

# NAVIGATING THE STORMS OF LIFE

by Gary Inrig

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How’s your life going right now? Is it smooth sailing? Are you seldom off balance? Is there no sense that there has to be more to the picture than you are seeing? If so, this booklet probably won’t seem very significant to you.

But if you can admit with some of the rest of us that on more than a few occasions we wonder where our lives are going, whether we have it in us to face the day, or how to take the next step with confidence, I think you’ll be as encouraged as I am by this excerpt from *True North* by pastor Gary Inrig.

Sometimes we need a friend like Gary to tell us what we can believe with confidence.

*Martin R. De Haan II*

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# FINDING TRUE NORTH

The only hope a sailor has of surviving a storm and navigating an ocean is to have a fixed reference point that enables him to discover where he is and where he is heading. The first navigators kept in sight of land, using familiar landmarks. When mariners dared to push beyond the sight of land, they still needed to find a fixed point of reference. So they looked to the heavens. As knowledge grew and celestial navigation developed, the primary reference point for navigators in the Northern Hemisphere became the North Star, Polaris. Modern technology has changed the process. Sextants and compasses have given way to electronic navigation and the Global Positioning System (GPS). But the principle remains the same. The fixed reference

points for the GPS are a system of 24 satellites that send out signals, which a receiver then uses to compute latitude, longitude, and even altitude. Those satellites have precisely fixed locations.

The North Star for navigating life is Jesus Christ. This is true whether we are in relatively familiar waters with old landmarks comfortably in sight, or far out in uncharted waters with nothing on the horizon. It is our focus on Christ that will keep us on course. That can easily sound like a pious platitude, but in the middle of a storm it becomes an urgent necessity. Few places in the Bible illustrate that as well as the compelling story of Job. Although the story has a profound depth that demands careful attention, my goal is more modest. We are going to look at some of the book's essential themes, which provide several important navigation principles.

## **Life's Storms May Hit The Most Unexpected People.**

Whatever else is true of Job, he is not an ordinary man, and his is not an ordinary life. As we read his story, we must recognize that he is an exception, not the norm. This is not the way things usually happen. And profound as the book is, it does not attempt to answer all of our questions about the mystery of evil. But its opening words introduce us to a life well lived and a man whom God marked out for his upright character.

*In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the*

*greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom (Job 1:1-5).*

There is much that we do not know about Job. We are not told when he lived, and we have only a general idea of where (northern Saudi Arabia or southern Jordan). We are unsure about his relation, if any, to the people of Israel. Who wrote the book and when also remain unanswerable questions. But the message that the Holy Spirit intends us to learn from Job's story does not depend on

these things. It does, however, require us to consider carefully the information we are given about the man described in these first few verses.

*Job is a person of impeccable character, a man of integrity, “blameless and upright.”* This is not just the human author’s opinion. Remarkably, it is the opinion of God, who challenges Satan with Job’s character: “Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). No higher affirmation can be imagined. “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding” (28:28). Job is a sinful human being, but he towers above his contemporaries in the integrity of his inner life.

*Job is also a person of substance.* The description of his wealth doesn’t immediately strike us as making him worthy of inclusion on a list

of the world’s wealthiest men, especially in a culture that seems to make people billionaires overnight on the stock market and instant millionaires on game shows. But Job, in the currency of his day, was a successful and prosperous man. Family was considered wealth, and a man with seven sons was rich indeed. Seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred working teams of oxen, five hundred donkeys, a large retinue of servants—these were all marks of power and prominence. Job was a man to be reckoned with, a man who was not only personally prosperous but also wielded great economic influence in his region. He was not merely successful; he was “the greatest man among all the people of the East” (1:3).

A third thing we are told about Job is that *he was a man with a vigorous and authentic spiritual life, combined with a deep concern for his family.*

His wealth had not made him self-indulgent or self-sufficient. He was a man of prayer who upheld his children before the Lord. His sons and daughters loved to party. We are not told exactly what these parties involved, but they apparently troubled Job enough for him to be concerned about his children's spiritual and moral well-being. To that end, he made sure that all of these feasts were followed by some kind of ritual purification for his children. Then he would offer sacrifices for each of them, with a prayerful concern for their relation to God and their inner lives: "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts" (1:5). The precise details of this process are obscure to us; the larger meaning is not. Job did not take his wealth for granted and forget God. Nor did he believe his children were entitled to live the good life, indifferent to God.

We therefore begin with a

clear picture of the man who is at the center of the action. Job is a pillar of moral integrity, a model of spiritual authenticity, and a recognized and respected success. In every sphere of life, Job flourished. He was the kind of person people admired and God marked out as special.

