

February 27 | Matthew 4:1-4

Read

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

Reflect

I am among a handful of folks at our church that has caught the sourdough bug. It started when a friend gave me some of his sourdough starter. I found a simple bread recipe and made my first loaf. Since making that first loaf, I have been feeding the sourdough starter religiously each week, equal parts water and flour. The starter feeds on the starches in the flour and maintains its lively, bubbly goodness.

If you don’t feed the sourdough starter, however, it can die. Last year I gave some of my sourdough starter to my sister-in-law, but her life was too busy at the time to keep feeding the sourdough. It died, so I had to give her a second round of starter a couple months ago.

Since childhood, I have been intrigued by this story of Jesus heading into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. I could barely imagine skipping one meal, much less 120 meals! As I’ve lived with this text I’ve started to realize how this pattern is similar to most spiritual journeys. While our initiations may not be as spectacular as Jesus’ baptism with God’s voice crying out, many of us experience God in a real and profound way. We know this experience will change the direction of our lives. What we overlook is the wilderness that is sure to follow. A new practice fails. Prayers go unanswered. Doubts return. When we find out that the spiritual life is not easy, one temptation is to try even harder.

Jesus locates the answer in receiving a gift from God, not from working harder. Even in the wilderness, Jesus shows us that grace is closer than we think. The mystics of the Christian tradition often talk about communion with God in sensory ways—hunger, taste, thirst. Like sourdough starter hungers for flour, so our very lives hunger for God’s good words. These good words feed us when we find ourselves lost and famished in the wilderness.

Recenter

Consider: *What was your star word for 2026? How is God using that word to feed your soul?*

Pray: *God, feed me when I am most in need of nourishment and help me find enough grace—even in the wilderness. Amen.*

Author Bio

Kyle Caudle is the Associate Pastor for Youth, Missions, and Adults at First Baptist on Fifth. A firm believer that words create worlds, he loves the creative process of writing and songwriting.

February 28 | Matthew 4:8-11

Read

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”

Reflect

The wilderness, like the desert to which the fourth century desert mothers and fathers were led, is a desolate space, what some translators call “a lonely place.” It is a place of silence, of slowed time and often, of testing. As the devil continues to tempt Jesus to prove that he is Son of God, the stakes in the devil’s game become clear. Jesus “wins” the contest not simply by thwarting the devil’s challenges, but by redefining and embodying what it means to be Son of God in the first place.

Three times the devil tempts Jesus to prove his divine sonship through displays of power, greed, and privilege. Three times Jesus responds by quoting from Deuteronomy 6 and 8, where we also find the *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts” (6:4-6). Jesus counters the devil by revealing the lie at the center of the temptations. The power, wealth, and status that drive so much of the world and disguise themselves as sources of identity are mere counterfeit. Jesus resists the devil’s temptations and proves his identity by demonstrating unequivocally that the Son of God is the one who fulfills the Mosaic ideal of loving God completely and binding God’s word to one’s heart.

Later, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will teach his disciples what it means to be children of God. To live as God’s children is to embody the teachings of the Law and the Prophets through radical love, to love neighbor and enemy alike, and to reflect God’s own generous life-giving presence in this world. Lent is an invitation to the wilderness. Lent calls us to remove ourselves from the noise of this world and to sit in silence. It challenges us to see the idols in our midst, and it is an opportunity to rediscover and return to our identity as children of God.

Recenter

Rediscover: Take time in this Lenten season to regularly remove yourself from the noise, to reconnect with God’s presence around you and within you, and to rediscover your identity as a child of God.

Author Bio

Mary Foskett teaches New Testament studies at Wake Forest University. She and her husband, Scott Hudgins, and their late son, Daniel, belong to the family of faith that is First Baptist on Fifth.

March 1 | Genesis 12:1-4a

Read

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”

Reflect

I confess that I am not a risk-taker. I don’t like rollercoasters and I have no desire to sky dive, so I am always in awe of people who are brave enough to give up what is safe and secure and take a leap of faith into the unknown.

