

**Week 1: Looking For Answers**      Matthew 4:1-11 The temptation of Jesus

**SHARE:** Introduce yourselves around the group and share some of your most frequent spiritual barriers or temptations in your every day life.

**KNOW:** When we find ourselves lost in the wilderness of life, desperate for answers and drowning in the depths, we cry out to God. Barriers for refugees are the walls we build to divide us. Barriers to spiritual freedom can be found in our every day lives. Are we just wanting the answer of relief from the troubles of life, or do we seek safety in the presence of God and that is answer enough?

**GROW:** Have a volunteer read the following introduction and a second volunteer read Psalm 22

When you sit and listen to the stories of refugees, one would think it is impossible not to be moved at what they have survived. To listen to the reality of their loss, their grief, and their journey to survive can be overwhelming. And when you listen to these stories it is so dismaying to realize that our government essentially adopts the position that they are all liars and should be deported back to the very country that persecuted, many times tortured, and often tried to kill them.

Even refugees and immigrants who have been approved are uncertain now whether we the American people really stand with them. The fear is rampant as they wonder if it is safe for them to travel, or whether immigration will change its mind and take away their papers. They listen to the news and the talk shows and wonder if this is really how America feels about them. And they struggle with feeling alone and abandoned.

Psalm 22 expresses the anguish of abandonment.

- How do you think refugees experience temptation?
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- How do you, in difficult times, experience temptation?
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- Dr. Warren Wiersbe suggests that each temptation targeted a core conflict that we all struggle with. Discuss whether you agree with his thoughts and share where you see present day examples of the same struggles.

1. First temptation: if God doesn't meet my perceived needs, perhaps God doesn't really love me.
  2. Second temptation: the human desire to "tempt" God, meaning that we expect God to spare us from the consequences of destructive actions.
  3. Third temptation: you can avoid suffering and go straight to the rewards. (see 1 Peter 5:10)
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- Have a volunteer read the following:

St. John of Chrysostom spoke of "the Dark Night of the Soul." It seems that God often seems to withdraw from us when we think we need to know he is there the most. But the Dark Night is not to abandon us, but to draw us instead to him. It is as if God allows us to test whether we really want him just to solve our problems or do we just want him. As I told you yesterday, my father's death was a crisis point for me. God seemed at the other end of the universe, and I knew that I could not feel him at all. It was at

that point that I realized that “feeling” God was not the point. My faith did not depend on a feeling. Rather, my faith was centered on whether I trusted God, even the sovereign God who would do as he would do, whether I liked the result or not.

I came to peace with accepting that God could heal my father, or he could take him home. And I realized that I could not live my life without trusting in God and trusting that he would never take me where I did not need to go nor would he ever allow any situation to crush me but to somehow he would work it out for my good.

God will not ignore his beloved, nor will he turn his back on us. He indeed listens to our cries for help. And he will answer. Perhaps not at the time we want, and often not in the way we plead for. But he is moving and acting on our behalf and we will indeed have a story of his mighty power changing, guiding, and protecting us.

➤ In the Dark Night, which do you want more, the situation resolved or God himself?

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➤ When it seems like God has abandoned you, what good has he brought about?

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➤ How do you identify with Christ in the wilderness?

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Have volunteers read the following and Psalm 143

Resettled refugees, and those granted asylum, are grateful to this country for the safety and security that we have offered them. They are determined to make a new life here and have their children succeed in America. But there is always a part of them that recognizes that they are in a different culture and people. There is always a part of them that remembers where they came from and how life used to be before chaos and death and destruction ripped their country apart. And as bad as things can be, they long for the days when they can go back, even just to visit. But for many of them, they know that there likely will never be such a day. Even when they have become U.S. Citizens, many of them are never willing to risk going back to the country that persecuted them.

The Psalmist looked back as well in Psalm 143:5-6

David here was in the midst of terrible times. But he remembered better days. He remembered that God had indeed done great things for him and in the life of his people. And he drew on that reality to call on God to once again move and bring back the better days.

It is a remarkable thing how we can forget what God has already done in our lives. We see the problems of today, and somehow the other situations that God has worked on our behalf fly out of our memory. The story is recorded that Peter, seeing Jesus walking on the water said if it is really you, then command me to come to you. Jesus did, and Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water. But then he noticed how strong the wind was, became frightened and began to sink. One wonders, how in the world can you be participating in the miracle of walking on water one second and the next you are panicking and convinced you are about to drown?

But our journey of faith is so often like that. We start out in faith and seeing God moving, and then the storms come, and with the winds, there goes our confidence and assurance and peace. We become frightened and convinced we are going to drown. It is then that we must look up and realize that Jesus is

still right there. Peter at least had the sense to cry out for the Lord to save him. And Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. So too David lifted up his hands in prayer, thirsting for God to be in his life and in power.

When we start seeing the storms, when we start to lose confidence, the truth is that Jesus is right there. With Peter, he was so close he simply reached out and caught him. God promises that he will never lead us where he has not already been and that he is always with us. When the storms of life threaten to overwhelm us, remember that God has shown his power in your life before and he is right there with you, ready to catch you and bring you through.

- Where have you started your journey of faith but now feel that you are lost and drowning?:
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- Recall those times in your life that God has reached out and lifted you and moved in your life. Will you focus on the storm in your life or the Savior next to you?
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### **Optional Bible Reading: Benedictine Lectio Divina**

Read a scripture of your choice or one of the following using the Benedictine practice of reading scripture.

Psalm 143:10-11   Psalm 143:8

Lectio Divina literally means “reading of God”.

Lectio Divina is the search for God in his written Word.

This form of lectio divina works best in a group of between 4-8 people.

A group leader co-ordinates the process and facilitates sharing.

Golden Rules:

- (i) members of the group always speak in the first person singular;
- (ii) others listen; discussion or comment is not useful for this format of prayer & meditation;
- (iii) anyone may “pass” at any time, and prefer to pray silently rather than share.

Three readings of the same text from the Scriptures are read aloud by different people, each time followed by a period of silence and an opportunity for each member of the group to share the fruit of his or her lectio.

## PREPARATION

The group settles comfortably and prepares for prayer in whatever way works best - focus on breathing/a candle/prayer setting/listening to music/singing.

The leader, or the group together, invokes the Holy Spirit to open everyone's heart to God's Word.

## FIRST READING (actually twice)

An unhurried reading, the second time more slowly, to allow people to listen for the word or phrase that beckons, stirs or unnerves, touches the heart. Gently repeat and ponder the word or phrase silently to yourself in the silence (1-2 minutes) that follows.

Each person in turn speaks the word/phrase that has touched him or her.

## SECOND READING

In the silence that follows (2-3 mins) each person ponders the word/phrase, attending to the feelings or images that arise, noting how they are seeing or hearing Christ reach out to them through the text.

Each person in turn briefly states what he or she has "heard" or "seen".

## THIRD READING

In the silence that follows (2-3 minutes) each person reflects on where and how God is connecting to him or her; what God is calling them to be or to do. It may be through memories, or events of their lives that God is now present. Allow your response to be in whatever way is most natural and spontaneous.

Each person in turn shares the results of his or her reflection.

**GO:** faith takes action steps.

- What steps can you take this week to resist the temptations you are facing now?
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**Close in Prayer**