Then, suddenly, unpredictably, everything changes. Job's life is torn apart, and he has no way of knowing why. He is living at ground level as one disaster after another tears apart his carefully constructed life. As readers, we are given the advantage of seeing Job's life from a heavenly perspective. But as we live our own lives, we live where Job did, at ground level, unable to see things from above. And that is the heart of the life of faith—trusting when and where we do not see or understand.

Round one begins with the sudden arrival of a report from one of his servants:

*One day when Job's sons*

*and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (1:13-15).*

It isn't clear whether this is an act of war or a brutal robbery, but it is an act that combines terror with massive financial and personal losses. Job probably grieved far more for his lost servants than for his lost oxen and sheep. But the avalanche of troubles is only beginning.

*While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (1:16).*

Job barely has time to catch his breath when the second blow falls. This time it is some kind of natural disaster, perhaps a massive lightning strike that causes a fire that destroys his sheep and his shepherds. But once again, Job has no time for the bad news to sink in:

*While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (1:17).*

This time the troubles are again human in origin. The raiding parties of the Chaldeans have swept down, stolen Job's camels, and killed his herdsmen. He must have wondered whether some strange alliance of tribal groups had targeted him. But, once again, he has no opportunity to process the

information. Another messenger arrives with far worse news. For the third time we have the phrase “while he was still speaking.” These messengers are almost falling over one another in their urgency to bring the bad news:

*While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!” (1:18-19).*

Of all the news Job has received, none is worse than this. A tornado-like wind has taken the lives of all who are most precious to him. Combined with the other messages, this becomes a waking nightmare for Job. His prosperity, his security, his

lifestyle, his social standing, and his family have vanished in a moment’s time. Within minutes, he has been transformed from the greatest man of the East to the most desolate man on earth.

Harsh as Job’s nightmare day is, however, this is only round one. Round two will target Job’s personal health and well-being:

*So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (2:7-9).*

The specifics of Job’s disease aren’t clear, but his condition was extremely painful and socially isolating. He was reduced to a beggar-like existence, sitting on a garbage heap, surrounded by

broken pottery and the ashes of burned-out fires. He had lost everything of value to him: family, health, property, social standing. Even his wife, traumatized by her grief, is in no condition to give him support. In fact, she holds God and perhaps Job responsible for what has happened. Nothing in life makes sense to Job at that moment, although something of value does remain—his view of God. It has been threatened, but it has not been lost. In fact, as we shall see, it is Job's focus on God as the North Star that enables him to navigate the storm.

Few, if any, human beings have experienced what Job did. But we can identify with the feeling of being far out at sea in a life-threatening storm with no familiar landmarks in sight. As I write this, I am about to visit a young woman whose husband suddenly collapsed during a workout, leaving her a widow with two

small children. Her clearly envisioned future has come to a sudden and painful end. How does she go on? That becomes the fundamental question when we are faced with situations we can hardly imagine but cannot change.

The book of Job is intended to help us answer that question, but not in a theoretical way. Although the book confronts us with the problem of evil, it does not intend to give us a philosophical resolution. Instead, it challenges us, in the face of unexplained and unexplainable tragedies, to fix our eyes on God. The first two acts of Job's tragedy unfold on earth. Now we are invited to view the events of his life from another perspective, one that involves a fundamental mystery of human life.

### **Be Aware Of The Unseen Cause Behind The "Seen" Of Life.**

God claims every inch of the universe, and that claim is

attacked and challenged by Satan. Behind the “seen” of human history and our lives is a cosmic conflict between God and the evil one. It is not an even contest. Satan is in no way God’s equal or even His rival, although he bitterly opposes all that God does. We are rarely aware of how that invisible war touches our lives, but the truth is that our lives are part of a story bigger than we can imagine. And the unique thing the book of Job does is to allow us to stand in the heavenlies and understand the heavenly prelude to earthly events. We are able to see what Job never sees and to know what he is never told. The story unfolds in dramatic form, and we need to be careful about pressing the details in a way Scripture doesn’t intend. It does, however, make it clear that our world is the focus of an enduring conflict between God and Satan, and our lives are part of that bigger story. It

also calls us to recognize the mystery of life, and reminds us that many of the explanations we attempt to give are profoundly shortsighted.

