of crucifixion. Crucifixion is one of the most painful and torturous methods of execution ever devised. In fact, so horrific was the pain, that a word was created to help explain it. Excruciating literally means "from the cross."

Back to the point, though. Jesus was a bit stressed out. And if anything like us, He must've been half tempted to lose His cool and freak out. But He didn't. Actually, we're told that Jesus so kept His cool that when one of the knuckleheads that shows up to arrest Him gets his ear chopped off, Jesus has the composure to stoop down, pick the ear up, and put it back on the guy's head. So, what we need to know, is how it is that Jesus was able to resist the temptation to freak out.

Many people have a predisposition of getting all worried and worked up over things that are beyond their control. In your own life, have there been moments of stress that cause you to question God and go back and forth with Him over whether or not He even cares about your wellbeing? Have there been moments where you've been like the father of the demon possessed boy who said, "I believe Lord, but help my unbelief"?

Looking back at those types of moments, many of us wish to have had faith like Jesus to know that no matter the situation, no matter the circumstance, no matter the feelings, God was going to pull through. Sometimes we allow temporary uncertainty to outweigh all the times God has proven Himself faithful to us, and instead of being thankful for all God has done we become worried about things that have yet to happen.

We don't like freaking out. It makes us feel stupid. Thank God we don't have to stay in freak out mode for long. We've got this incredible example of Jesus in how to stay connected to God through the stuff that causes us to freak out. Just think about what Jesus went through. There were moments of crisis in His life (a crisis is defined as a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger... a time when a difficult or important decision has got to be made). And if we pay close attention to these moments of crisis in the life of Jesus, we can learn to overcome all the crazy stuff life throws at us!

When Jesus was praying that night before He was crucified, when He was sweating blood, it was a moment of crisis. He had a pretty big decision to make. Was it gonna be His will, or was it gonna be the Father's will? Thank God for us He didn't freak out and make the wrong choice.

There's another time in the life of Jesus that does a good job of showing us how to act right under pressure. This time happens at the very beginning of His ministry, right after He gets baptized. It's when He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. We're gonna look at that story in a minute, but first, consider this: Though it's true that Jesus came to reveal to us the character of God, it's imperative to understand that in the things He did, He came to reveal to us how God intends us to behave.

In everything Jesus did here on earth, we see a man acting as God designed us to be. At the very heart of that understanding is this key to life... the essence by which Jesus lived is the essence by which God intends us to live. Jesus's life was the ultimate expression of trust and dependence on God, that if we can imitate, will make our lives make sense. Jesus Christ offers to live his perfect and blameless life all over again in each one of us! In the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in every day we can allow Jesus to act through us on our behalf. If Jesus were the one living out our lives we would be less likely to buckle under pressure. Let that one sink in...

Let's look at this story of Jesus being tempted. Turn to your Bible and read Matthew 4:1-11 (seriously, read that passage and then continue reading this document).

So, we see Jesus going out into the wilderness, actually being led there by the Holy Spirit, to be tempted as a man. Jesus was tempted as a man. This is why this account is so fascinating and so practical for us. If we look closely, we see that it's pretty much the same form of temptation we face. And if we try to understand this, then we can know how to handle temptation in our own lives... and not freak out.

Before we unpack the three temptations in the passage, it's crucial to point out a couple things. The first is that temptation doesn't come to us because we're sinners. It comes to us because we're human beings. Jesus was not tempted because He was a sinner; He was tempted because he was a man. It's our humanity that makes us subject to the power of temptation, and the enemy knows it. It's in our human nature to act like we're in control when we're not, and when we get that false sense of control we begin acting independently from God.

You'll notice that twice the devil says to Jesus, "*If* you are the Son of God," like this is even a question to be considered. Remember, this is immediately following Jesus's baptism where the heavens open and God says, "This is my beloved Son in who I am well pleased." So, the devil is not trying to cast doubt on *who* Jesus is. Satan knew he was talking to the Son of God, and there's no doubt that Jesus knew He was God's Son. This question should be a statement. And as a matter of fact, due to some weird rule in the Greek language, most linguistic scholars believe that this has been translated improperly, and instead of *if* you are the Son of God, the proper translation should be *since* you are the Son of God. In effect, Satan is saying, "Since you are the Son of God, why not do this, or why not do that." The whole point of these temptations is to get Jesus to move off His principle of trust and dependence on God. The enemy tries to get us to act on our own, independently of God, this is always the point of temptation.

