

## **Basic Training; Ready for Change**

Laura Smith Conrad

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Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

Today we return to Matthew's gospel. Jesus has just been initiated and commissioned for service in Spirit driven ministry.

At his baptism Jesus is infused with the Spirit and called beloved by the voice and power of God.

In case you think ministry and service is simple, what happens next is a period we might call Basic Training.

My brother went off to "Basic Training for the Service" when he joined the Air Force.

I was a preschooler. He left and came back changed.

Something had happened. I remember he lost weight and lost lots of hair!

Now I understand he was tested, pushed to the limits, and being prepared for what lie ahead.

In much the same way, Jesus is sent to Basic Training- of the Soul, to be prepared for the ministry to which he is called.

Today we will also Ordain and Install or Commission for Service our new class of deacons and ruling elders.

Jesus begins his ministry in the wilderness, why not hear it again as you start your ministries.

Last month we commissioned our 8th Grade Confirmation class in much the same way. They are in discipleship basic training: building relationships with covenant partners, studying God's word purposefully, and serving together eagerly-  
all Faith Practices that form us as followers of Jesus.

Freshly baptized and named as God's beloved, listen now to Jesus' basic training.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

4:2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

4:3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

4:4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

4:5 Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,

4:6 saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;

4:9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your

God, and serve only him.'"

4:11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on Jesus.

Lord, may the words of my mouth...

### **Meditation**

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

That disturbs me! The Spirit was in on Jesus' meet up with the Devil.

There goes the saying, "The Devil made me do it." Here it is the Spirit.

The Spirit sent Jesus to Time-out.

To prepare, to learn trust, to experience God's provision.

Jesus goes on an *Outward Bound* program, not to find himself, but to prepare.

When someone sets out to hike the Appalachian trail, it is usually his or her choice.

Jesus is driven by the Spirit,

into the wilderness

to be tempted by the Devil.

Israel had a forty-year time-out in the wilderness, you may recall.

And they continued to fail the test, time and time again, whining, making a golden calf when left unattended by Moses.

It was in the wilderness that God's children learned to trust God's provision and care.

Jesus, while tested, is tended to.

Jesus is cared for- the provision of angels.

We pray the Lord's Prayer- "Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil."

But even though God may not lead us to temptation in quite the same way that Jesus was placed in a perilous position, curiously enough the struggles Jesus endured remain common to us all.

**We're still tempted by the quick fix, by the kind of instant gratification that will do an end-run on our need to trust God's Word over the long haul.**

Similarly, we're tempted to do silly things by which to test and see if God's Word is true. We may not be tempted to throw ourselves off high buildings necessarily, but we have been known to pray things like, **"O God, if you love me and desire what's best for me, give me this new job I want . . . help me get enough money to buy that lake house . . ."**

And in so many ways we're tempted to make the kingdoms of this world our own domains by taking shortcuts, engaging in cut-throat tactics, telling little lies (or big lies), working ourselves half to death, and **so essentially bending the knee to the false gods of money, celebrity, power, and prestige. The temptations of Jesus are a microcosm of what we all face.** <sup>i</sup>

Jesus also shows us how we can remain connected to God.

Sure- Jesus fends the Devil off with a good come back.

Not just because he is clever, but he knows the Word of God.

BUT he knows God intimately.

Therein lies the key- Jesus not only knows Scripture, which anybody can use or misuse, Jesus knows the Father, the Author of life.

The first thing you learn in Basic Training is **trust and dependence**.

Jesus's trust in God's provision is clear.

And his remaining dependent on God is what saves his life.

We are no different.

Some of us are **not** in the wilderness right now.

We are enjoying a season of good things.

Life is just humming along.

Life is good and we are quote, "Living our best lives."

But for others of us, we are in the wilderness- not by choice, and possibly we have been led there by the Spirit.

I feel like the world is in a wilderness season- with fears of an COVID-19 outbreak, an amped up election year,

a consumer driven-ever busy-can't-fall behind-harried way of life.

Jesus was in the wilderness forty days before the Devil showed up.

He had lots of quiet time, alone with God to prepare for that.

It seems we need lots of time with God, to prepare for whatever comes.

So what is the good news in this Scripture?

God's Provision

God's Sustenance

God's Strength

and our dependence upon God.

We keep our eyes trained on Jesus.

Whatever training you are in, it is always best to keep your eye on the leader.

Jesus is unfailing in his commitment, who refuses to compromise, especially in the face of evil.

Jesus is the one so committed to redeem us, that we can trust him.

He says “No” to the devil, so he can say “Yes” to the things that bring the world wholeness, healing, peace- to sum it up- REDEMPTION.

So this Lent, rather than giving up chocolate or meat,

say "No" to some things in order to say “Yes” to God and God’s will.