The list of all that Abram is asked to leave is devastatingly specific: the country he calls home, his extended family, the security of inherited property. In contrast, God gives Abram no clue about where he will end up or how he will get there. Oh, and there is this completely illogical promise that at the seasoned age of 75, he and his wife Sarai, with no children and no hopes of having children, will be the progenitors of a new nation through which God will bless the entire world.

We know the rest of Abram’s story. He enters a covenant with God. Not a transaction, not a legally binding contract. A covenant, borne out of a trusting relationship and bound by promises. Abram promises to follow God’s guidance into a new life and a new land. God promises to bless Abram with descendants who will not only be the recipients of blessing but will become a blessing to others.

With Abram’s story of call and covenant, our faith story begins. We are Abram’s descendants. Called to a relationship of trust. Called to a journey of faith that is not always safe or certain. Called not just to embrace God’s unimaginable blessings, but to be a blessing to the world, despite the risks.

For those of us who are risk-averse, Abram can feel like an impossible spiritual role model. In 2026, we are beset by calls to speak out or stand up or name the injustices we see. This season of Lent invites us to deepen our trust in the God who calls us to GO and who promises to be with us, even when the way forward is risky and the destination unknown.

Recenter

Recalibrate: How are you experiencing God’s call in your life in this moment? Are there risks you are being asked to take? In moments of despair and uncertainty, how can God’s promises offer hope for the way forward?

Author Bio

Linda Lewis is a Program Assistant at The Shepherd’s Center of Greater Winston-Salem, member of the Covenant Class, and is wife to Barry and mother to Emily.

March 2 | Psalm 121:1-4

Read

*"I lift up my eyes to the hills—
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."*

Reflect

Do you remember a time in your life when you had a big problem and didn't have a clue how to solve it? Did you perhaps ask, like the Psalmist, "Where is my help coming from? Am I just yelling into the air? Can anyone hear me? Can anyone help me?"

On April 27, 2011, David and I were living in Huntsville, Alabama. Only I wasn't there that day. I was in seminary in Atlanta. Tornadoes ripped through north Alabama and I wasn't there. I couldn't help David from so far away... or so I thought.

You see, the power went out from the very beginning of the storms and he had no way to know just how bad it was. No TV weatherman giving minute by minute updates. But in Atlanta, I was able to watch live streaming radar from a Huntsville station that was running on auxiliary power. I could tell him when to go into our tornado shelter and when to come out. He was connected to me, and I was connected to him.

That connection made all the difference.

So it is with God.

Often in the wilderness, we might think if we can't see God or touch God, we have no way of knowing that God is with us. Remember what the Psalmist said, "my help comes from the Lord." Help is there, ready for you to access it. Our help comes from God. Even though you can't see or touch God, remember, God is always there with us.

Recenter

Receive: *Has there been a time in your life when you felt alone? Remember the words of the psalmist, "My help comes from the Lord...."*

Author Bio

Jane Hull is a retired pastor, married to David.

March 3 | Psalm 121:5-8

Read

*“The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.”*

Reflect

Oftentimes many of us go through the daily motions of life, sometimes even forgetting that the Lord is there to guide and protect us. This definitely is the case for me, even as a life-long classified Christian who grew up with influences of Catholics and Quakers, and living in a predominantly Jewish community along with other cultural backgrounds.

As a musician, a lot of my daily life involves waking, coffee/eating, practicing and rehearsals, as well as sleeping again. Eat, sleep and practice, they say! Rinse and repeat.... This can feel fairly solitary, whether we are on our own or have a family support system. Even as devoted Christians, it is easy to forget we are not alone, God is there to guide us. This is particularly challenging when we face trials and tribulations in our personal lives including anxieties about life and the daily grind in general. It is also challenging when tribulations come to our communities and society.

With my mother passing away still less than a year ago, it is easy to say that I’ve felt lonelier, as one does after the passing of a loved one. It is a heavy loneliness that cannot be captured in words. But today’s passage brings assurance and comfort that when I feel alone or unprotected, God is with me in my coming in and my going out, day in and day out. The verse “the sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night” may seem paradoxical. You might think you will not receive light, His light, or any light...but the next verse reassures that God is protecting you through all bad things and bad days. God is protecting you and for life!

