

**PRONE**  
Temptation of Christ

Does anyone here know what the prone position is?

It's when a person is face down and prone to physical attack. You can catch him from behind and wound him easily because he doesn't see you coming. It's a position of vulnerability.

An exploiter likes to take advantage of vulnerability – to catch folks when they are most prone to falling for their tricks. That's how they prey on people.

I was, just Friday, with a woman from Cedar Springs rehabilitation. Her name's Verna and she's 96 years old and, while very capable, -- also very loving, -- and she got that call that you all hope an older woman doesn't get. "This is the Nashville police. Your grandson has been picked up for (some crime). We have him here and we can let him out of prison, but we will need security money. He's been having trouble getting a hold of someone who could help him. We're running out of names. He said we should call you." They even put a young man on the phone who sounded like her grandson who had just a little bit of information that they must have gleaned from the grandson's facebook page.

Have you heard of this scam. Fortunately, Verna remembered that her friend from Willowbrook fell prey to this scam and so she played it smart. She got a number from them, called her actual grandson to make sure he was okay, called the police with the number, and let them take it from there.

What would it mean to you if I used the phrase: VULNERABLE? Give me an example of time when a person is vulnerable?

Depression (can lead you to substance abuse, to making hasty decisions, to giving up)

Time of Crisis (vulnerable to doubt, anger, fear)

Loss (of a loved one, of a home -- prone)

Financial difficulty. (vulnerable to get rich quick schemes)

Loneliness.

Vulnerability. That's Satan's magic wand. He watches and he waits for the appropriate time to pounce upon his prey; and he is happy to exploit that time of vulnerability with his lies, his lures, and his lustful enticements.

Look at our text. Jesus has just begun His three-year journey of preaching and teaching, and the Devil wants to discourage Him from His work of atonement and lead Him toward a ministry of that focuses on Himself. He sees that Jesus is in a mode of fasting, and he says to himself, "This is the time. He's hungry, He's thirsty, He's tired, He's lonely, and He has on His mind the frightful task that lay before Him as the humbled Son of God. So I will go at him with my best deceptions. In fact, I will use the very promises of God to take Jesus' mind to the places I would have Him go.

"Jesus, are you really the Son of God? Does God really love you? If so, then let Him provide for your needs, like I can. If so, let Him bless you with earthly items, like I can. If so, let Him give you glory, as I could. Don't forget, Jesus, I am the Prince of this World, and I have so much to offer you. And what does He (the Father) have for you. Look at you. You're wandering around in a desert. Forty days. No food. That's hardly love."

And Jesus IS hungry and tired. And Jesus DOES know, even better than Satan, the hard road that He will have to journey to win our salvation. He can see the mocking, and the nails, and crown of thorns, and spear. No question. As a human being, He is prone, vulnerable.

But notice the very first line of our text. Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit;" and He was using this time in the wilderness not to meander about and mourn the fate that awaited Him as the suffering servant, nor to think about the pangs that His body was undergoing during the time of fasting, but rather to fortify Himself by using the time to connect to His Father, to meditate on the promises He was about to fulfill, and to steel Himself for His journey of obedience.

And so, the vulnerable moment passes because Jesus has chosen to use this time of denial not to question God, but to communicate with Him -- not to doubt God, but to trust in Him, not to focus on His lack, but to focus on God's faithfulness.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ. All of us have days when we enter into the wilderness. All of us have moments when we will be particularly vulnerable to the craftiness and lies of the

Evil One. Maybe it will come as a result of the enemy exploiting personal vulnerabilities -- the habits, the addictions, the fears. Or maybe it will come as the result of relationship struggles -- the loneliness, the fights between parents and children or between husband and wife. Or maybe it will come as a result of world or bodily dysfunction -- natural disasters, sickness, disease, deterioration of those things once strong and self-sufficient. Or maybe it will come as a result of financial challenges -- job loss, stock market fluctuation, mismanagement, lack of discipline or poor prioritizing.

There are many deserts out there and an Evil One who longs to use them to his advantage. “Does God really love you? Is He faithful to His promises? Then why doesn’t He magically cure your disease, release you from your addiction, protect you from job loss, enable you to get along better with your spouse, your kids, your parents, your coworkers.”

St. Peter declares, “The Devil is a roaring lion seeking to devour.” He is watching and waiting -- stalking and scheduling His moment to ply his devices on what he deems to be your unguarded spirit. And let me tell you, he has a knack for finding just that spot where there is the tiniest little crack in your armor of defense -- that mini hole that he can chip away at, little by little, to undermine God’s work in your life.

Thanks be to God that we do not fight Him on our own power, cause left to ourselves we will be like the lonely deer out by the brook. The lion will pounce on us and we will barely know what happened except we will wonder, “When did I start doing that? How did I let myself fall into this trap? How will I pick up the pieces of this mess? What is the answer to this problem I have created?”

But brothers and sisters in Christ, we do NOT fight alone. No. At the tip of our fingers and at the edge of our breath is One who fought the Tempter and won -- One who entered into the arena of sin and emerged as the Victor. He is the One who was not fooled by the clever twists and turns that Satan employed during Jesus moments of vulnerability. He is the One who was not dissuaded by God’s plan despite the empty, yet appealing promises, that were made by the Enemy. No. He knew that there was no easy road. He knew that winning our victory would mean His own degradation, depravation, decimation and crucifixion. His wilderness would last for years, and, through all that time the Devil would come to Him again and again and again

seeking to gain an entry point. “Give it up, Jesus. They’re not worth it, Jesus. Look at their foolishness. Look at their faithlessness. They have no appreciation for who you are.”

But Jesus saw through the delusion and went to the cross -- where His obedience and faithfulness brought us the open arms of forgiveness and love from the One who made us. And now He is in our corner to help us through every time of vulnerability and weakness. He is the One who helps us put up our defenses and see through the lies. He is the One who enables us to resist the delusions and fight off the temptations. He is the One who has already forgiven us for the times we have failed and will fail again. And He is the One who declares that, in the end, the gates of hell will not prevail because we have been blessed with the righteousness of Christ.

And so we win -- every time. Because He Who is faithful wins -- every time. And as we cling to Him and rely on His strength rather than our own, we find that He can fortify us to face tomorrow, and the next day, and the next with confidence and faith that the final word will always be Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.