

I have two brothers, one is 3 years older than me and one is 8 years younger than me.

When I was a kid, I had an intense sibling rivalry with my older brother because we were so close in age.

He would tease me, taunt me and pick on me all the time.

I remember that I used to whine to my mom, so that she would make him stop picking on me.

Her response, on more than one occasion was, *“Ignore him. He only teases you to get a rise out of you, so stop giving him a reaction and he will stop bothering you.”*

I thought this answer was cruel and unfair, even if it had some truth to it.

I tell this story because I think it’s a lot like how Satan responded to Jesus.

Satan was trying to get a rise out of him, and he didn’t comply.

Satan was the taunting sibling, saying, come on, just turn these stones into bread. Jesus says no.

Then Satan says, all you have to do is worship me and I will give all the glory and authority over all the kingdoms in the world. Jesus says no.

Then finally, Satan took him to the top of the Temple, saying, well, if you are this 'Son of God' you speak of, prove it.

Throw yourself down from here, surely some angels will protect you from the fall. Jesus says no.

Then we hear the last statement in the story, which happens to be my favorite part.

It says, “[Satan] departed from him until an opportune time.” (Luke 4: 13)

It's like Satan gave up because he wasn't getting a reaction out of Jesus!

He said, this is no fun, he won't budge.

I am off to hassle someone else, but I will come back to Jesus when he's weaker and more susceptible to my temptations.

He would come back to Jesus when his faith was lacking.

A lack of faith means that we are vulnerable, exposed if you will, more capable of giving into temptations than we otherwise would be.

Being committed to and faithful to God means that we are immunized against making decisions that are unhealthy, unloving or even dangerous.

This happens when we sideline God or when we give up on God, when we stop allowing God to be at the center of our lives.

It happens for many reasons, maybe we asked for things and there were one too many requests that God didn't deliver on, so we gave up.

Or maybe we have one too many problems in our lives and we've become convinced that God isn't there for us.

Maybe we see the state of the world, and we become despondent and convinced that there's no way a higher power could exist given the messes we find ourselves in.

But when we give up on God, when we lose faith, we've given into the temptation of self-rejection.

You see, believing in God means that we know we are worthy and we are beloved in the sight of God and we don't have to prove anything to anyone.

When we reject God, we accept the voices that tell us we are unworthy, not good enough, unloved, and so we start the vicious cycle of doing everything we can to measure up.

We start to have faith in the seductive temptations of success and power and wealth and popularity.

In the story we heard, Jesus rejects all those false notions.

He knew he wasn't placed on this earth to grab power for himself, which is why he rejected having the power over all the world's kingdoms.

All that power had no power at all if it meant that the price he had to pay was to answer to Satan.

And he's not here to prove anything to anyone, as he refuses to throw himself off the pinnacle of the Temple.

Jesus knew that he was good enough just as he was, although he knew this when he was only in his 30's, I think it takes most of us an entire lifetime to finally understand this concept, that we are enough just as we are.

It's a rare achievement to be so sure of ourselves, and our inherent value, that we resist the temptation to prove our own worth to others.

How wonderful it would feel to receive all those affirmations, to revel in it all, but the problem is that approval can fade as quickly as it comes.

Or, as musician LeCrae said, *"If you live for other people's acceptance, you'll die from their rejection."*

What other people think of us is not what matters, all that matters, *all that matters*, is what God thinks of us, because God's approval never fades.

This conversation about faith and lack of faith is intertwined with trust and distrust.

Sometimes I wonder if faith and trust are synonyms.

Because when we have faith in God, it means we are placing our trust in God.

It doesn't necessarily mean that we completely understand God; it simply means that's where we're choosing to place our trust.

And likewise, when we lack faith, what we really lack is trust in God.

We don't believe God is there for us, we don't believe that we are inherently worthy because we're created in God's image, we don't believe that trusting God will have any impact on our lives.

If you ever have trouble trusting God, I have an exercise for you to try.

I invite you to sit down and reflect upon your whole life, as best you can.

And think about all the blessings you've received, all the good stuff that's happened to you, all the joyful, happy memories and experiences.

Then, think about the bad stuff, negative things that have happened.

I can *almost* guarantee, that you've had more blessings and love in your life than you've had sorrow and pain.

That's enough for me to believe that love wins, that God wins, and that I will never lose if I place my trust in that higher power.

That's not to say that things will always go my way or that I necessarily like how things turn out, but it is to say that I know things won't go wrong, if I put my trust in God.