*One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have You not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out Your hand*

*and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord (1:6-12).*

While we are told very little in the Bible about how the world of the heavenlies operates, Job does present us with a remarkable glimpse behind the scenes. The angelic beings come into God’s presence, and Satan is with them—but not as one who is loyal to God. Elsewhere in Scripture we meet Satan as “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). That same passage tells us that he will be cast out of heaven just before the final events of the tribulation period. It seems, until then, that Satan has access to the presence of God,

where he opposes God’s work by attacking and accusing God’s people. Why God permits this we are not told. However, it is in such a setting that God takes the initiative by issuing a challenge to Satan: “Where have you come from?” The Lord is not asking for information; He is calling Satan to account. Satan’s response is ambiguous: “I’ve been wandering around the earth, everywhere in general and nowhere in particular.” This is met by the Lord’s direct challenge, which takes the form of an amazing affirmation of Job: “Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8).

We should not pass over this too quickly, for there is a profound fact about human existence found in these words. God’s purpose is to magnify His worth and glory in and through His people.

Of all the features of His creation He could have used to shame Satan, the Lord chose a believer. The importance of this for every single Christ-follower cannot be exaggerated. We bear the name and reputation of our God, not only before the world but also before the principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10). The chief end of man truly is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, and when we do, Satan is defeated and God is exalted.

If God's purpose is to magnify His glory, Satan's purpose is to defame God and to deface His glory. His counterchallenge strikes at the heart of a believer's relation to God. You can hear the sneer of contempt in his words:

*Does Job fear God for nothing? . . . Have You not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his*

*flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face (1:9-11).*

Satan's words are a tremendous insult to God. In effect he is saying that God is not worth serving simply on the basis of who He is. Instead, He needs to buy the loyalty of Job and the rest of mankind. Satan implies that the only reason anyone chooses to worship God is out of self-interest. And Satan understands self-interest. It is his basic philosophy. That is one of the reasons the Lord Jesus is such a mystery to him. How can Satan understand Someone who, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing"? (Phil. 2:6-7). He cannot, just as he cannot understand a Christ-follower who loves God for who He is and

not merely for what He gives.

This is the central question of the book of Job: not, Why do the righteous suffer? but, Why do the righteous serve God? Human beings are sinful, and the corrupt motives of people say more about us than about God. Nevertheless, Satan raises an issue that every Christian must deal with: Why do I follow Christ? Some forms of preaching that promise health, wealth, and prosperity to “the King’s kids” appeal to the worst instincts within us. Do I love God for His gifts or for Himself? Would I still love Him if He called me to walk the path of suffering and sacrifice? Warren Wiersbe sums up this essential issue well:

Satan’s accusation cuts at the very heart of worship and virtue. Is God worthy to be loved and obeyed even if He does not bless us materially and protect us from pain? Can God win the heart of man

totally apart from His gifts? In other words, the very character of God is what is at stake in this struggle (*Why Us? When Bad Things Happen To God’s People*, p.41).

The Lord could have dismissed Satan’s insolence with the contempt it richly deserved: “I don’t need to prove anything to you or to anyone else.” But He doesn’t. Instead, He allows Job to become a test case: “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger” (1:12). Job now becomes the latest front in the invisible war, the place where Satan will seek to demean God’s worth and God’s glory.

We have no way of knowing whether this precise scenario has ever played itself out in the lives of other believers. But, whatever our circumstances, God’s glory is at stake in the way we respond to situations that

enter our lives. The issues we face are often far bigger than our own peace and happiness.

The second act of the heavenly drama is a virtual rerun of the first, only this time Job himself, rather than his family or possessions, becomes the object of attack. When God points out that Job “still maintains his integrity,” Satan demands direct access to Job:

*On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before Him. And the Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have You considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity,*

*though you incited Me against him to ruin him without any reason.” “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse You to Your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life” (2:1-6).*

That permission triggers Satan’s onslaught on Job’s health. Job is reduced to a pain-wracked outcast, scraping his sores with shards of pottery, vainly seeking relief from his pain.

At this point, the onslaught of catastrophes comes to an end, but this is not the end of the story. After all, we have only reached the second chapter of a 42-chapter book. As Winston Churchill said of the first Allied victory in World War II, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is,

perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Satan disappears from view. His part has only been a prelude to the core of the book, which tells of Job’s encounter with God at a level more intense and profound than anything he has known before.

Although these dramatic events are considered the prologue, they do have an enduring message. Job’s experiences remind us that *our storms and sufferings are part of a larger struggle*. In ways that we cannot see as we live life at ground level, we are part of a larger cosmic struggle. We have not been promised exemption from life’s challenges, and the way we respond in the storm has direct bearing on whether we reach the goal of bringing glory to God.

