

My husband received this 1000 piece puzzle for Christmas. 1000 is a lot of pieces. As you can see, it's still sealed. Would anyone like to buy it? I'm selling it cheap because I know he is not going to work it. A puzzle takes a lot of time and patience. You have to try pieces here and there to see if they fit. Then it takes a long time before you see the picture.

Sometimes the Bible is like that. Often it seems like a puzzle. For instance, it seems odd that Jesus is tested. Shouldn't Jesus be exempt? He is perfect, after all; he's full of the Spirit; so why does he need to be tempted by Satan? It's confusing; a puzzle. Patience and time are required to see how it all fits together.

Perhaps you find it so puzzling that you give up reading the Bible. That's why we are giving you this New Testament so you can read a little of it every day. It is called the One Year Bible because the readings can be completed in a year. As you read it each day, it will be like working a piece of the puzzle. After awhile you will begin to see how the pieces interlock, creating a beautiful picture. You will read through all four Gospels while we study the Gospel of Luke, and that will broaden your knowledge of Jesus' life. We'll talk about it each week, and that will help. Let's begin.

After being baptized in the Jordan, Jesus went out to the surrounding wilderness. While there, who should he happen upon but Satan. Listen to it. READ Lk 4:1-13

And so the ministry of Jesus begins. The first three chapters of Luke contain all those prophecies – a child is born who will save His people. He will fill them with good things; He's the Messiah, the deliverer. This is a good time – a very hopeful time. But what is Jesus' resolve in the face of the devil? Well, He's hungry. He's in a weakened state. That's the time we seem to feel temptation the most.

Even though the test was from Satan, God allowed it. Remember the reading from Deuteronomy 8? God tests us to see what is in our hearts. God's tests humble us so that we depend on God. That was what happened to the children of Israel when they were in the desert. God has not changed. It happens to us too.

Did you notice some similarities in those readings? The Israelites were in the desert for 40 years – Jesus for 40 days. They were hungry and had to depend on God to provide. Jesus was hungry and determined to depend on God to provide. They crossed the Jordan; Jesus crossed the Jordan. The Old Testament points to the New Testament to help us see God's work and believe. Think of puzzle pieces.

If you listened closely, Deuteronomy tells us the withholding of food was a test to teach that there is more to life than consumption. Jesus' first temptation was that exact test, coming when he was in a vulnerable condition. The question was, did Jesus really believe that? The highest evil authority was allowed to put Jesus to the test before He even got started. And it was a good time.

You will be tempted in good times and bad; when you are well and when you are weak. You will be tempted at work, in your leisure, and in your Christian calling. Your children will be tempted;

this church will be tempted, and you will be called upon to make some decisions at that time that show what you really believe. They might be decisions that cost you something.

First, just like Jesus you will be tempted to not trust that God will provide. At First Presbyterian Church we recently increased our commitment to giving to allow us to take steps of faith to move forward. When the stress of hard times hits, and these are hard times, it is very easy to become anxious. We ask, *will God provide?* The temptation is to operate out of fear and not live up to our commitment. This is true in our personal lives as well as our lives as a congregation. Our cultural habit is to grasp what we can see; to take care of our own needs first.

But God wants us to unequivocally trust Him because God has great plans. We really only know the power of God and the miracles of God when we look at Him more than the hunger within us. Our dependency is highly important to God. The test is to trust that God will provide for our needs as we commit to the church. This is an opportunity to learn we can actually accomplish some really hard and courageous things when we trust God.

Take Charlie Plumb, for instance. It was a great time in his life. A Navy fighter pilot, he had flown 74 successful missions over Vietnam. He was going home in five days when during his 75th mission, his plane was shot down. He parachuted into enemy hands and spent six years as a prisoner of war.

While in prison, Captain Plumb¹ lived in an 8X8 foot cell. His only possession was a rag to cover his nakedness and a bucket in the corner for a toilet. No pillow, no blanket, no furniture; nothing. The temptation was certainly to succumb to the lack of food, the torture, and the loss of everything, including, later, the loss of his wife, who divorced him and married someone else just three months before he was released nearly six years later.

So whether we talk about Jesus' temptation, or the temptations that come against the church as we move forward, or perhaps in your life, a difficult boss or a marriage that hasn't turned out, when we read the Scripture we learn to put these puzzles of good times and temptations together so that we may triumph.

