

There is a little Italian restaurant in the Kansas City area, and on a shelf somewhere is a book that includes a list of names. The list isn't very long. In fact, it's quite short, but it contains the name Kurt Pressler, written by me. I want to tell you the story of how it got there.

When I was in college, I would, from time to time, get invited to go out to dinner with my roommate, his girlfriend, and her parents. And while that might sound like I was a third wheel, I think it was actually because this girl's father would have preferred his daughter date me instead of my roommate. And there was something else that attracted this dad to me: he loved to watch me eat. Historically, the eating habits of Pressler boys have always been something of a spectacle, and this next generation I'm raising is no exception. And this dad was all in.

So we went to this Italian restaurant in Kansas City, and when it was my turn to order, I asked an obnoxious question typical of a 20-year-old punk with an infinite metabolism. "I'm pretty hungry. What do you have that will fill me up?" Little did I know that simple question would be the catalyst for spiritual growth. The waiter puffed up a little, and responded with, "Well, I have a dish I guarantee you can't finish." And before I could utter a word in response, this father came across the table and exclaimed "He'll have that!" This was an incredible opportunity to have a full belly, win at a challenge, and receive the praise of this man.

When the plate of food came, my first thought was "Oh, I got this." Fifteen minutes later, when I was beginning to feel full, yet the plate looked as if I had hardly touched it, my second thought was, "Maybe I don't." My buddy whom, in solidarity, also ordered the dish, had already tapped out (Loser!). But I would not be denied, not with all that was at stake. I kept going, and going, and going, and my gut kept growing, and growing, and growing. Finally, when it appeared I just wasn't going to be able to finish, I looked up and, standing next to me was my waiter. He reached out his hand and said, "Congratulations. You finished the challenge. You actually passed the normal amount we put on this dish about five minutes ago, but you seemed pretty cocky when you ordered it, so we added some extra. I'd like to introduce you to someone." It was the chef! He also extended his hand and congratulated me. And then the most amazing thing happened. The waiter called to attention everyone who was sitting in my section. They started playing Dean Martin over the speakers, the waiter announced my achievement to everyone and, in celebration, told all of them they would be getting an after-dinner drink on the house, and that I would be signing my name in a book that contained the names of everyone who had ever achieved this miraculous feat. He handed me the book and it didn't take me very long to find the next blank slot because there were so few names. I was in rare company. This was an incredible achievement! Complete strangers were coming up to me, patting me on the back, congratulating me, and thanking me for winning them a drink. And all the while, the approving eyes of my would-be father-in-law fell upon me with great adoration, I'm sure dreaming of the day where I'd be over for Sunday dinner every week. What a moment!

You know what I ultimately had to show for it? A two-day stomach ache. I traded short-term satisfaction for long-term pain. I may have won the challenge, but I lost the battle. In the matter of an hour, I experienced and succumbed to three temptations; the temptation of appetite, the temptation of ambition, and the temptation of approval. They are the three temptations the devil used against Jesus in the wilderness, and they are the same three temptations he uses against us.

This morning we continue in our series called *Life Drifts*. We are spending four weeks in the book of Luke, looking at Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Through it, we hope to understand how the devil schemes to appeal to our sinful desires and causes us to drift into disobedience, ultimately sabotaging our ministry. We began last week by looking at Jesus' baptism, where he was given everything he needed to resist the devil and fulfill the calling God had for his life. He received God's presence and power (including his Word), God's approval, and God's mission for him. We are given these same spiritual resources when we come to faith in Jesus as our Savior. Luke 4 tells us the very next event after Jesus' baptism.

**[Luke 4:1-2a] And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil.**

Last week we answered the question of why Jesus needed to be baptized. We said it identified Jesus as the Messiah and identified Jesus with the sinners he came to save. This week, we need to answer the question of why Jesus was tempted. It's clear from the beginning of chapter 4 that the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus in and through the wilderness. This encounter with the devil is not accidental, it's providential. Jesus did not randomly "bump into" Satan. The Holy Spirit intentionally led Jesus into the wilderness to test him through a confrontation with the devil, and he does it for two reasons.

