

WINTER 2025–2026

Jesus in the Wilderness

LESSON 12

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Luke 4; 7:18–23

FOCUS VERSES

Luke 4:17–19

¹⁷And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

¹⁹To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will do my part to see the covenant fulfilled in my sphere of influence.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Now that God had come in flesh, Jesus faced every temptation we would face to show us it is possible to win against the devil and against our own human nature. Yet, people in His hometown did not believe He was who He said He was, so they rejected Him. Jesus set up His ministry outside of Nazareth, where He worked miracles signaling His rightful claim as the Savior.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you have ever been lost in an unfamiliar place without cell service, how did you find your way?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to point out how fearful it can be in an unfamiliar place with no way to know how to get out safely.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

A. Jesus Overcame Every Temptation We Face

B. Jesus Showed It Is Possible to Win in the Wilderness

***DISCUSS:** How does Jesus' victory in the wilderness give you personal confidence to win your battles against temptation?*

C. Through God's grace, I will win in the wilderness.

II. JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

A. Jesus Claimed Isaiah 61 for Himself

B. Jesus Was Glorified in Galilee, but Not in Nazareth

***DISCUSS:** How can we be sure we don't presume to know all about Jesus and lose out on what He wants to do as the sovereign God of creation?*

C. I will believe Jesus is sovereign and can do whatever He pleases.

III. JOHN IN PRISON

A. John Was in Prison for Telling the Truth

***DISCUSS:** If you have ever softened the truth or refused to tell the truth because of the possible consequences, how did you feel afterward?*

B. John Questioned Jesus' Messianic Identity

C. Jesus' Response Proved His Messianic Identity

***DISCUSS:** What does Jesus' method of answering John tell us about how the Lord viewed His own ministry?*

D. I will do my part to see the covenant fulfilled in my sphere of influence.

***DISCUSS:** What are some specific ways we can bring God's covenant promises to those in our sphere of influence?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give strength and grace to those in need
- For God to fill everyone with the wisdom needed to thrive in difficult seasons

LESSON CONNECTION

Luke finally achieved the feat of turning twelve years old; preteen pride filled every ounce of his eighty-five-pound frame. Twelve—was the wait truly over? Indeed it was, and Luke's dad felt the excitement and ambition reaching a boiling point in his young man-child. Luke's excitement stemmed from a family rite each of Luke's four older brothers had already passed through—a rite that transitioned boys into men: hunting with Dad.

The boys' dad had granted every one of his twelve-year-old sons the right to pack their bags and head for the woods for a weekend of roughing it in the backcountry—at least, roughing it for a twelve-year-old. Luke could hardly stop the churning in his stomach from his excitement to be with his dad in the wilderness. Becoming a man was no small deal. People, especially the young ladies, would surely notice he no longer smelled like the plush aromas of a home filled with candles. No, he would smell like the woods, like a man, like someone who had passed from death to life, from childhood to manhood. Like the Spartans before him, Luke would face the fears of nature head-on and win.

Luke's dad, Mark, loaded the truck with the necessary equipment: food, clothing, camping gear, rifles, and ingredients for s'mores (the most important). Luke nearly flew into the front seat of his dad's truck, buckled himself in, and stared straight ahead as if already looking for his target. He gabbed the entire drive about how he was going

to cook up his bounty. Mark laughed, thankful for his son's excitement and for the opportunity for one-on-one time with him.

As the brakes whined, the truck came to a stop at what would be their home base for the weekend. Luke flew out of the truck with even more gusto than he got in. Surveying the land and checking the perimeter, he concluded proudly, "This will do just fine, I think."

"I agree," concurred his grinning father. "Now let's set up our tents and get some sleep. We've got to be up early." Luke frantically darted into action, setting up the tents first, camping gear next, food supplies, and rifles. Finally, Luke ran back to the truck and pulled out all the s'mores supplies. After dinner, an exhausted Luke curled up in his sleeping bag and slipped into the sweetest rest he had ever known. Just before dozing off completely, he thought to himself, *Tomorrow...I'm going to be a man.*

Morning came faster than he would have liked—the sun wasn't even up yet. His dad gently shook him awake and told him to get ready and stay quiet. Zombie-like, Luke followed his dad out of the tent and into the dark woods. Slowly waking up and hearing the deafening silence that was only broken by strange bumps and thuds in the night, Luke realized a terrible truth about himself: he was afraid.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

A. Jesus Overcame Every Temptation We Face

The wilderness was an appropriate arena for a cosmic battle between Heaven's Son and Earth's enemy. God in human flesh was alone in the desert and hungry when Satan approached Him. Understandably, Satan first attacked Jesus' previously mentioned hunger. Jesus had been fasting for forty days, but Jesus parried by reminding the devil what was written: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). With a quick slip and a counterpunch, Jesus rebuffed Satan's attempt to draw Him into shortcutting and self-reliance. The bell rang—round one to Jesus.

Round two began as Satan placed the world and its kingdoms before Jesus with a promise He could have it all if He worshiped Satan. But idolatry, the oldest and most destructive of Israel's habits, had no hold on Jesus. He slid His feet, swung left, and delivered a gut punch. "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8). The bell rang again—round two to Jesus.

