

Thought for the week: Testing times

In addition to being a crucial point in his ministry among us, Jesus' time of testing also models how we can face – and overcome – challenging times. By focusing on God's promises in his Word and our overall knowledge of Christian teaching, we are shown how to respond to tests against our faith.

Because we have free will, we can choose whether or not to give in to 'just one more sweet' or to say 'I really can't be bothered to turn up to church'. Likewise, Jesus could have agreed with the logic of Satan's words, which were quoted from the Pentateuch. Jesus was easily able to meet the challenges on offer: to turn stones into bread would have been easy for the one who would later feed 5000 from a lunch box and turn water to wine. Why would he doubt that the angels would protect him? They were always present, hovering, to come and wait on him. And what was the devil thinking, to offer the kingdoms of the world to Jesus? They were his already.

For Jesus, as for us, trusting in God's provision equips us against being fooled by the deceptions of the world into doing what the devil asks. There appear to be far more ways, in our current age, in which we are subtly invited to make bad choices: online influencers offer their goods and creeds with a disarming presentation; computer-generated voices and images seem genuine; social media friendships that appear to be a lifeline can turn out to be an awful trap. Valuable though technology and AI can be, they have no moral compass.

Our tests may have changed in character but have always been with us. From the previous attitudes of the established Church towards slavery, to ongoing issues of safeguarding failures, there will always be a schism between what is right and what we do. In contrast to Adam and Eve, who were living in a fruitful garden, Jesus, physically alone and hungry in that wilderness, had nothing. Yet he refused to accept anything from Satan. His strength to do so came from his intimate knowledge of Scripture. Are we too sufficiently familiar with the message and the detail of the Bible that, even if we can't quote the exact reference, we can measure even the most modern moral dilemma against its overall teaching? In our world of plentiful blessings and wide-ranging temptations, can we trust in God alone to help us to resist the easy path and take the right path?