It's about our identities as well.

Saying that I believe in God is an incredibly powerful statement.

It's claiming that you are a person of faith who has put your belief in our Creator.

And if that trust erodes, if we start to have faith in other things, we lose that identity.

Satan was trying to compel Jesus to betray God and place his faith in Satan, and in material goods like food, and in his ego, with all that power he offered Jesus.

For us it might not be bread and power, it might be youth or beauty or wealth or confidence or fame or security, we all face these temptations all the time.

They try to get us to shift our allegiances from God to something else that will "surely" bring us more happiness and fulfillment, which we know isn't true.

Satan failed at trying to get Jesus to change his loyalties and his identity, there are forces in the world that try to get us to change ours all the time as well.

But here's the thing, we have to be vigilant because marketers are sneaky.

Those temptations can be disguised as being good for us and for the world.

After all, Satan quoted the Bible to justify what he wanted Jesus to do.

During the first two temptations, the one where he wanted Jesus to turn a stone into bread and then when he wanted to give Jesus all the power and authority over the kingdoms, the Devil doesn't quote scripture in his offer to Jesus.

But Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy.

So, by the time the third temptation rolls around, Satan has become all the wiser and thinks to himself, okay, this guy knows his scripture and he's committed to it.

Surely I can trick him and tempt him by using scripture to get him to prove to me that he's the Son of God.

He can't deny something that's written in his Holy Text.

I will use Psalm 91, it says, *"For [God] 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."* (verses 11-12)

But Satan is still no match for Jesus, and in this battle of the wits, he immediately responds by quoting a different scripture from Deuteronomy that says, *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* (6:16)

And if this were a movie made in the 21st century, this would have been a mic drop moment and the Devil would have walked off the stage because he lost the battle.

But you can't accuse Satan of not putting up a good fight, he put in a lot of effort in trying to tempt Jesus and we experience the same thing in our lives.

Temptations are always morphing with the times.

Take weight loss for example.

The advertisements for weight loss products and promotions used to be explicitly about losing pounds, now they're much more subtle, because the narrative has changed.

In the last 5 years or so, a “body positive” movement has evolved, especially among women, and it's meant to counteract all the messages we receive that smaller is better.

So, now the weight loss companies aren't encouraging people to simply drop pounds but, instead they're saying things like “get healthier,” and “have more energy” and ‘use our product so that you can run around with your kids and live longer.’

It sounds so great, who wouldn't have to be healthy and energetic?!

But the underlying message is still there, you need to lose weight because being heavy is bad ergo you are imperfect and would be perfect if you were lighter, thinner and therefore more beautiful.

You see how subtle that is?

Now, a lot of us can see weight loss companies for what they are, but not all companies are as transparent, take Subaru for example.

Their slogan is enough to make your heart melt, “Love, it's what makes Subaru, a Subaru.”

The last commercial of theirs that I saw involved adopting puppies through the SPCA, someone delivering meals using Meals on Wheels and a sick girl who got to dance with a professional ballerina through the Make-a-Wish foundation.

Who wouldn't want to buy a Subaru after seeing a message like that?!

I'd love to be affiliated with all those organizations, maybe if I buy a shiny, new Subaru, THEN my life will be complete.

They're so sneaky!

It's like the Devil quoting the Bible, speaking Jesus' language, Subaru is trying to speak the altruistic language of it's customers, but at the end of the day, what do they want to do?

It's not really about the ASPCA or Meals on Wheels or the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

They want to sell cars and make money, but somehow they've led us to believe that a new car will bring us true happiness and fulfillment.

So here's the thing when it comes to temptations and decisions, I think what matters possibly as much as the decision we make is WHY we chose that path.

This answer is perhaps the most realistic way of understanding what truly has power over our lives.

And more often than not, we are the only ones who know the answer to this question.

The rest of the world sees you accept that job promotion, but only you know if you did it because you truly want to help people and make a difference, or because you really wanted a bigger pay check and more visibility in your company.

During this season of Lent, we're invited to reflect upon *why* we make the decisions we make.

Jesus said no to Satan because he was firmly committed to God and creating God's realm on earth.

Are we faithful and rooted in God's love and security, making us completely immune to the temptations of this world, or is our faith waning?

Do we find ourselves giving in to secular forces, which convince us that happiness is always just out of arm's reach?

Between now and Easter, take some time to think about why you make the decisions you make, then you'll be able to answer the question,

"what has power over you?" Amen.