We also need to recognize that *suffering falls within the sweep of God’s sovereignty*. How a sovereign, all-powerful God relates to the sufferings

and evils of a fallen world can be an enormous mystery. Yet, as we will see, Job did not make the mistake of assuming that if he could not understand it, God must not have anything to do with it. Job did not sacrifice the truth of God’s ultimate sovereignty on the altar of his frail understanding. Neither must we. Satan does what he does, but not outside the boundaries of God’s control. Even the evil one is not free to act autonomously. He could touch Job only with God’s permission (2:5-6). Our God remains sovereign even in the inexplicable events of life.

Job’s story also reminds us that *there is such a thing as undeserved suffering*. Perhaps our society, with its frail sense of sin and guilt, needs to hear the opposite message: There is a God who must and will punish sin. Some suffering is due to God’s punishment or to the consequences of sin in our lives. Nevertheless,

not all suffering is the result of personal sin. That is a concept Job's friends utterly fail to grasp in the central section of the book. Their theology is as clear as ice and twice as cold: Whatever a person reaps, he has sown. They are sure that Job must have committed some deep, hidden sin to experience such dire consequences, and they are relentless in their accusations. But they are also wrong.

God makes it clear that Job's sufferings occur not because he is sinful but because he is righteous. There is mystery here, and that is precisely the point. We are not in possession of all the facts, and we need to be humble before claiming to know the mind of God. The *why* of his suffering remains a mystery to Job, as ours often does to us. I do not know why my colon suddenly ruptured or why my retina detached, permanently damaging my

eyesight. I do not know why my wife contracted cancer or, even more mysteriously, why she survived while other wonderfully godly friends died of the same disease. But I am sure of two things. First, suffering is not always a consequence of direct personal sin, but it is always the result of living in a fallen world. None of us are exempt from the effects of that fallenness. Second, suffering may be undeserved, but it is never purposeless. Job says it beautifully: "He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (23:10). God uses even undeserved suffering to refine us and to produce in us a growing likeness to Jesus for the glory of God and for the good of others.

*Suffering presents us with mystery.* As Job pours out his feelings and thoughts, it becomes clear that he thinks God is, for some unexplained reason, angry with him

(Job 3–31). He is wrong. In fact, God is proud of him. Throughout their discourse, Job and his friends see his situation as a problem that must be solved. Only in the end does Job realize that it is a mystery that must be surrendered to an all-wise, all-powerful God.

It has helped me immeasurably to realize that my fundamental concern in such times must not be, How can I get out of this? but, What can I get out of this? That is not a stance of passive resignation. Job struggles mightily to understand and barrages heaven with his questions. God approves his desperate quest for answers even as He rebukes the rigid orthodoxy of Job's friends: "You have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has" (42:7). But in the end, Job is reduced to silence before the mystery of God's sovereign purposes.

And what is Job's response

to the sufferings that have befallen him? Job holds course, even in the midst of catastrophic storms. The reason is clear. He has a North Star, and he takes his bearings from a reference point that is fixed and certain.

### **We Need A Clear Sight Of The Triune God To Chart Our Course.**

Job's immediate recourse is to the sovereign, gracious control of God. Job does not come to these crises unequipped. He knows God. You may deepen your knowledge of God in a crisis, but it is a poor time to try to find Him. Job draws upon a lifetime of worshiping and walking with God. When Job's nightmare of a day comes to an end and he finds himself stripped of everything he valued, he speaks words that are profoundly moving:

*At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my*

*mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing (1:20-22).*

It is impossible not to be moved by Job's response. He makes no effort to choke off his emotions. Yet, through tears, he maintains his focus on the Lord. His response of worship is not empty ritual but the practiced response of a man who has learned to walk with his God. Job feels the storm in all its intensity, but he chooses to focus on the Star, not the storm, to see above the horizon to the living God. He is deeply aware of God's grace ("the Lord gave") and His sovereignty ("the Lord has taken away"), and he chooses to praise God, even in the midst of his pain. These are not trite words; they are not pious words he is expected to say. This is the

resolve of his deepest being.

The second round of testing ends in a remarkably similar way. This time Job's focus is revealed in an encounter with his wife:

*His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (2:9-10).*

At first glance, this may seem like fatalistic resignation. That is not the case. As chapters 3 to 31 reveal, Job has a passionate trust in God. But he quickly enters the crucible of grief, and these chapters describe the depth of his struggle to maintain his confidence in God's goodness, as well as His control.

