



Discussion Guide

Date: 2/22/2026

Sermon Title: Am I what I achieve?

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and gracious God, in this season of Lent, quiet the voices that compete for our identity. We confess that we often measure ourselves by productivity, performance, and praise. Through your Spirit, lead us into the wilderness with Jesus so that we may rediscover who we are as your beloved children. Root our worth not in what we achieve, but in who you say we are. Amen.

OPENING QUESTION:

1. Where do you feel the most pressure to prove yourself?

SETTING THE CONTEXT:

Just before this passage, at Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven says: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17, NRSV) The temptation narrative follows immediately. The identity declared in baptism is tested in the wilderness.

EXPLORING THE TEXT:

Read Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV). If you're in a group, have members read from different translations like The Message or ESV.

1. Why do you think the tempter begins with "If you are the Son of God..." in verse 3? What is being questioned? Note a better way to translate that text is "so since you are the Son of God".
2. How is this temptation about more than hunger? Where are you tempted to prove your worth by producing results? Where is our society are we being judged by our production?
3. Jesus responds, "One does not live by bread alone..." (4:4). What does that say about identity versus productivity?

Theological Reflection: John Wesley preached that our identity is grounded in grace before works. In his sermon The Scripture Way of Salvation, he reminds us that prevenient grace goes before all effort. We are loved before we perform.

4. Looking at Matthew 4:6 What would dramatic public proof have accomplished for Jesus?

5. How does social media or public validation tempt us to “throw ourselves down” for attention? Have you ever equated visibility with value?
6. Jesus refuses to test God. What does that teach us about secure identity?

Theological Reflection: Henri Nouwen writes in *Life of the Beloved* that the greatest temptation of Jesus was to become “relevant, spectacular, and powerful.” Nouwen argues that these same temptations distort our identity today.

7. Looking at Matthew 4:9 What shortcut is being offered to Jesus?
8. Where do we see achievement tied to compromise in our culture? What might we be tempted to worship in order to succeed?
9. Jesus says, “Worship the Lord your God...” (4:10). How does worship re-center our identity?

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 8:3 (quoted by Jesus); John 6:35; Psalm 127:1–2; Psalm 46:10; Galatians 1:10; Luke 10:20; Exodus 20:3; Philippians 2:5–11; 1 John 3:1

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Allison draws attention to the phrase “since you are the son of God” is a temptation for Jesus to lean only on his power and not the power and grace of the Father. How does the idea that temptation can come in moments of strength rather than weakness challenge your understanding of spiritual vulnerability?
2. The sermon points out that Jesus went from the very high of his baptism into the low of temptation. In what areas of your life do you find yourself trusting in your own gifts and abilities rather than depending on God's grace?
3. Jesus was tempted to have the power and rule with strength than out of the suffering and sacrifice that he would endure for us. Jesus refused to engage in self-serving miracles. What hope does this offer you to do the same as Jesus did and serve others.
4. Pastor Allison reminds us that we are worthy of God’s love only because we exist. Not by what we achieve, or gain power, or our own ability. In what ways might you be using your strengths or achievements to climb a ladder for your own benefit rather than to serve others and glorify God?

APPLYING IT ALL:

1. How would your life change if you truly believed you were beloved before you achieved it?
2. How can we practice dependence on God in seasons of success and recognition, when we might feel most self-sufficient?
3. What practices during Lent could help “turn down the volume” of achievement culture?
4. Where is God inviting you to rest in your being God beloved rather than striving?

WESLYAN LENS:

We are justified by grace through faith. Our works flow from love, not for love. Sanctification is becoming who we already are in Christ. Ephesians 2:8–10 (NRSV) holds this tension beautifully: “For by grace you have been



saved... not the result of works... For we are what he has made us..." We are God's workmanship — not self-made people.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Faithful God, you named Jesus beloved before he healed, preached, or performed a single miracle. You name us beloved before we succeed or fail. Forgive us when we chase achievement for our identity. Free us from cultural expectations. In this Lenten wilderness, teach us to resist the lies that say we are what we produce. Remind us that we belong to you. Through Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose one or more of the following practices this week.

1. Practice a mantra prayer daily of "I am worthy of God's love." Set a reminder on your phone 2-3 times per day. Journal about how this changes your perspective on your achievements and worth.
2. Do a gift inventory. List your top 3-5 gifts, talents, or strengths. For each one, write down:
 - a. How you've used it for self-serving purposes
 - b. How you could use it to serve others and glorify God
 - c. Choose one concrete way to redirect a gift this week
3. Each morning this week, before starting work or your daily tasks, pray: "God, I am dependent on your grace today. Help me remember I live not by my gifts but by your love." Each evening, reflect: When did I trust in my own abilities today? When did I depend on God?
4. Make a list of things you're proud of achieving. For each achievement, ask: "Does my worth depend on this? What would happen to my sense of identity if this was taken away?" Surrender each achievement to God in prayer.

LEADER NOTES:

- Be prepared for vulnerability - this topic touches on deep issues of worth and identity
- Some group members may struggle with the idea that achievements don't define worth, especially if they've built their identity on success
- Create a safe space where both high achievers and those who feel they haven't achieved much can share honestly
- Emphasize that God isn't opposed to effort or achievement - the issue is when we make these things our source of worth or independence from God
- Be sensitive to those who may be going through job loss, illness, or other situations where achievements have been stripped away

REMEMBER: The goal isn't to stop achieving or using our gifts, but to ground our identity in God's love rather than our accomplishments. We live not by our gifts, but by God's grace.