The final round of the bout began, and Satan came out swinging with an appeal to the Christ's special status: "If thou be the Son of God," quipped the devil (Luke 4:9). Jesus saw it coming a furlong away. Jesus would not use His status to tempt the Spirit of God into action. With a final swiftness, Jesus ducked the attack, set His feet, and delivered the decisive blow. "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Luke 4:12). Satan was down for the count. Jesus stood victorious over every temptation we face: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Most importantly, Jesus stood victorious over Satan himself.

B. Jesus Showed It Is Possible to Win in the Wilderness

While Jesus' victory over Satan is worthy of celebration, something even deeper happened that day. Note the details. Jesus, the Son of God, was alone in the *wilderness* for *forty days*—an allusion to Israel's wilderness wandering for forty years. Like Israel, also called God's son in the Exodus narratives (4:22–23), Jesus was without food in the wilderness. Israel complained and called Moses and God to account for their hunger. But Jesus trusted God and craved the words of God more fiercely than food alone. Although Israel displayed an unwillingness to remain faithful to their covenant during difficulty and temptation, Jesus remained faithful, submitted, and humble while trusting God. In other words, Jesus did what Israel did not; He lived faithfully in the wilderness.

***DISCUSS:** How does Jesus' victory in the wilderness give you personal confidence to win your battles against temptation?*

C. Through God's grace, I will win in the wilderness.

Jesus' method for winning in the wilderness instructs us well. He responded by quoting Scripture, which was more than just reciting God's Word. He was fully depending in and obedient to the Word of God. God promised that faithfulness to and humility before Him would cause life to flourish. Why? Because the words of the Lord are good

and because the God of covenant—the giver of Scripture—would uphold those who trust in Him by keeping His word.

Thankfully we are not left alone to keep the commands of God, something Israel struggled to do throughout its history. God has empowered us. While no work of God excuses laziness in serving Him, we are given every bit of strength we need through His Spirit. God’s Spirit teaches truth (John 16:13), offers wisdom (I Corinthians 2:10–16), strengthens us (Ephesians 3:16–17), gives us joy and peace (Romans 14:17–18), and provides everything we need to live for God faithfully (II Peter 1:3). By depending on God’s grace in the forms of His Word and His Spirit, we can win in the wilderness.

II. JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

A. Jesus Claimed Isaiah 61 for Himself

Faithful first-century Jews used to gather in the synagogues to read the Scriptures, and someone would provide commentary on the text. Luke 4 records one of these moments. Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and—in line with custom—was offered the scroll of Isaiah, chapter 61. Jesus began to read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18; compare to Isaiah 61:1). The synagogue attendees knew this passage well and loved it. Perhaps they pictured the glorious day Israel would again be free and restored to her former glory during the rightful reign of their Messiah. Isaiah 61 was central to Israel’s faith.

The room likely filled with prayer and praise as the people of Nazareth longed for the day of which Isaiah spoke. Then Jesus surprised everyone in the room. His commentary on the passage was short. He began: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). As Jesus continued, it became clear He was pointing these messianic prophecies to Himself. Jesus was claiming to be the very messenger who would herald the restoration of the people of God. As exciting as that would have sounded to ancient Israelites, their response to Jesus revealed doubt and unbelief toward Him: “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (Luke 4:22).

B. Jesus Was Glorified in Galilee, but Not in Nazareth

Jesus then confronted their doubt with a rebuke, much like the prophets rebuked ancient Israel when they rejected the prophets. He lambasted the people of Nazareth and told them of their fate: they would have no part in the workings of God. The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus was shocked at the level of unbelief found in Nazareth and quotes what appears to be a proverbial saying: “A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (Mark 6:4). This unbelief produced the dismal results of Mark 6:5: “And he could there do no mighty work.” Although Jesus healed the sick and lame and raised the dead outside of Nazareth, the blind did not see, the lame did not leap, and the dead did not rise in Nazareth. In an ironic turn, the people who knew Jesus the most actually knew Him the least.

***DISCUSS:** How can we be sure we don’t presume to know all about Jesus and lose out on what He wants to do as the sovereign God of creation?*

C. I will believe Jesus is sovereign and can do whatever He pleases.

Nazareth’s unbelief is shocking to twenty-first-century Christian readers, but it is no stranger in our own lives. Our unbelief surfaces often and even unexpectedly. When God uses people we are not fond of, when our plans do not work out, or when God seems to answer everyone else’s prayers but ours, we see our own unbelief. Like the assembly at Nazareth, our problem is not with the idea that God is working in the world, but rather with the ways in which He does. Our problem is we are not the center.

A true and faithful understanding of God bows to His sovereignty. There is one God, and we are not Him. As much as this ruffles feathers, humility before the God of Heaven is required for those who follow Him. While the Lord can and does do whatever He wants however He wants, He always works for the good of those who love Him and work toward His purpose (Romans 8:28).