**Passing the test of temptation confirms the Father's approval.**

For us to understand what God is doing in this passage, we need to understand two New Testament words that get translated as temptation, trial, and test. The Greek word *peirasmos* (pear-ras-mos) is usually translated as "trial" or "temptation". It can mean a difficulty in life, particularly one that comes as a result of us living out our faith (see 1 Peter 1). It can also mean a temptation, some influence that attempts to incite or seduce us to commit evil, or to drift. The Greek word *dokimos* (dough-kee-mos) is usually translated as "test". It's an examination to prove something as genuine, to confirm that someone is who they claim to be. It's a test of faith.

**[James 1:12-15] <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial (*peirasmos*), for when he has stood the test (*dokimos*) he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted (*peirasmos*), "I am being tempted (*peirasmos*) by God," for God cannot be tempted (*peirasmos*) with evil, and he himself tempts (*peirasmos*) no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted (*peirasmos*) when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

God is not a tempter. He does not lead Jesus to the wilderness to entice him to commit evil. The devil is the tempter, and he's the one who will attempt to get Jesus to drift. God does, though, lead Jesus into the wilderness to allow him to go through the testing of temptation to prove that his faith is genuine and his approval of Jesus at his baptism was warranted. Understand, God is not taking Jesus out there in an effort to trip him up. He's expecting him to pass the test.

I read a story about a flood in east Texas that washed away a railroad bridge. Over several months, they rebuilt it, but before they let rail traffic travel on it, they took two engines and drove them across as a test. Someone asked the chief engineer, "Why are you doing that? Are

you not sure it will hold?” He replied, “We know it will hold. We’re just proving that it will hold.” **The testing of temptation is to prove someone will hold, to prove them as faithful, not to expose them as faithless.**

What is true for Jesus is also true for us. To go where Jesus went, we have to undergo what Jesus underwent. God allows us to go through the testing of temptation. While the enemy will appeal to the desires inside each of us to draw us into disobedience and cause us to drift away from God’s will, God uses the same temptation to test us. If we pass, we prove our faith as genuine and confirm his approval of us.

As parents, we do this same thing with our children. Hopefully none of us are out there enticing our kids to commit evil, but we will allow them to engage in a moral dilemma, where they have to choose between right and wrong. In those situations, my boys have my presence. I am there for counsel and willingly give my help. They also have the words of instruction I have given them their entire lives. I have raised them up in the way they should go, and they know what I expect. These dilemmas become an opportunity for them to make the right decision, showing themselves as faithful and developing their character as they go forward in life. And that leads right into the second reason for the test:

**Passing the test of temptation is a prerequisite for effective ministry.**

The test of temptation is training ground for anyone who seeks to serve God. Temptation causes us to turn to God and allows him to demonstrate his provision and protection. If Jesus passes this test, he will be emboldened and will begin his ministry with confidence. If he passes the test, he’ll do so because his Father sustained him. He will have mastered the flesh and defeated his enemy through God’s provision and power. Spoiler alert: Jesus is going to pass this test, and v.14 tells us the result. Jesus goes into the wilderness “full of the Spirit”, and he comes out of the wilderness “in the power of the Spirit”, equipped and prepared to fulfill his mission.