If Job's immediate recourse was confidence in God's control, his ultimate resolution was trust in the character of God. In the

powerful conclusion of the book, Job meets the living God (Job 38–42). He receives no explanations for what has happened or why. Instead, he meets God and is overpowered by His wisdom, His power, His grace, and His care. Job's ultimate answer is not philosophical or theological but personal. He finds himself humbled and repentant before the God of glory and grace: "My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6). In God's presence, Job's view of God and himself has changed. There is much that has not taken place. God has not explained Job's pain. He has not answered his questions. He has not defended His actions. He has not unraveled the mystery of evil. But He has revealed Himself and called for Job's trust. The Lord is more concerned to enlarge Job's trust than to satisfy his curiosity.

God can always be trusted, even when we do not understand what He is doing. He is unchanging in His character, the only fixed point in a changing world.

God has a right to do what He does: He is sovereign. God has a reason for what He does: He is good and wise. God has a goal in all He does: He is fair and gracious.

The story of Job drives home a powerful truth. We need to fill our minds with thoughts of God that are worthy of Him. All unworthy ideas get us dangerously off course. At the heart of his ordeal, Job cries out in words of faith and hope:

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (19:25-27).*

What a powerful example for us. For the truth is, we know so much more of God than Job did. Our vision of Him is far more compelling. Our North Star is the triune God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know the Word become flesh. We possess the words and works of Jesus. We see in His Person the incarnate truth about God. We stand at the cross and wonder at the depth of His love. We stand before the open tomb and recognize His power. We have His Spirit living within to personalize His presence. We possess His Word of truth, in which we can hear His voice. He is the fixed point, the North Star, or, to use His description of Himself, “the bright Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). He is the indispensable constant to enable us to live life well. If He is not the fixed reference point by which we constantly determine our location and direction, we are doomed to flounder.

## “DON’T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT”

Living life in the modern world is like trying to navigate an uncharted, rapidly changing, unpredictable ocean. We have sailed off the edge of our maps. The first need is to have a fixed, unchanging reference point. That North Star is our triune God, made known in the Lord Jesus Christ. Navigation, however, requires much more than a fixed reference point. I know how to find the North Star in the night skies. I don’t have the slightest idea how to find my location by using it. Even if I did, I would need the appropriate tool to enable me to bring the North Star down to my horizon. A Christian knows that the Bible, the written Word of God, is the God-given navigational tool to enable us to reach our God-intended destination, which is

likeness to Jesus, for the glory of God and the good of others. But I need more than knowledge that the Bible is my spiritual sextant. I need to know how to use it properly. The great example of the proper attitude toward and use of Scripture is found in the Lord Jesus. That being so, the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to Scripture must shape my use of and attitude to God's Word.

One of the constant themes of the Gospels is the centrality of Scripture in the life of the Lord. The Bible filled His teaching, directed His choices, and foretold His sufferings. He steered His life by Scripture, and that is never more clearly seen than in His encounter with Satan at the outset of His public ministry. Luke gives us the account in chapter 4 of his gospel:

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty*

*days He was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry. The devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give You all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if You worship me, it will all be Yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If You are the Son of God," he said, "throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command His angels*

*concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time (Lk. 4:1-13).*

The greatest privilege of life is to become a Christ-follower, a person living by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The greatest purpose in life is to become like Christ, living a fully developing, fully human life, imitating Christ. There are many ways in which we cannot become like the Lord Jesus, for He is the God-man, and the temptation of Christ reveals His unique nature as the Son of God. At the same time, the temptation was possible only because the Lord Jesus had taken an authentic human nature, and in His victory over temptation He employed the same

resource we, His followers, possess—the Word of God.

### **The Temptation Of The Lord Jesus Reveals His Unique Person.**

There were no human witnesses to this remarkable confrontation, which is recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Lord Jesus must have told this story to His disciples to enable them to see His uniqueness more clearly. The striking thing is that this is not a surprise attack by Satan. Luke tells us that the Spirit led Jesus in the desert. Matthew is even more specific: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Mt. 4:1). This encounter was not an ambush, sprung by Satan on an unsuspecting Jesus. It was a demonstration, engineered by the living God. Satan’s intention in his attack was the destruction and disqualification of the Lord Jesus. Were He to succumb,

Jesus could not become our Savior. So Satan put Jesus under relentless, shrewd, calculated pressure. God's purpose was entirely different. The steadfastness of Jesus under Satan's most intense attacks vindicated and validated Him. His true nature as the perfect man, proven under testing, qualified Him to be the Substitute for His people and the High Priest who identifies and sympathizes with His tempted people. In the Lord's case, temptation didn't cause His failure; it exposed His remarkable character.

