TEMPTATION AND TESTING

"Then Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." —MATTHEW 4:1

The first assignment of Jesus following His baptism by John the Baptist is a very interesting one. He was not called to preach a sermon, nor to heal anyone or perform a miracle, but was led into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to be tempted by the devil.

To be subject to attack by Satan while alone in the wilderness was a deliberate strategy. Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights of solitude in the hostile environment of the desert with no food in His stomach and with the devil on His back, guns blazing! This is the consequence of His being led by the Spirit for God's purpose in testing Him, not only for His ministry that lay ahead, but for the grueling day when He would be made sin for us and hang on a Roman cross, despised and rejected by men.

There is an insupportable idea that our comfort and God's interests coincide. This is simply not the case. The Holy Spirit's presence does not set us free from difficulties but equips us for them, and so often the rough, tough situations in life are His tools for accomplishing His will and purpose for us.

This time Jesus spent in the desert needs to be understood from two points of view; from the antagonist, the devil, and from the instigator, God. From the devil's perspective, these were forty days

of temptation designed to weaken and disqualify Jesus from His ministry. From God's perspective, they were 40 days and nights of testing, designed to strengthen and qualify Him. The exact same events had the potential of the exact opposite effects. Every attack of Satan is a potential springboard to growth as we respond to God in the attack, and every experience of the Holy Spirit carries with it a potential of opportunity of shipwreck if we allow the devil to intrude.

It was Satan who attacked Jesus in the wilderness, but it was the Spirit who led him into the conflict. The very thing the devil would use to destroy us is the very thing God uses to build us. That is why it is true to say that sometimes the devil will do us good. It is never his intention, but with the appropriate response such as we see in Jesus, drawing upon the word of God, the devil's attack becomes a springboard to greater blessing and a deeper experience of God.

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, in times of testing and temptation, keep me mindful to always draw upon your Spirit and be my strength, Lord. Thank You.

TO REFLECT UPON: In difficult times, am I turning to Christ and trusting Him to work out His purpose in them?