By going through this test, and by passing it, Jesus also identifies himself with us and proves to be an example to us, as we seek to know and serve God. The book of Hebrews says it this way:

**[Hebrews 4:15] <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

Jesus identifies with us because he is tempted in every way we are tempted. Jesus is our example because he resisted temptation and remained obedient at all times. This encounter with the devil in the wilderness is almost like watching game film. You watch your own game to understand the things you did to achieve success, and the things you need to work on. You watch your opponent’s film to understand their strategy and tactics, how they will play to win, and you adjust your own game plan accordingly. This conflict in the wilderness is an incredible act of grace that God gives us because it allows us to see the tactics of our enemy and how he appeals to our desires to cause us to drift. It also shows us how what Jesus did to resist temptation and defeat the devil. We know how our opponent plays, we know how Jesus plays, and we have been given the same spiritual resources as him through the presence and power of the Spirit and God’s Word. We too can defeat the devil, pass the test, and be prepared for ministry.

So what happens if we don't pass the test? If we don't appropriate the power of God and remain obedient, we'll be blown off course and fail the test, becoming ineffective for ministry. Listen, every pastor you've heard about who had to resign because of a moral failure failed the test by succumbing to all three of these temptations. He indulged his appetite with someone other than his spouse, he satisfied his ambition through conquest, and he received approval through the affections of that same person. We can all be rendered ineffective through failing the test of temptation in those same three areas.

Remember from last week, you are approved because Jesus made you approved, and an adopted child of God. Obedience is the proper response to God's approval, not the source of it. Disobedience does not disqualify you from the family, but it does disable you from pursuing the family business, which is the work of God. Failing the test means you have some spiritual work to do so that you can pass it next time. We see this in the history of Israel. God led them out of Egypt and to the edge of the Promised Land. When given the opportunity to remain faithful, to pass the test, they were disobedient and failed. It didn't disqualify them as God's people, but it made it clear they needed refining to live out what God was calling them to. So, for 40 years, God marched them around the wilderness to humble them and sanctify them, ultimately preparing them to pass the test the next time. Like Jesus, God has filled us with his Spirit so that we can make the right decisions when temptation comes, so that we can pass the test.

So let's learn from Jesus how we pass that test. His first test came in the temptation of appetite.

**[Luke 4:2-4] And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"**

It appears Jesus was tempted throughout the forty days in the wilderness, but Luke records only the three temptations after. The Spirit has led Jesus to fast. That means Jesus is isolated and Jesus is hungry. That also means he's vulnerable. Satan's appeal to appetite is to cause us to drift into disobedience in two ways:

**Our appetite tempts us to indulge our flesh.**

The devil begins with, "If you are the Son of God." There is no question in the devil's mind who Jesus is. A better translation would be "Since you are the Son of God..." He uses the title the Father gave to Jesus at his baptism. It is a taunt meant to incite pride in the Son and call into question character of the Father. It is an attempt to get Jesus to doubt God's goodness and provision, and get him to start focusing on himself and what he deserves. The devil is consistent. In the Garden, he began the temptation of Adam and Eve with the words "Did God really say..." He begins with the same tactic here. The devil is saying "Hey, look, you are the Son of God. You should be lacking in nothing. Indulge yourself. Satisfy your own needs in your own way."

The motto of the culture has made a subtle shift from the lie of "you need it" to the greater lie of "you deserve it"; that we are entitled to whatever pleasure we desire, and if it's not coming to us quickly enough, we need to go get it on our own. There are few things as counter-cultural as the denial of flesh and the reliance on God and his Word; that we would be content with less, that we would forgo something for ourselves so that we might bless others, that we would wait on God,

that we would honor the boundaries God places on sex, and that we would consider enough truly enough. We are tempted to drift when we believe we are owed something.

**Our appetite tempts us to doubt God's provision.**

The reason we indulge our own flesh is because we don't trust that God will give us enough, give it soon enough, or give it satisfyingly enough. We believe the lie that either God won't provide, or that what he provides won't sustain and fulfill us. It will be too little, and it will come too late.

The devil tempts Jesus to take a shortcut. Turn stones into bread and fill your belly. But if he did so, he would fail the test and no longer be a worthy Messiah. He would violate his identification with us, because none of us have the power to create bread from stones, and he would violate God's will because of a lack of trust. Both would disqualify him.

