

## 320: Temptation and Vocation (Come Follow Me; New Testament February 17)

Matthew 4; Luke 4-5; John 2-4

This episode of Latter-day Saint Sunday School covers the Come, Follow Me material for February 10: Matthew 4; Luke 4-5; (home study) and February 17: John 2-4 (Sunday School). Corresponds to Engaging Doctrine Episode 320.

I am currently debating whether to keep to every two weeks or switching to every week... more on that soon!

Preview of next two episodes:

321: Law of Jesus (Come Follow Me; New Testament March 3)  
Matthew 5-7; Luke 6

322: Healing Discipleship (Come Follow Me; New Testament March 17)  
Matthew 8-12; Mark 2-5, 8; Luke 7, 11

This episode:

1. Prayer
2. Follow Up
3. Nugget: John and the Synoptics
4. Devotional: (David Whyte's Ambition)
5. Participation
6. Challenge
7. Preview
8. Lesson
  - a. Reading Review
  - b. Temptation
    - i. Appetite: What your body wants (stone to bread)
    - ii. Ego: What you think of yourself (angels save you)
    - iii. Status: What others think of you (rule the world)
    - iv. Other lessons from temptation: Stick to principles, and only give things the energy they deserve (underline that point). Also, maintaining boundaries.

- c. Vocation
  - i. Self-awareness
  - ii. Work
  - iii. Recognition
- d. Life's work and work of life

Prayer: Pray God to increase our ability to fulfil our purpose here on earth

Follow Up: What has your example been like this past week?

Nugget: John and the Synoptics

Devotional: Ambition by David Whyte (from the book Consolations)

#### AMBITION

is a word that lacks ambition: ambition is frozen desire, the current of a vocational life immobilized and over-concretized to set, unforgiving goals. Ambition may be essential for the young but becomes the essential obstacle of any mature life. Ambition abstracts us from the underlying elemental nature of the creative conversation while providing us the cover of a target that becomes false through over description, over familiarity or too much understanding.

The ease of having an ambition is that it can be explained to others; the very disease of ambition is that it can be so easily explained to others. What is worthy of a life's dedication does not want to be known by us in ways that diminish its actual sense of presence. Everything true to itself has its own secret language and an internal intentionality with a secret surprising flow, even to the person who supposedly puts it all in motion. Ambition ultimately withers all secrets in its glare before those secrets have had time to come to life from within and then thwarts the generosity and maturity that ripens the discourse of a lifetime's dedication to a work.

We may direct the beam of ambition to illuminate a certain corner of the future world but ultimately it can reveal to us only those dreams with which we have already become familiar. Ambition left to itself, like a Rupert Murdoch, always becomes tedious, its only object, the creation of larger and larger empires of control; but a true vocation calls us out beyond ourselves; breaks our heart in the process and then humbles, simplifies and enlightens us about the hidden, core nature of the work that enticed us in the first place. We find that all along, we had what we needed from the beginning and that in the end we have returned to its essence, an essence we could not understand until we had undertaken the journey.

No matter the self-conceited importance of our labors we are all compost for worlds we cannot yet imagine. Ambition takes us toward that horizon, but not over it - that line will always recede before our controlling hands. But a calling is a conversation between our physical bodies, our work, our intellects and imaginations, and a new world that is itself the territory we seek. A vocation always includes the specific, heart-rending way we will fail at our attempt to live our lives fully. A true vocation always metamorphoses both ambition and failure into compassion and understanding for others.

Ambition takes willpower and constant applications of energy to stay on a perceived bearing; but a serious vocational calling demands a constant attention to the unknown gravitational field that surrounds us and from which we recharge ourselves, as if breathing from the atmosphere of possibility itself. A life's work is not a series of stepping-stones, onto which we calmly place our feet,