The conditions of the temptation Christ endured are significant. The place is the desert, where God's people Israel had failed so deeply centuries before, when the Lord brought them out of Egypt. Adam, by contrast, had failed under temptation in a perfect environment. Jesus will demonstrate that He is all that Adam and Israel should have

been and failed to be. The process is a 40-day ordeal in which the Lord goes without food. Apparently several temptations occurred during that period, but the Gospels point us only to the final three, which come at a time when Jesus is physically at His weakest and most depleted. Socially, He is isolated, utterly without an earthly support system.

Round one of Satan's attack directly addresses the Lord's obvious physical condition. "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread" (Lk. 4:3). Satan begins with the subtle smoothness of the skilled seducer. He does not begin by attacking or doubting Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. In fact, he accepts it for the sake of argument: "If you are the Son of God (and I'll assume that you are)." The essence of the attack is in the suggestion "Tell this stone to become bread." On the basic

level, this is an enticement to a hungry man to satisfy his hunger. The Lord Jesus' body did not differ from ours in its physical needs. What could be more powerful than an invitation to eat after 40 days of denial? By a simple act, He would not only satisfy His hunger but would also demonstrate His special powers to the enemy.

But this temptation operates at an even deeper level, which shows the subtlety of the tempter. As God the Son, Jesus had exercised His divine attributes for all eternity in perfect agreement with the Father. Now, as He lived His life as the God-man, He had submitted Himself to His Father's will. Satan's inducement is for Jesus to live by self-gratification, using His powers autonomously, serving His own agenda, and doing His own thing.

It's not wrong in itself to satisfy a physical need such as hunger. It's not wrong to do

a miracle, turning stones into bread. But Satan's appeal was for Jesus to take a shortcut, to cut His Father out of the equation and to set His needs above everything else. This is one of Satan's favorite ploys. "Your needs, your desires are the priority. Satisfy them. Serve yourself." Sex, food, marriage, money, pleasure, possessions—these are good in themselves. They are to be enjoyed fully within the boundaries of the will of God, boundaries that are set for our well-being. But when these things become the priority, when we indulge our desires autonomously, we are falling into the trap of the evil one. This is the old lie he used with Eve: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." The point wasn't just that Eve would have intellectual knowledge of good and evil but that she would define good and evil, determining for herself what was right or wrong. This is the essence of

sin: We usurp the place of the sovereign God.

The Lord's response is brief but direct: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Mt. 4:4). He is saying, emphatically, "I eat at the direction of My Father, not at the urging of My stomach." Luke gives a shorter version of the quotation than Matthew does, but the message is the same: Food (or, My body and its needs and desires) doesn't have the priority. God does. He is Lord. The Lord Jesus could have asserted His authority, but He rests His response upon written Scripture (Dt. 8:3). He is not only responding to Satan; He is declaring the fundamental principle by which He navigates life: *Obeying God is the supreme priority of life.*

Round two of Satan's attack on the Lord begins with a physical change of location. Satan transports Jesus to a

high place from which he shows Him "in an instant all the kingdoms of the world" (Lk. 4:5). Since there is no physical location where that would be possible, this is obviously some kind of visionary experience. Satan's claim is breathtaking in its audacity: "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to" (v.6). The claim is delusional, like a child with someone else's toy: "I have it. It's mine." The sovereign God has not ceded authority of any part of His creation to the enemy. When the Lord Jesus describes Satan as "the prince of this world" in John 14:30, He is not suggesting that the devil has any legitimate authority over the world. The "world" in that context is the evil world system in rebellion against God and composed of those in rebellion against God. It is this that Satan offers: "Take it. It's Yours.

I won't fight You for it. All You need to do is bow down and worship me."

The offer must have been enticing. The kingdoms of the world rightfully belong to the Lord Jesus. Were He to accept Satan's offer, He could reclaim His property and avoid the cross. Success without suffering. What a concept! He could take the easy way and detour around the cross. If we have any idea of how costly the cross was to the Lord, we can understand how attractive Satan thought this offer might be to Jesus. Modern Christ-followers know the same temptation in another form: Avoid suffering and enjoy the world. Just serve another king.

The Lord's response is clear and direct. He could have debated Satan's claim, but He doesn't. He could have attacked Satan's audacity, but He doesn't. He could have mocked Satan's credibility, but He doesn't. Instead, He quotes God's Word, again from the

book of Deuteronomy: "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'" (Lk. 4:8; see Dt. 6:16), establishing a second non-negotiable principle by which He navigates life: *Worshipping God is life's supreme priority.* Any rival claims must be rejected. Only the eternal God is worthy of our reverence.