The other thing to point out is that when Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted, He was taken into a wilderness. This may not sound too important, but it is a bit strange. We usually don't think of the wilderness as the place of temptation. In fact, when we want to avoid the problems and temptations of life, we usually retreat to the wilderness. To a quiet place. We usually think of a place with lots of immorality as the place of temptation. That's where you've got more worldly influence.

This story shows us that our susceptibility to temptation does not come from out there somewhere. It comes from within. It's not some outside force that creates our inability to resist temptation. The real issue arises from within. Jesus said, "It is not what goes into a man, but what comes from within, that defiles him." For instance, there are plenty of people that can drive by a liquor store right now and be absolutely unphased. There are also plenty of people that would be tempted, go inside, buy a bottle of alcohol, and commence ruining their lives. The variable is not the situation. Rather, it's the person in the situation.

We tend to think our faults and failures are due to outward pressures, and because we fail to take responsibility for them, we can't even begin to overcome them. If you listen closely to the way people speak, you'll hear it. We say things like, "I had no choice" and "they talked me into it" and "it's not my fault." And those are all lies. The truth of the matter is that it's an inner weakness. It's an inner urge that causes us to fall to temptation. Could this be why the Holy Spirit led Jesus into a solitary place for this experience? Was it to show us that the real issue comes from within?

Now, let's investigate the passage and the three temptations. In the first one "the tempter" says, "Since you're the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." It's important to realize that Jesus had been without food for forty days... In maybe the greatest understatement in the entire Bible, it says He was hungry. Notice that this temptation comes out of a normal, natural need... food. It isn't that there's something wrong with Jesus that causes this temptation. It's simply that He was a person, and people get hungry.

As we read between the lines, could it be that the devil was saying was, “look man, God doesn’t really care about you! Why would you be out here in this wilderness with no food? Why don’t you act upon your own divine powers and turn these stones into bread? That is, if you can” (quotes amplified and paraphrased). His suggestion is that God is either too busy, too unconcerned, or too something, to take care of Jesus. There’s a subtle pressure here to make Jesus act on His own, independent of the Father. The devil’s attempt here is to reverse the priorities of life and make it seem as though our physical desires are more important than our need for God. We must recognize in our own lives that our physical desires are not the most important thing because the alternative says that if God doesn’t take care of our physical needs the way we want Him to He must not love us.

The devil’s work is always to twist things and make them look different than they really are. He tries to twist our perspective so that we see our own truth based on our own wants and desires. Jesus’ work is always to bring us into THE truth. God’s truth. So, He immediately quotes Scripture and says, “It is written, Man doesn’t live on bread alone.”

Jesus is basically saying that our deepest needs are not physical. He immediately brings us back to a proper understanding of how God intends us to live. He’s saying that it is better to die of hunger than to satisfy that hunger at the cost of our relationship with God. Just like that, Jesus puts life back into focus by reminding us we have deeper needs than the physical, and a temporary lack of physical supply does not in any way indicate that God has forgotten us or is unconcerned.

The second temptation has the devil taking Jesus to the top of the temple, and saying, “Okay Jesus, throw yourself down, for it is written, the angels will take care of you, they’re not gonna let you get hurt!” This is interesting because in the first temptation the devil tried to get Jesus to violate His most important need, and not *trust* in His relationship with God, and now he tips the scales and says, “Oh, you trust God, do you? Well, that’s good. Now, let me suggest a way for you to *show* that trust. If you do this, it’ll prove how much you trust that God of yours. Jump, and let everyone see that your trust is oh so great. And remember, it is written...” (quotes amplified and paraphrased).

Do you see how subtle, yet powerful, that temptation was? The devil’s tactics are always the same, if he can’t push you off this side he’s going to try and push you off on that side. It’s even more subtle and powerful when he tries to support it with Scripture. Here, he tries to flip the script on Jesus and he’s basically saying, “use your trust, and remember, there’s scripture that says you should. Aren’t you the author of Scripture? What do you say to that Jesus?” (Again, quotes amplified and paraphrased.) It’s possible to prove just about anything with the Bible if you read it the way the devil does. But again, what Satan is really saying to Jesus here (amplified and paraphrased) is “Look, if you want to demonstrate trust in God, this is the way to do it. If you really want to show others how they’re supposed to trust God, this is your chance. We’re at the temple, and there’s all your people down there just waiting to see an act of God. If you jump it’ll prove to everyone that God is with you!”

This exposes a bogus way of Christian thinking. The idea that the mark of a faithful person is in some spectacular demonstration of faith. If you really want to show faith in God, you have to be great.