So Jesus responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 8. God promised Moses that he would feed the Israelites every day they wandered in the wilderness, and he kept his word. Israel twice got in trouble with God in the wilderness regarding his provision of manna: once when they tried to hoard it, showing a lack of trust that God would keep his word and continue the daily provision, and another time when they grew discontent with what God provided, and grumbled. And as they were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded them that, though they ate manna for sustenance, it was the presence and power of God, promised through his word, that truly sustained them. They could have had all the bread in the world, but if it wasn't God's will for them to live, it wouldn't have made a bit of difference. He is the sustainer of life, and we are sustained by his word and all that he promises us through it.

Because Jesus was fully man, he got hungry. His flesh desired bread, and he could have had it. But he recognized bread as a temporary sustenance. The true sustaining power was the Word of God. So Jesus trusted the Father, relying on his presence and power, and trusting in the plan he had for Jesus. When we place our hope in all of these fleshly indulgences to fulfill us, we no longer trust God. But these things will fall woefully short in our attempts to be truly satisfied. That satisfaction comes from one place, and one place only: God.

**What are the stones in your life?**

What is it that Satan is pointing to and telling you will satisfy you? What are you tempted to pursue because you think it would bring you pleasure? When your being tempted through appetite, what hole is that trying fill?

Be honest...this is a question not only for this week but for the entire series. We are tempted to sin because we perceive we are lacking. If we're tempted by appetite, it's because we fear we'll never have enough. If we're tempted by ambition, it's because we fear we'll never accomplish enough. And if we're tempted by approval, it's because we fear we'll never be enough. What is it for you? What is it REALLY for you?

Someone I know very well came to grips with their own sin of appetite around a decade ago. They acknowledged the sobering reality that they were, at times, owned by it. For two years, they prayed a prayer that went something like this: Dear God, I confess my idolatry of food. I confess that I look for it to satisfy me; I look for it to fill me up as a celebration of a good day,

and to fill me up when a bad day leaves me wanting. Help me. Break me free of this bondage. Let me be satisfied only in you.” The reason I know this person so well is because it’s me. I wasn’t thrilled by the idea of sharing that this morning. I might have wrestled with God a little bit this week about saying it. But it’s a story I rejoice in telling because it’s one that includes the overwhelming presence and power of God. It’s a story of God’s glory and my victory through him. And it’s a story that I hope encourages you to get real about where you are struggling. So telling it is worth it. (Just don’t stare at my plate next time we share a meal together!)

What I could not defeat on my own Jesus defeated personally in the wilderness and permanently at the Cross. At the Cross, Jesus willingly deprived himself of all things; he was thirsty, he was stripped of most of his clothes and the dignity that went with it, he had been deserted by most of his friends, and his body was broken. There was no comfort, and there was certainly no pleasure, and ultimately even his flesh became deprived of life. But it was at the Cross that Jesus satisfied the Father, and in so doing, defeated sin and death and the enemy who desires to keep us in bondage to both. **Jesus emptied himself on the Cross so that we could be made full.** The only thing that can truly satisfy us is God himself. And the good news of the Gospel is that God freely gives all of himself. And that’s how God answered my prayer. I was given the power of God to resist and the fullness of God to be satisfied.

So what is it for you? Where are you really tempted to not trust God and indulge your appetite? It is at the Cross where God makes it possible for you to have your fill. God not only provides for your needs, he is the provision for your needs. His power is available to help you resist, and his presence is available to satisfy you completely.

**Communion**

In John 6, on the heels of Jesus feeding the 5,000, a crowd is moving about, trying to find Jesus. They ultimately come upon him in Capernaum, and Jesus tells them the only reason they're looking for him is because he gave them food. Their motivation is their flesh, their physical hunger. So Jesus engages them in a conversation, tells them they are missing the point, and then shows them what they REALLY need.

**<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”  
<sup>34</sup> They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” <sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. –  
John 6:33-35**