Round three, as Luke records the events, involves another change of location, this time to the temple in Jerusalem. Luke probably has placed this encounter as the climax because it mirrors the flow of events in his gospel. In fact, Luke 9:51 depicts the Lord resolutely setting out for Jerusalem, where He confronts the final attack of Satan in the events that lead to the cross (Luke 19ff.). This, then, becomes a kind of preview of that final encounter, waged on "the highest point of the temple." This was probably a place on the walls of the temple area, which dropped

off more than 400 feet to the Kidron Valley below. The devil's suggestion is clear: "If You are the Son of God," he said, "throw Yourself down from here" (v.9), although it is not clear whether this was meant to be a public act, seen by many, or a private one, witnessed only by Satan.

This time there is an added twist from Satan, who attempts to buttress his temptation by quoting the Bible. If Jesus uses the Scriptures, so will he! "For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (vv.10-11; see Ps. 91:11-12). Satan quotes the Scripture accurately but devilishly, tearing it out of its intended context and using it to try to turn Jesus away from His Father, not toward Him. This is extremely important for us to remember: There is a way of using the Word of God that transmutes it

into the voice of Satan. It isn't enough just to use the Bible. We must use it in a way that honors and respects Scripture for what it truly is: God's written Word.

Satan's temptation here is a subtle one: "You claim to believe the Bible. Here's a promise. Step out in faith; take a risk. God will bail you out." We live in an age that collects experiences, even spiritual ones. Sometimes ideas are presented as if the whole thing is about us: about our success, our prosperity, or our happiness. "Name it and claim it," we're told. Bible verses are wrenched out of context to justify a self-indulgent lifestyle. God becomes our servant, catering to our whims. And we can prove it from the Bible!

The Lord's response is again direct: "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (v.12). And again He goes to Deuteronomy (6:16). Testing the Lord is not trusting Him. Scripture is

not supreme; God is. Please don't misunderstand. The Bible is God's inspired authoritative Word. But it must be used under His authority, consistent with His character and purpose.

Thus, this third navigational principle is consistent with the previous two: *Trusting God is life's supreme priority*. The three join inseparably together: obeying God, worshiping God, trusting God.

The Lord Jesus is unique, and His victorious resistance over Satan's temptation demonstrates His uniqueness and His supremacy. But the account of the temptation also points to the abiding navigational principles that guided His life and should also guide ours.

**The Example Of The Lord Jesus Reveals Our Indispensable Resource: The Word Of God.** The account of the Lord's victory over Satan's seduction is rich

with lessons for every Christ-follower. But there are three of special significance when it comes to navigating life in a fluid, unpredictable world.

First, *navigating life requires a deep confidence in the Word of God*. The Lord Jesus obviously had an authority not possessed by any human being. In the Sermon on the Mount, He proclaims authoritatively, "You have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . ." His is not the authority of a learned rabbi or the voice of tradition or official position. He speaks as the Son of God, possessing unique power and authority over Satan and every other created being. But He does not argue His case or even declare the truth in His own name. Rather, His continued response is to quote Scripture. "It is written," He declared, repeating God's Word in simplicity and brevity. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that, for Jesus, Scripture is the final court of

appeal. What Scripture says, God says. Just as significantly, Satan makes no effort to dispute the Bible. He may misuse it, but he never counters the Lord's response when Jesus stands upon the authority of the Bible.

Few things are more important for a Christ-follower to consider than the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Word of God and His profound respect for its authority. At every major point in His ministry, the Word of God is there. He defines His ministry by quoting the words of Isaiah 61 as His personal manifesto (Lk. 4:16-21). He builds His most famous sermon around a clarification of the true meaning of Scripture (Mt. 5-7). He condemns the Jewish leaders, not because they value Scripture too highly but because they are ignorant of its clear message (Jn. 5:39-40, 46) or because they have

encrusted it with layers of tradition that cover its true meaning (Mt. 15:1-9). He declares that the Bible is of enduring authority, an authority that reaches to its smallest part:

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and*

*the teachers of the law,  
you will certainly not enter  
the kingdom of heaven  
(Mt. 5:17-20).*

Indeed, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35). Jesus saw the events of His life as the fulfillment of Scripture, since “the Scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mk. 14:49). Even on the cross His mind was full of God’s Word (Jn. 19:28). And after the resurrection, one of His priorities was to open the Scriptures for His followers and explain “what was said . . . concerning Himself” (Lk. 24:27,32). The Lord Jesus lived God’s Word, loved God’s Word, and was loyal to God’s Word. Scripture was His guidebook for His life, His protection in His spiritual warfare, His authority in His public teaching, and His directive for His God-given ministry. He obeyed its commands with His actions, and He honored its meaning with His teaching.