It’s the only way to survive in the wilderness.

- I wonder, what you need to say No to in order to say Yes to God?
- What needs to change?  
(How will you invest your time? Money? Love? Service? To bring healing and wholeness, redemption, to your own life and the lives of others.)

New officers are saying YES to service, and have to set priorities, maybe say No to something else. Let me confess my experience- and see if it resonates with any of you.

On Ash Wednesday, we read the part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus criticizes the hypocrites who practice their piety in public to win the praise of others.

Jesus commends us to go to our room and pray alone in a quiet place.

I decided to listen.

I had been told by a theologian recently that Pastors need to spend hours a week in silence.

I balked.

I could not imagine finding extra hours in the week to do that.

Just to be present to God in silence.

To be still for that long.

I had things to do, places to go.

Pastors are busy people, right.

There is always more need than time.

But I was convicted on Wednesday, and I was finally ready to hear it.

One, I was weary and exhausted.

I had a tension headache for two days.

I usually am pretty productive, but there was nothing.

I could not write a sermon, or do anything productive.

I gave up.

I decided God must **be commanding** me, **requiring** me, **not requesting** me to finally Listen!

So I did it.

I was still and silent in the presence of God for a whole hour, and I wanted another hour.

So I did that.

Two hours is nothing compared to forty days and forty nights that Jesus waited, listened, prayer.

I cannot begin to tell you about that experience today.

(I wrote a blog post about it if you are curious

<https://wordpress.com/view/laurasmithconrad.wordpress.com>)

And it was as if God had to hit me on my head to get my attention.

Experiencing Sabbath and praying without talking, but listening for God

Was pure gift.

I had to say NO to somethings to say YES to God's intended desire.

Summer in Clemson is sometimes the slowest, less busy (maybe) time of year.

All year long, I say "If I can only make it to June, it will slow down."

I feel like the little engine that Could- chugging, working, climbing that hill all year long.

I Think I can. I think I can. (that is my go to sin- self-reliance, pride)

But truth is, I cannot. (Can I get an amen?)

I am tired, weary, tending to too many things.

Part of that is we are down one full-time Associate Pastor, and **many** of us are doing more.

And the other part, is I am grieving the death of my brother.

Grief is draining- it is heart and soul work.

I opened the Montreat Conference Center website last week and read the mission: Rest, Relationship, Renewal, Recreation.

And my heart leaped! I wanted that so much- Rest, Relationship, Renewal, especially.

I know many of you might feel the same way...perhaps for different reasons.

I knew something had to change.

I had to stop something to start something more important.

I had to say NO to some things in order to say YES to God's intentions.

Summer is a time for rest, relationship, renewal- Sabbath, one of the Big Ten Commands. And your Session decided last week after much thought that we will go to one Worship service for June and July.

To match the rhythms of our increasingly busy community and the needs of our overly committed servants at Fort Hill church.

I found myself saying like that Little Engine, "I can do two services...I think I can, I think I can"

Its not a problem. We do one service. We can just repeat.

... and then I thought of Peggy (or Donna or Judy) who shows up every Sunday at 7:30 to make coffee for us.

I thought of our paid care-givers who come in at 8:00 am and sit for four hours on Summer Sundays, sometimes with no children to watch.

I thought of Scott who spends hours each week setting up chairs and tearing down chairs for that one hour.

I thought of Judy Blackwell who coordinates folks to serve each Sunday as host/greeters

...and they can have a break. And the No to something became a yes to another thing:

Rest, Relationship, renewal after an intensely busy school year in Clemson,  
a little bit of AAAHHHH.

And we can say YES to simplifying, to seeing people in our faith family with whom we  
never get to visit with.

To being the Body of Christ together in Worship- glorifying God.

We can say Yes to new people who move to town, excited to find a faith community,  
who will not see a half-empty sanctuary, and think, that's not an alive church.

The NO to something becomes a YES to other things.

It's not forty days and nights, it's just eight Sundays.

But I hope we can experience some Sabbath rest,

time for relationships, and renewal in the Spirit.

Sometimes change is for the good.

Even in the wilderness, we can trust the promise- angels will attend us.

God's messengers will guard us and protect.

We can stop chasing the gods of busy-ness, productivity, personal preference, and self-  
reliance so that we can say YES to rest, relationships, recreation, and renewal.

That does not mean we will not face the Devil or hunger or trial, but God provides.

And God is the one power we can truly trust, in all things.

**Invitation**

Hear the gracious words of our Savior Jesus Christ:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Prayer

Bread- Laura

Cup- Michael

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<sup>i</sup> thanks to [www.WorkingPreacher.org](http://www.WorkingPreacher.org) for these examples which have been adapted.