Charlie Plumb said, the hardest thing to overcome was thinking of himself as a prisoner, because that meant he thought of himself as a victim of circumstances. That meant he would spend his time blaming others.

Jesus was no victim just because he was hungry, and then tempted. He didn't say, "Oh this circumstance is terrible. God doesn't care. God's not real. I can't do this. I'm not good enough. God has abandoned me." No, Jesus knew God's Word through and through and He trusted and believed it.

When you are tempted, do you think of yourself as a victim? Or do you trust God's Word? If you are familiar with the Bible, you are in a greater position of strength.

¹You can read about Captain Charlie Plumb at www.charlieplumb.com, accessed 1/15/09.

I don't know if Satan was standing there physically or was simply a voice in Jesus' head. But, the testing was not over. Next, Jesus was led to the top of a mountain where He could see all the kingdoms of the world. The temptation was to grasp the power and prestige this world has to offer. "Just worship me," Satan said. Another man offered Jesus a similar thing. Pilate. Pontius Pilate said to him, "Don't you know I have power to release you and power to crucify you? But Jesus told him, "My kingdom is not of this world" (see John 18:33-19:16). Satan says have that new and bigger possession instead of tithing. Seek power and money for yourself. But God says, "store up treasures in heaven." Put God first, above the things of this world; then we have the truly great future.

Finally Satan played his last card. Put God to the test, he said. "Jump off. Believe and receive. Name it and claim it." A young man came to me one day, disappointed in God. A baseball player, he prayed that God would get him on a professional team. He would then give the millions he earned to God and that would help God out. But it had not happened. It was his plan, of course, not God's, and he was trying to force God's hand to make it happen. It doesn't work that way. We are to seek God's plans for our lives and for this church, not our own. Jesus did not come to do His own thing, but the Father's plan.

So you might be thinking all this temptation stuff is hard. It's hard to live without bread, or in a prison cell, or going without because you sacrifice for the church. The children of Israel failed; I fail; we all fail. Jesus is the only one who did not fail the test. What is this text all about? Are we just supposed to gut it out and try really hard?

One day Charlie Plumb was sitting in a restaurant in Kansas City. A man kept looking at him, and finally got up and walked to his table. He said, "You're Captain Plumb. You flew jet fighters. You were on the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down. You parachuted into enemy hands and spent six years as a POW." Plumb said, "How in the world did you know all that?" The guy replied, "Because, I packed your parachute." He then said, "I guess it worked."

And Charlie jumped up and shook his hand. He said, "I've said so many prayers of thanks and gratitude for that parachute."

The guy asked him if all the panels were there. Charlie replied, "Well, out of 18, three were torn, but it wasn't your fault. I jumped out of that jet fighter at a high rate of speed, close to the ground, and it tore the panels in the chute. It wasn't the way you packed it. By the way, do you keep track of all the parachutes you pack?"

"No" he replied, "it's enough gratification for me just to know that I've served."

That night Charlie was troubled. He had never noticed that man. How many times did he walk around the Kitty Hawk when he might have seen him? But he didn't think about acknowledging lowly sailors. He was a fighter pilot. So he was never even aware of the parachute packer. Charlie wondered how many hours he spent sitting at that long wooden table in the bowels of the ship weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of those chutes? He couldn't have cared less . . .

until the day his own parachute was packed.²

You see, when you are facing temptation, you have a parachute packer; Someone who carefully provides that safety net you need. He is someone who knows what it means to stand against an attack of a deadly adversary. He came through His tests with flying colors with the power and Spirit to defeat that enemy. He packs your parachute without you even knowing it, because He gets enough gratification from serving His Father. And He serves you, His beloved. In fact, when your plane is going down, He is the one sitting in that cockpit beside you – he's the co-pilot who thinks you are worth dying for.

So when you are tempted, when you feel like a victim, when you don't see a way out, find Him in prayer. He's here. Search for Him in the Bible. Read about Him and love Him. Soon you will find yourself strong, triumphant, and with a great future because of Him. And your life which looks like a thousand discordant pieces will begin to take shape in a beautiful picture.

Amen.

²From *Insights Into Excellence*, Packing Parachutes - Excerpt from Chapter 16, by Charlie Plumb. You can read the full story on Capt. Plumb's web site listed above.