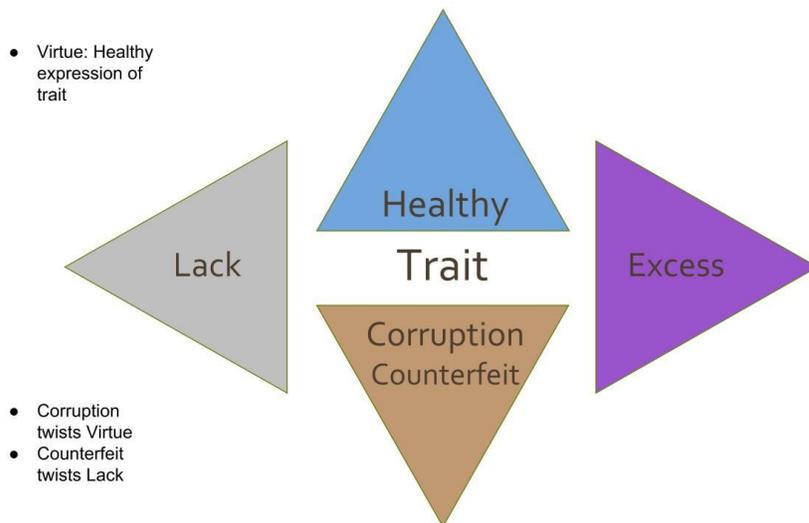
but more like an ocean crossing where there is no path, only a heading, a direction, in conversation with the elements. Looking back we see the wake we have left as only a brief glimmering trace on the waters.

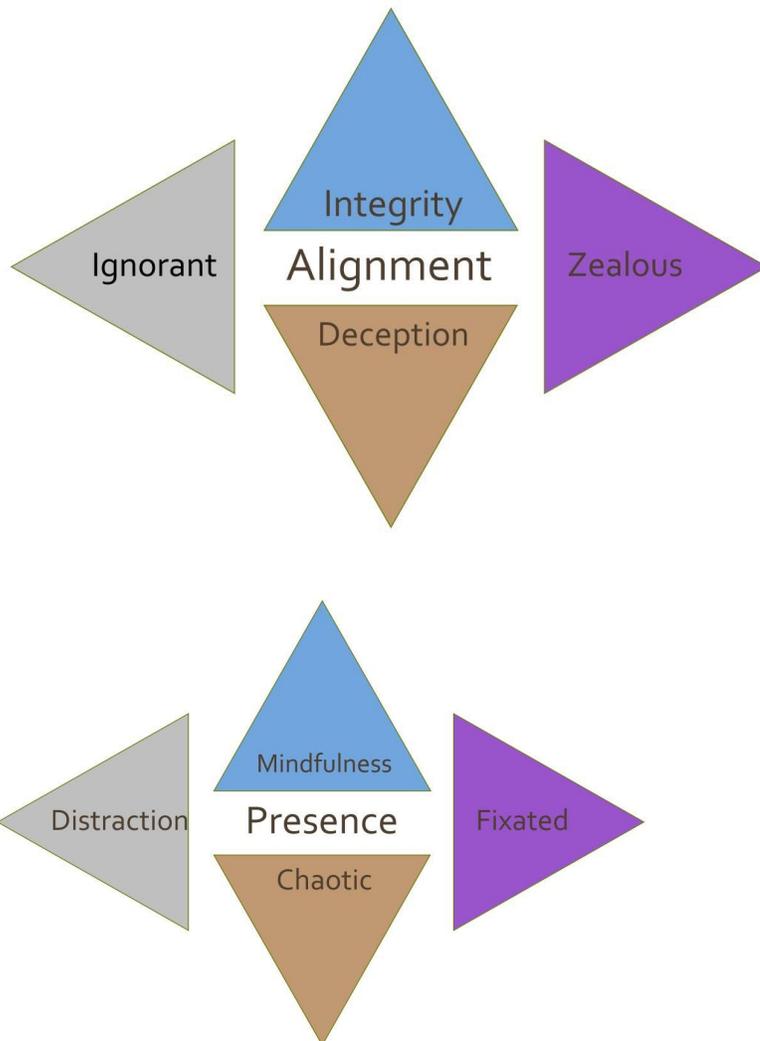
Ambition is natural to the first steps of youth who must experience its essential falsity to know the larger reality that stands behind it, but held onto too long, and especially in eldership, it always comes to lack surprise, turns the last years of the ambitious into a second childhood, and makes the once successful into an object of pity.

The authentic watermark running through the background of a life's work, is an arrival at generosity, and as a mark of that generosity, delight in the hopes of the young: and the giving away to them, not only of rewards that may have been earned but the reward in the secret itself, the core artistry that made the journey a journey. Perhaps the greatest legacy we can leave from our work is not to instill ambition in others, though this may be the first way we describe its arrival in our life, but the passing on of a sense of sheer privilege, of having found a road, a way to follow, and then having been allowed to walk it, often with others, with all its difficulties and minor triumphs; the underlying primary gift, of having been a full participant in the conversation.