Recenter

Remember: Even in the daily grind, take some time to reflect on how God protects you, reassures you, keeps you company, and offers solace. Remember, you are not alone.

Author Bio

Emily Grissing is a freelance cellist/musician in NC and the Southeast. Close to Emily’s heart is sharing music with others through performance, mentoring, teaching, as well as singing in the First Baptist Sanctuary Choir.

March 4 | John 3:12-15

Read

"If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Reflect

Each new year, I look forward to my star word. Mysteriously, every year, the word I picked was a Holy Spirit message just for me. In January 2025, after selecting "remember," my immediate reaction was confusion—what am I supposed to remember? Shortly after, during Emily's sermon, it was answered when these words pierced my heart: "Remembering who and whose you are: this year and every year, identity holds, even as words fail. Identity comes in so many forms that matter deeply and shape significantly. 'You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.'"

This was it! This was my Holy Spirit message! Each morning, I looked at this word and this message on my mirror. Little did I know what the year would bring and how much I needed to remember.

In verse 12, John the apostle, reveals how human we are with our difficulty believing even in earthly things. Jesus' disciples had trouble believing after personally seeing miracles. Through Jesus' lifting up; his death and resurrection, we can believe!

After losing my mother and youngest brother to cancer, I became conscious of my own mortality—something that seemed distant, until it suddenly wasn't. In October of 2025, I was diagnosed with early stage ovarian cancer; a diagnosis which truly surprised me. My star word made sense. God was preparing me for this. It's been a time of chemotherapy and hardship yet a time of drawing close to God; recognizing the deeper reality of the Kingdom of God and especially God's love for me. A time of how meaningful all the meals, flowers, cards, calls and texts from all of you, reminding me of God's love for me just as I am; each and every day.

My star word this past January? Sabbath. How perfect!

Recenter

Refocus: How beloved by God do you feel? What practices would help you dwell in God's love as God's beloved, in whom he is well pleased?

Author Bio

Linda M Jones is a retired minister and former RN. She is married to Joseph and both are members of the Connections Sunday School class.

March 5 | John 3:16-17

Read

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Reflect

Perhaps no verse of scripture is known or memorized more than John 3:16. We learn it as children in Sunday School and many Christians recall it from memory as a summation of the gospel in full. God loves the world, God sent Jesus into the world. Believing in Jesus leads to eternal life. What more can be said? Simple and straightforward. Or is it?

What does it mean “to believe in him”? Many would suggest that belief is an intellectual or intentional assent to some claim. Like, “After thoughtful consideration, I agree that Jesus is the son of God.” Yet, perhaps belief in something or someone is more than an acknowledgement or act of acceptance.

Just prior to these verses, Jesus is involved in a deep discussion with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the religious council in Jesus’ own faith community. Jesus explains that to see the kingdom of God, one must be born “from above”. Nicodemus, taking Jesus’ words somewhat literally, is confused by Jesus’ teaching. So Jesus provides an image, the wind—something out of human control, something that can be known not because it can be seen, but because it can be heard and felt and experienced. To those born of the Spirit, Jesus’ image of the wind resonates the experience of the Spirit of God. Struggling to understand, Nicodemus asks Jesus an important question: “How can these things be?” Confounded Nicodemus is told that “belief” in the one lifted up may have eternal life.

Most of us have someone in our lives that we trust in completely. Over time, they have related in a way that engenders confidence and trust. We go to them for guidance and advice because of who they are to us. When they speak we listen carefully, because we respect and have experienced their tendency to be insightful, reflective and just. In a profound sense, we “believe” them. Jesus calls us to a relationship with himself, and belief in him is more than agreement or assent to his teaching, and more than a decision to accept his authority apart from a relationship or knowledge of who he has been in our life. We believe him.

Recenter

Reimagine: This week reflect on the ways you “believe in Jesus”. Thoughtful reflection on what it means to believe may guide us into seeing and experiencing God’s love for the world.

Author Bio

Scott Hudgins is co-chair of the Adult Ministry team and has been a member along with his spouse, Mary Foskett, since 1998.