

# In the Desert – A Lesson Plan on Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

This In the Desert lesson plan on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving will help youth understand the connection between the temptation of Jesus in the desert and Lenten focus on spirituality, sacrifice, and service. Youth will come to understand why we give things up for Lent.

For background material on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, along with practical ideas for these practices, [see here](#).

## Opening Game for In the Desert

Start by playing [the Could You Give It Up game \(see the complete instructions\)](#). In this game, youth think about what they could give up for Lent

Follow up with a couple of questions:

- Were there things you could give up easily which others could not?
- Do you think it is good to challenge yourself with your Lenten practices?
- Did you get any new ideas for things to give up for Lent?

Some of us give up the same thing every year for Lent. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, it is good to think about why we are giving it up and if it is bringing us closer to Jesus. So today we are going to talk about the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving and how they relate to the 40 days which Jesus spent in the desert.

## Scripture Reading for Lesson Plan on Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

Read the Gospel:

[Luke 4:1-13](#) (Jesus is tempted in the desert) – the Gospel Reading for the [1st Sunday of Lent – Year C](#)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written, One does not live on bread alone.”

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Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me."

Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve."

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

[Luke 4:1-13](#)

## Discussion for In the Desert

Lent is an invitation to experience 40 days in the desert with Jesus. Our Lenten practices are meant to be a way to do this. We can consider them in relation to the three temptations of Jesus.

First, Satan tempted Jesus to turn bread into stones. The gospel states that Jesus was hungry, so this would have been difficult to resist. It is also a temptation to use his power for himself instead of for the mission he has been sent on by His Father.

Jesus answered him, "It is written, One does not live on bread alone." He knew that pleasure and comfort were less important than doing his Father's will.

We can think of this as a temptation for comfort and material goods. We learn to resist this temptation through fasting. When we give up something for Lent, we are recognizing that filling our desires for food, entertainment, and comfort is not the most important thing in our lives. We must fill our hunger for a relationship with Jesus first.

The second temptation was for Jesus to rule over all of the kingdoms of the world, if only he would worship Satan. This is a temptation for worldly glory and power. He would be forgetting his mission to draw all nations to his heavenly Father. Instead he would be putting all nations under his control.

Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve." He knew that all power and glory belongs to God, not to humanity.

The remedy for this temptation for power is to love weakness instead. We can do this by lifting up the powerless in this world. That includes those living in poverty, the immigrant, the elderly, the marginalized. We do this through almsgiving. We give what we have to help those need a helping hand. This will help us understand that influence and popularity is not our goal.

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The third temptation was for Jesus to depend upon himself instead of trusting in his heavenly Father. This is a temptation to test his Father and make himself the most important person in this universe. This is to be driven to ego.

Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” Instead of trusting in ourselves, we must trust in God. We must not make demands on our heavenly Father.

The way to keep our own egos from growing out of control is through prayer. In prayer, we remember our dependence on God. We also remember all of the gifts God has given us. We put God first, instead of ourselves. When we place ourselves before God in prayer, we remember our place in the universe.

So as we journey in the desert with Jesus this Lent, we can consider that we are facing temptations as he did. And we can respond as he did. So put some thought into your Lenten practices. Choose forms of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving which will be a bit of a challenge. That will help you control your appetite for pleasure, your desire for popularity, and your need to put yourself first.

## **Reflection Questions for Lesson Plan on Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving**

- Why should your Lenten practices be challenging?
- Do you give thought to what tempts you when deciding on your Lenten practices?
- Why is it important to include prayer, fasting, and almsgiving instead of doing just one?
- Do you want to share what you are planning to do this Lent?

## **Challenge for In the Desert**

This week, spend some time thinking about your Lenten practices. If you haven't done so already, make a commitment for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. If your choices don't seem challenging, consider changing them to something a little more difficult. Don't set yourself up for failure though. Your Lenten promises should be challenging, but not impossible.

## **Prayer for In the Desert**

Conclude by offering petitions and praying the [Fasting and Feasting Prayer](#).