'AMBITION' From CONSOLATIONS:

The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words. © David Whyte and Many Rivers Press 2015





Participation: Ask class members to share what brings them fulfillment, what they excel at, what they feel their purpose in life is (again, mine is well-being, understanding how humans work and how we can human better, and specifically to help young Americans appreciate the power of religion and spirituality)

Challenge: When you face temptation this week, remind yourself of your goals and purpose

Preview: Sermon on the Mount (be thinking about how we can internalize the gospel, live the higher law)

Reading Review

Reading Review (Wayment's Translation)

Greek tempt: peirazdo: put to the test, entice to (improper) behavior.

Matthew 4: Note the juxtaposition of Jesus being led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Jesus 40 days of fasting corresponds to Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, as

well as drawing parallels to Moses (Deut 9:9, where Moses fasts 40 days on the mountain before receiving the tablets) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). The tempter taunts Jesus, saying IF you are the Son of God, trying to play to his ego. Instead, Jesus responds with scripture. Next Satan quotes scripture (Psalms), and Jesus responds again with scripture. Finally Jesus commands Satan to depart, and angels minister to him, as they did Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8). Note the escalation and representation of temptations... we'll talk about the during the lesson.

Jesus moving away from Nazareth was a really big deal... people in the ancient world simply didn't do that. Matthew emphasizes as often as he can that Jesus fulfills scripture. Jesus' first message, taken from Mark, is "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near". Repent is a marvelous word, metanoieo, to think in a new way, have a change of mind (we might add a change of heart), have a new orientation toward ourselves, others, life. Jesus calls two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James (Jacob in Greek) and John, and then immediately leave everything to become spiritual fishers of souls. Matthew finishes with a summary: Jesus preaches the gospel, heals the sick, and casts out devils. In other words, he increases the dominion of God and decreases the dominion of evil.

Luke 4: Look for differences between Matthew and Luke, so we can see and learn from their particular emphases. Jesus being "full of the Spirit" is a repeated theme. Remember that Messiah means "anointed one", and the spirit has anointed Jesus in preparation for his mission and ministry. Note that Luke changes the order of temptations! In Matthew they increase in scale (stone, temple, world), while in Luke they end with the temple. Luke 4:13 is haunting foreshadowing (Wayment's translation, similar to the ESV's): "WHen the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until it was an opportune time." He teaches and is praised in the synagogues. Then he comes home. He reads a Messianic passage from Isaiah 58:6 (our only record of Jesus reading) and the people are shocked, even wanting to throw him off a cliff. Luke emphasizes Jesus as teacher. He also heals all those who are sick. He forbids the devils to speak, as is the case in Mark. He moves from place to place even though people beg him to stay. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law (before he calls Peter to be a disciple).

5: Luke calls Peter and Andrew, James and John. There is the added miracle of the overwhelming haul of fish (probably prefiguring messianic abundance), which leads to Peter asking Jesus "depart from me, Lord". There is something touching in Jesus' statement that yes, he wants to heal the leprous man (Luke 5:13). We have the healing of the paralyzed man, which parallels Mark 2). An example of close reading is to notice that Luke mentions "roof tiles" (19), which presupposes a Roman-style home, whereas Mark talks about "digging through the roof", which presupposes a more humble thatch roof. This story juxtaposes two genres: a healing story and a dispute. In this case, Jesus

proves he has authority to forgive sins, healing the soul, by demonstrating his power to heal the body. Jesus defends his sharing of table fellowship with sinners to the self-righteous (which in part prefigures who will belong in the Messianic Era). The proverbs quoted at the end of chapter 5 contrast the old ways and the new era inaugurated by Jesus. We need to adopt new ways of thinking and being to be ready for Jesus and his message.

Take a moment to notice how DIFFERENT John feels than the other gospels!

A few things before we dig in. John uses many literary devices to highlight Jesus' nature and identity. One is irony, and a common pattern is that Jesus will say something ambiguous (using a word with a double meaning for example), which leads to misunderstanding, which provides Jesus the opportunity to expound on his identity, usually at length.

