

TEST TWO: CONTROL OR TRUST

By Pastor Ricky Stephen

Matthew 4:1-11 (esp. 5-7)

INTRO: PUTTING LOVE TO THE TEST

In relationships, trust is like oil. Without trust every interaction feels like steel-on-steel friction. Because without trust we are always putting each other to the test.

When we approach God with suspicion, bargaining or attempts to control, we put Him to the test. In Jesus' second test (Matthew 4:5-7), satan tempts Jesus with forcing God's hand—an action which would represent controlling God.

Jesus responds by refusing to 'put God to the test,' demonstrating His trust in the Father.

I. SECOND TEST: ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL GOD

satan quotes Psalm 91, saying if Jesus truly trusts God, He should prove it by throwing Himself from the temple and God's angels will save Him.

What could be wrong with proving His trust in God this way?

Because it wouldn't be a trust fall at all, it would be a magic trick.

Magic is not just spooky techniques; Magic is a way of interacting with reality.

Magic is the ability to control ourselves, others or our environment through means which are less costly than they should be. Control plus ease is the formula of magic.

Hollywood actors 'manifesting' their destinies—control + ease = magic.

Technology like AI taking away our difficulties—control + ease = magic. As Arthur C. Clarke observed:

*"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."*¹

Jesus is being tempted to make God serve Him, to create a world where being God's child guarantees control and ease. R.T. France notes:

By asking Jesus to force God's hand, Satan was creating a situation where "...man may become lord of God, and compel him to act through the power of his faith..."²

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Their testing of God reveals not a lack of evidence but a lack of trust. When discomfort comes, they demand proof of God's presence.

Where Israel grumbled - Jesus endures. Where they demanded signs - Jesus trusts without forcing God to act. In doing so, Jesus shows what it truly means to be God's Son: not grasping for control but living in faithful dependence.

This test in the wilderness also prepares Jesus for a greater test in the garden. When He is arrested He declares that He could call on twelve legions of angels to rescue Him (Matthew 26:53). He doesn't call the angels down.

Why?

Because it was the Father's will for Jesus to go down, all the way down. Not off the temple roof, but down into the grave. Not kept from the pain but pushed through it into death itself.

The angel will not keep Him from tripping on the stone, but an angel will roll the stone away. Because the Spirit of God raises Jesus from the dead.

Again, satan tells Jesus to demonstrate God's power but for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way. Jesus does demonstrate God's power - not just to protect but to resurrect.

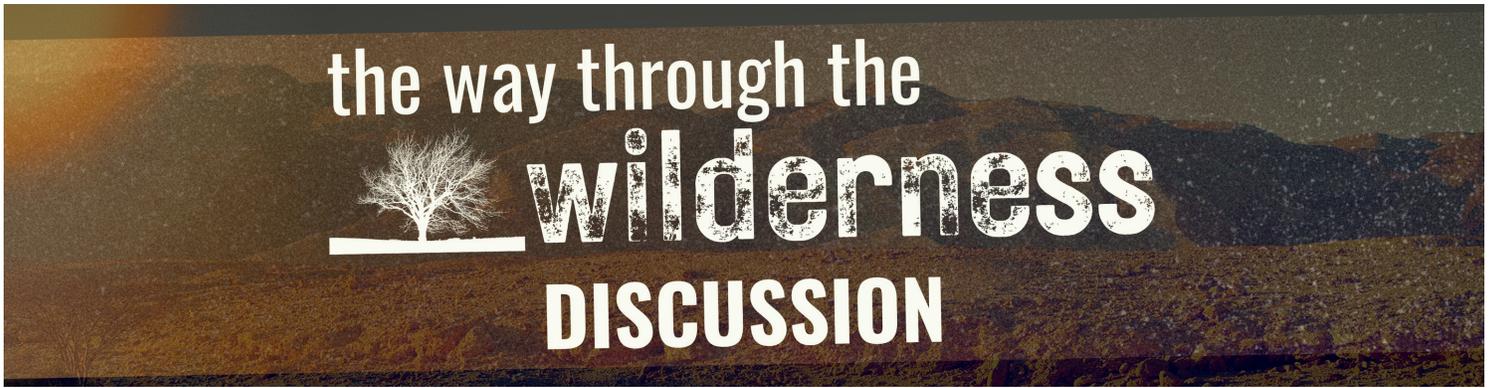
satan's version of being God's child is a party trick; Jesus' way is the way of the cross and resurrection life.

III. BEING GOD'S CHILD: TRUST

It's impossible to love someone when they're always putting you to the test. Yet, many of us find ourselves asking the same question Israel asked in the wilderness: 'God, are you with me or not?' Even after experiencing His faithfulness, when life becomes difficult we are tempted to grasp for control.

Faith is not control. Trusting God is not about getting Him to do what we want, but believing that He will do what is best.

We often misunderstand faith, especially in passages like Matthew 17:20, where Jesus connects faith to powerful outcomes. It's easy to hear this and assume faith is about having the right thoughts, feelings and words. When we strip that logic down, it begins to sound less like prayer and more like a spell.



Open Up

Have you ever tried to make some kind of bargain with God to prove He was with you? What happened?

Dig In:

Read Matthew 4:5-7 & Exodus 17:1-7

- What differences do you see between Jesus' response to His situation and the Israelites?

- What is wrong with the Israelites request and attitude? How is it they are 'testing God'?

Live It Out

- When you've felt you're near rock bottom, what kind of deals have you tried to strike with God?

- Prayer has an implicit tension: we are supposed to ask for what we want, but we also ask God who has a will which may be different than ours. How do you navigate this tension?

- What areas might God be calling you to relinquish control in?

Prayer:

Take time to pray for greater trust in God. Pray for each others requests with boldness and honesty.