III. JOHN IN PRISON

A. John Was in Prison for Telling the Truth

Shortly after this surprising scene in Nazareth, Luke shifted his focus back to John the Baptist. Around the time Jesus’ ministry began, Herod threw John into prison for calling him to repentance, specifically for his immoral marriage to Herodias. Herod’s response to John’s preaching was exactly the opposite of repentance; Herod imprisoned John just because John told the truth. John sat in prison for faithfully obeying God’s will.

***DISCUSS:** If you have ever softened the truth or refused to tell the truth because of the possible consequences, how did you feel afterward?*

B. John Questioned Jesus' Messianic Identity

Prison changes people, or so some say. John began his ministry with great confidence. He boldly declared the soon arrival of the Messiah and praised Jesus when he saw Him for the first time. John called Jesus "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). That was messianic language, but that seemed like a lifetime ago. Prison curated a moment of doubt for John, or at least a moment requiring some confirmation. Facing his execution, John wanted to know whether his ministry was true or if it was all for naught.

C. Jesus' Response Proved His Messianic Identity

The prophets often spoke of God's return to Israel. He would forgive, restore, and rule over His people in a new and invigorating way. Language of abundance, life, and the outpouring of God's Spirit gave God's people hope. These images were meant to paint a portrait of God's covenant reign. One such prophetic moment is found in Isaiah 35:4. Isaiah cried out: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." Isaiah continued to zoom in on what would happen when God would "come and save" in the following verse: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped."

Doubtless knowing these prophecies, John sent messengers to Jesus to ask whether He was the Messiah or should they look for another ruler to reign in righteousness. A simple yes would have done it, but Jesus wanted to make a point. His response echoed Isaiah: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:4-5). Again Jesus claimed for Himself the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises. In Jesus Christ the reign of God had arrived.

***DISCUSS:** What does Jesus' method of answering John tell us about how the Lord viewed His own ministry?*

D. I will do my part to see the covenant fulfilled in my sphere of influence.

Jesus' words to John did not end on a high note. Then Jesus left a final word: "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matthew 11:6). John sat in prison and heard of Jesus' wonder-working ways, but he received no reassurance of release. Instead, he received instruction to resist being offended against Jesus since John's life had turned out much different from what he expected. John had done his part, fulfilled his role, and was now called to submit his life to the will of God. The true center of the story was Jesus, not John. Yet John was a smashing success as the forerunner of the Messiah.

John's own willingness to resist bitterness and focus on his role in seeing God's covenant fulfilled gives us an example to follow. We are called to surrender our lives to God in order for His promises to be fulfilled in our world. This will look different for everyone but the call remains the same. Jesus' words remain instructive for us: blessed are we if we are not offended (more concerned for our own lives) because of Him. We may not know how our story ends, but we are called to be faithful as the Author of our faith writes and will one day finish our story.

***DISCUSS:** What are some specific ways we can bring God's covenant promises to those in our sphere of influence?*

***Teacher Option:** Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how we can win in the wilderness because of Jesus' victory there. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Luke's pace sped up as he got closer to his father, causing quite the racket as he tried. Hearing what sounded like a herd of elephants behind him, Mark turned to see what was wrong. "What are you doing?" Mark asked quietly with a puzzled look.

"I'm scared," replied Luke, more as a boy now than a man. Luke continued in hushed tones, urged by his father's mime-like shooshing: "What are those noises?" With a renewed softness on his face, Mark knelt and looked Luke in

the eye as best he could in the darkness. The dad began: "I know it seems scary out here, and you do need to keep your eyes and ears open, but you can do this. Much of what is out here is more scared of you than you are of it, not to mention you have me to protect you. You don't think I would let anything happen to you, do you?"

"No," replied Luke, still a bit taken by his fear. "All you have to do is follow my lead," reassured Mark. "Put your feet where my feet go, and you'll be fine. Can you do that?"

"I think so," answered Luke, now with a bit more courage in his voice. Mark straightened his son's shoulders like a brave soldier and set off again into the darkness. Left foot, right foot—Mark walked with consistent and purposeful cadence with his son in tow. Luke tried his best to land his feet in the soft imprints of his father's footsteps. Slow at first, Luke's bravery began to build; he was getting his nerve back. Left, right, left, right, on they went into the darkness. When they reached their tree stand, Mark sent his son up first. Once both were seated, Mark leaned over to his son and whispered, "The sun should be up any minute now."

The sun began to peek over the horizon and through trees, igniting the once formless and void woodland wilderness into a beautiful display of shape, color, and—in ever increasing volume—life. The few remaining leaves shook in the breeze, the owls hooted, the crows cawed, and the occasional turkey gobbled in the distance. Out of the darkness came abundant life and Luke was reinvigorated. With his eyes forward in an unrelenting search, Luke now waited with the light of the sun to help him.

Luke found success that day, but not simply in the hunt. Luke stood triumphant because his father had done so before and graciously imparted the wisdom of his victories into Luke's young life. In our spiritual life, it is so with us. We can conquer the dark woods of our day only because we share in the riches of Jesus Christ's victory and the bounty of His graciously-given wisdom. Let us, like Luke, follow in our Father's steps. Jesus won in the wilderness; so can we.