The gospel also employs contrasts. Notice the differences between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman for example:

Nicodemus	Samaritan Woman
Named	Unnamed
Night	Day
Jewish	Outsider
High status	Low
Cautious	Believes openly

The gospel is structured around seven "signs". In the other gospels miracles are called manifestations of power (dunamis, same root as our dynamite) and in John they are signs of Jesus' identity (semeia). Note how John counts them off. There may have been an earlier "Book of Signs" that the gospel writer used, as well as a "Book of Glory"

1. [Changing water into wine](#) at Cana in [John 2:1-11](#) - "the first of the signs"
2. [Healing the royal official's son](#) in [Capernaum](#) in [John 4:46-54](#)
3. [Healing the paralytic at Bethesda](#) in [John 5:1-15](#)
4. [Feeding the 5000](#) in [John 6:5-14](#)
5. [Jesus walking on water](#) in [John 6:16-24](#)
6. [Healing the man blind from birth](#) in [John 9:1-7](#)
7. The [raising of Lazarus](#) in [John 11:1-45](#)

The gospel is also structured around "I am" sayings, where Jesus implicitly and explicitly declares himself God (alluding to the name of God in Exodus 3:14). He also declares

himself to be the bread of life, light of the world, door, good shepherd, resurrection and the life, way, truth, and the life, and the true vine.

John 2: We have the miracle of turning water to wine at the wedding feast (possibly a family member, given that Mary is responsible for providing wine). This symbolizes the abundance of the Messianic Era, as well as demonstrating Jesus' glory.

In response to a great question in the Facebook group I answered:

Great question! The comment that this miracle "manifested his glory" (11) is significant, as well as "my time has not yet come".

Jesus' ministry in a nutshell is manifesting the glory and abundance of the Messianic Era in the here and now. That is what it means that the kingdom/dominion of God has come near/is breaking into this world. Raymond Brown calls this the theme of "Messianic replacement and abundance"... Jesus takes the normal and turns it into the delectable.

My read of Jesus' response to Mary's question is that Jesus expresses concern or perhaps even frustration that Mary is asking him to reveal his power and glory to accomplish a simple task, to "pass the salt" as it were. But he does, and the result is miraculous.

The wine can also be a sacramental allusion.

Verse 12 is simply a transitional passage, getting the characters from one location to another.

Jesus' "Temple tantrum", the cleansing of the temple, happens at the beginning of John, rather than right before Jesus' death in the other gospels (historically, that likely was the direct cause of Jesus' arrest). Jesus prediction that the temple will be destroyed (by God) is found in all the gospels and Acts. In John it is interpreted as a prediction of Jesus' death.

3: Next we have two stories of Jesus testifying to two individuals with very different responses. Nicodemus comes at night. This account depends on a double meaning world play, born from above, which also means born again. Nicodemus misunderstands it to mean again, while Jesus really means from above, a spiritual birth. John 3:16 is the most memorized, translated, and perhaps cherished verse in all the Bible. The reference to Jesus baptizing in 3:22 is interesting.

4: There was hostility between Jews and Samaritans, which provides background to this interaction between Jesus and the woman. Note the woman's (I wish we knew her name) increasing awareness of Jesus' importance and identity. Like our last account,

this one also depends on double meaning and misunderstanding. “Living water” also means “running water”. Wayment notes “The statement God is Spirit is made in reference to the nature of God, who is to be worshipped in the spirit and is a spiritual being. The statement need not be taken as an assertion that God is only a spiritual being but that his work is a spiritual effort to save humanity.” Verse 32 is very important “I have food to eat that you know not of”, referring to the satisfaction of doing what we should, living our vocation.

## Lesson

### Temptation

Appetite: What your body wants (stone to bread)

Ego: What you think of yourself (angels save you)

Status/Greed: What others think of you (rule the world)

Other lessons from temptation: Stick to principles, and only give things the energy they deserve (underline that point). Also, maintaining boundaries.

### Vocation

Self-awareness

Work

Recognition

### Life’s work and work of life

Central message: Life constantly invites us into genuine work and seduces us to cheat. Genuine work is hard, and most of us cheat how we can, in little or big ways.

If you have not been truly tempted, if you have not faced your darkness, you are not good... you are just fortunate.

(Really juxtapose the temptation and vocation idea. Working toward our passions is one of the healthiest things we can do...) Really dig into our tendencies, our predilections, or genetics, the small amount of freedom we have