The implications are

obvious and essential. If our Lord and Savior shaped His life by Scripture, how could we imagine we need it less than He did? If we call Him Lord and Teacher, how can we have a lower view of Scripture than He did? If we are His followers, how can we rely on it less than He did? We are no match for the wiles and seductions of Satan, but God’s Word retains its power as the sword of the Spirit, able to put our enemy on the defensive.

One of the first lessons a pilot is taught is, “Rely on your instruments.” Christ-followers need to learn the same lesson from the Lord Jesus. Our instincts, our intuitions, our desires speak to us loudly. It is tempting to do our own thing, to steer by the moral seat of our pants. But such a lifestyle is not only foolish; it is disloyal to our Lord. A Christ-follower imitates his Master by living out a solid confidence in Scripture as God’s written Word. He views the Bible as

an indispensable navigational tool for making the daily choices of life.

A closely related principle follows: *Navigating life requires a working knowledge of God's Word.* The Lord Jesus not only valued Scripture but also knew it and used it. The passages He quotes from the book of Deuteronomy show His deep familiarity with the text of Scripture. His respect for the Word is also shown by His refusal to allow Satan to misuse the Bible. Scripture has a meaning intended by its divine Author; therefore, the text must be handled properly, allowing God to speak and not manipulating it to speak our truths rather than God's truth. So He prays for us as His people: "Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth" (Jn. 17:17).

The great need is for Christ-followers to know God's Word and to handle it properly. It is impossible to be deeply affected by what you do not

know. Are you able to think your way through the Bible's basic story line? Do you know the great biblical passages that describe most clearly the central Christian truths about the nature and character of God, the way of salvation, the fundamental moral and ethical principles that shape Christian behavior, and the basics of prayer? Have you mastered the truths of God's revelation of His heart and mind?

We must handle God's Word with the respect it deserves. As Paul exhorts Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). A navigator who tries to manipulate his instruments into giving him a reading he desires rather than the reading that reflects reality is a fool. It has become fashionable to read the Scripture with only one question in mind: What

does this mean to me? The question is mistimed. The first question must always be, What does this passage mean? What is the author really saying, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Then, and only then, when I am confident that I have faithfully understood the meaning of the text, should I ask, What does this then mean to me? The meaning of Scripture must always determine its significance to my life. Otherwise I shift the authority to me, and I merely use the Bible to validate my opinions. Wise Christians work hard to develop good skills of Bible interpretation, just as a navigator trains himself to use his instruments carefully. For in the final analysis, lives depend on it.

The third principle, then, follows naturally: *Navigating life requires a lifestyle of obedience to the Word of God.* The goal of confidence in the Bible as

God's Word and of knowledge of the Bible is conformity to the truths of the Bible. It does no good to have accurate navigational instruments and readings that you do not follow. The Lord Jesus declared His life principle in these pithy words:

*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work (Jn. 4:34).*

*I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me (Jn. 6:38).*

*I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do (Jn. 17:4).*

At every point, Jesus' life was shaped and directed by the will of His Father. He navigated life by His Father's guidance.

The Bible is the Christian's sextant. It takes the fixed point of the triune God, the North Star, and brings it down to the horizon to locate us in time and space. It spells out

for me, sometimes in direct commands but more often in overarching principles, what it means to live as a follower of Christ. It reveals where I am, often with painful precision, by convicting me of sin. It points me where I need to go by showing me the marriage to which I need to aspire, the character I need to pursue, the behaviors I need to avoid, the habits I need to develop. It holds before me my ultimate destination, which makes the whole journey worthwhile, and inspires me to keep on keeping on.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*

But it is not enough to possess it; we need to steer by it. The Bible does its God-appointed work only

as it becomes the active navigational tool in our lives. Only a fool would carefully calculate his headings and then throw them overboard and do what comes naturally. That is why the Lord's brother, James, warns us: "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Jas. 1:22).

The expression "Don't leave home without it" has been made famous by a certain credit card company. For Christians intent on navigating a chaotic world successfully, the term takes on new meaning. The indispensable navigational tool for life is God's Word, the Bible.



This booklet is excerpted from *True North* by Gary Inrig. *True North* is published by Discovery House Publishers, a member of the RBC Ministries family. Gary is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and currently pastors Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California.

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