The mark of a faithful person is not that they do great and miraculous things. And so again, Jesus puts things back in perspective by revealing the truth. He says, “It is *ALSO* written, do not put God to the test.” He says this because the greatest display of faith is not in some spectacular demonstration, but in a quiet trust that rests upon what God has said. And not just what He says in one place, but everything He says. Perhaps the most important word Jesus uses in this response is also. When He says, “It is *ALSO* written...”

Truth does not come to us in a box. It’s a complete account, and one truth needs to be balanced against another. We have to take God’s Word as a whole and use Scripture to verify Scripture. We can’t understand God’s truth until all the subject matter is laid out before us and we see it as a whole.

Now, one more thing here before we move on, if you’re under temptation to demonstrate your faith by some spectacular display or by some great accomplishment you should probably ask yourself a question... Who are you trying to get the glory for? Is it God, or is it yourself?

- In the Book of James, we’re told to humble ourselves before the Lord, and He will lift us up. It could have said lift yourself up by doing something great. But it doesn’t. The implication here is that the quiet life of faith is the greater life. It’s a long obedience in the right direction that will produce the greatest results.

In the third temptation, the devil takes Jesus to a mountain top and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world. Satan says to Jesus, “I’ll give it all to you if you worship me.” Then Jesus says, “beat it Satan, it is written to worship and serve God only” (quotes amplified and paraphrased). Satan comes with a direct appeal to the deepest desire in the heart of man, the deepest desire within our spirits. It’s a desire that was actually placed there by God. It’s that this life might be meaningful, and that we might invest our lives in something special and bigger than just ourselves. Think about it. Who doesn’t want their life to be worth it? Who doesn’t want to be remembered and feel as though they’ve done something special with their time on this earth? These desires are basic to our spirits. The devil knows this, so he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says it can all be yours.

Think about the first time you ever saw a big city downtown. You’d never seen anything like it. It was huge. It was breath-taking. It displayed the greatness of America with all its power and wealth. You probably wanted to get there and be a part of it. Well, Jesus was able to see all the kingdoms of the earth at one time. With all their power and wealth. Just think of the force of this temptation. These kingdoms are exactly what Jesus came to earth to get. He came to win the world to Himself. And now, the devil is offering it to Him.

It seems that Jesus only gets a quick little glimpse of these kingdoms, though. It’s almost as if Satan is afraid to let Jesus look at it for too long. Then Jesus would see that it’s only an illusion. It looks solid, but it’s not. And just like anything else we use to inflate our pride it ends up deflating us and leaving us empty. Notice how Jesus immediately sees through all this. He’s like, “Get thee behind me Satan! I worship and serve God!” (Quotes amplified and paraphrased.)

Worship and serve. Jesus puts these two words more than together and is implying that to worship is to serve and to serve is to worship. You can’t have one without the other.

Again, Jesus brings us to the truth and reveals that only God can give us what our spirits are searching for. Only God can fill the God sized hole in our spirits.

The obvious lesson in all this as to staying grounded and not freaking out when we're tempted to lose our cool is that each time Jesus gets tempted, He uses the same weapon. He retreats immediately behind Scripture. He doesn't argue. He doesn't debate. Instead, He takes refuge in the promises of God. When He does, the battle is over. The moment Satan is confronted with the Word of God, and he sees that we are going to take refuge in the promises of God, there's no longer a struggle. This is very important, because our ongoing struggle is because we are so reluctant to take our stand behind what God says. Instead, we believe the lie that we will somehow gain something by submitting to the that which is tempting us. We think if we don't hurry up and do this, or do that, we'll miss out and life is gonna pass us by.

When it looks like you're gonna gain something by being disobedient, retreat into the Word of God. That's where you will realize the way things really are. When the temptation becomes overwhelming and you feel like it's time to freak out, slow down and come back to reality. Lean on the truth that is Jesus and remember two things... it is written, and it is finished.

All this is hard. It's easier said than done. It's countercultural. It's counterintuitive. But, if you at least try, some cool things are bound to happen. It's not that life is suddenly going to become spectacular, and it doesn't always mean that we'll be going around doing miracles and stuff. It does mean that in the quiet everyday experiences of life, things will begin to work out in unexpected ways. What was once ordinary, somehow becomes extraordinary when God begins to work in our lives. That job... that relationship... that big life change... they all kind of get worked out when we seek Him.

And this is one of the secrets to life, that Jesus may live His life all over again in us when we have faith in Him. That's the Gospel. It's good news. It's quite possibly the greatest news conceivable!