VULNERABLE OR VICTORIOUS

Bernie Madoff is infamous for orchestrating one of the largest financial frauds in U.S. history, swindling thousands out of billions of dollars. His Ponzi scheme eventually collapsed, leading to his arrest and imprisonment. With the exception of some small court-ordered payouts, the victims suffered a total loss on their investments.

As most people know, deception is a common tool used to exploit others, especially the disadvantaged and vulnerable. This practice can be seen in many industries. For decades, the tobacco business aimed its deceptive marketing methods at vulnerable populations, such as young people and low-income communities. These practices included downplaying the health risks of smoking and promoting cigarettes as glamorous or trendy. This exploitation led to widespread addiction and many health issues among these targeted groups. Similarly, some pharmaceutical companies have fueled the opioid crisis by aggressively marketing prescription painkillers, downplaying their addictive nature, and encouraging overprescription. This, too, has led to widespread addiction and many overdoses and deaths, particularly among underprivileged populations.

These sinful tactics originated with the archdeceiver, Satan, who has perfected his craft and successfully led billions astray. Believers are not immune to his attacks; we are not completely shielded from his temptations, so how are we to face his schemes and deceptions? How do we overcome him? How do we gain victory while living in the great controversy? This week’s lesson will focus on the power of God’s Word as we face Satan’s attacks.
Write out Matthew 4:1–10 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verse 4. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
THE WORD IS TRUTH

Winston Churchill said, “The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is” (Memories of the Second World War [1959]). Truth has become a rather relative term in recent years. “You have your truth, and I have mine” is a statement that some live by, but is illogical because one person’s truth often directly contradicts someone else’s. How can two contradictory statements both be right when truth at its very foundation is objective, universal, and absolute?

Unfortunately, human beings don’t have access to a document or database that provides every true statement to ever exist. Because of this deficit, we’ve needed (and wanted) to gather truth for ourselves. This desire has led to the development of different resources such as encyclopedias, scientific journals, newspapers, search engines, and artificial intelligence to help provide a common basis for what can be broadly accepted as true. Humans have a longing to discover truth.

From a biblical standpoint, truth is who God is. He Himself proclaims it—Jesus said, rather simply, “I am... the truth” (John 14:6). As the Creator, God defines reality. Everything He says and does is perfectly honorable and contains no contradictions. All of existence stems from who He is. “Your word is truth” (John 17:17), says Jesus, and by His truth and reality-defining words, all things were created.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he did not approach the Son of God with obvious lies but with deceptive questions and misapplied scripture, or truth. These misapplications were attempts to get Jesus to act selfishly and sinfully—to doubt His Father and His Messianic identity. Satan knows that if he can chisel a crack into the foundation of one’s convictions and beliefs, he can gain access to their thinking and sow doubts that spread like weeds, aiming to choke the faith and life out of his victim.

When Jesus lived among us, He had the exact same resources available to Him as we do. He understood that on this broken, confused planet, the only safety is in the Word of God—the truth. He found His identity not in feelings or opinions, but in the inspired, God-breathed scriptures alone. Jesus met Satan’s every deceptive attack with, “It is written.” Christ exemplified Psalm 119:11, which says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

As we go through this life, we are constantly bombarded with opinions, assertions, and claims about truth. Satan works hard to deceive everyone with his lies, half-truths, and misapplications of the truth. His agenda is not just to get you to sin but to keep you confused about truth and prevent you from sharing truth with others. Knowing that “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), the enemy tries to keep you in bondage to his lies. How extremely vital it is, then, to build our lives on God’s true Word, the only firm foundation! How crucial it is to test (cont. on p. 77)
THE WORD HAS POWER

History records many more languages than are currently spoken. Some have become extinct while others have evolved or merged with other languages over time. It is estimated that today there are around seven thousand spoken languages and between four and five thousand written ones. The entire Bible has been translated into more than seven hundred languages, and parts of it have been translated into over three thousand languages. There’s still a large work to be done to deliver the life-changing power of God’s Word to all peoples, tribes, and nations!

No matter what language it’s shared in, the Bible will always impart a message of truth and transformation to believing and Spirit-led hearers. The transformative power of God’s Word goes back to Genesis 1, where God created something out of nothing by merely speaking it into existence. When He speaks, atoms, molecules, and elements burst into being and form structures, cells, and systems of organic and inorganic matter. Nature and science do as His voice instructs. God’s creative word is not diminished by any change, whether it be of language or medium—from audible voice to written word. “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

The creative and transformative qualities of God’s words are not limited to the physical realm; they apply to the spiritual life as well. However, because God is love and never forces us, He respects our choices. What His Word can and will do in our lives depends entirely on our attitudes and decisions. God’s promises and commands can only be effective if we choose to trust and believe in the Promise Giver. To put it simply, God’s Word has the potential to flood our lives with divine power and grace, but it can only be “activated” when faith is present.

It was the memorized and internalized Word of God—Bible truth—that unmasked Satan’s deceptions when he tempted Jesus in the desert, and it was the spoken Word of God that granted Christ victory over both the tempter and his temptations (i.e., “It is written...” [Matt. 4:4, 7, 10]). Jesus understood the Bible as His source of truth. He validated and exemplified its power when He walked among us, utilizing it to guide His ministry and triumph over Satan and his schemes. As believers, we have access to God’s inspired, powerful, truthful Word. We are privileged to experience God’s creative power working in us for our sanctification and to witness Him providing victory over Satan as we deal with the great controversy that permeates our lives. God’s Word has the power to create life where there is only death, to give victory where there is nothing but defeat. The promises of the Bible are saturated with assurances of God’s healing power in every area of life.
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What relationship do the following verses have with Matthew 4:1–10?

Hebrews 4:12, 15
2 Timothy 3:16, 17
John 1:1–3, 14
Psalm 119:11
John 17:17
Ephesians 6:17

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

(Cont. from inGest, p. 75):

all things by the Bible, to be not only familiar with Scripture but immersed in it! If we do so, we have a powerful reference point on which to base our decisions as well as protection when confusion, temptation, and lies burst through our doors. “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer. 15:16).
THE WORD MADE FLESH

Anyone who has been in a long-distance romantic relationship knows how special handwritten letters from your partner are, especially in this digital age. Love letters are small, physical representations of a larger reality. Along with other forms of communication, such letters make the times of separation a bit more bearable. But of course, nothing compares to when the two reunite in person.

The Word is God’s love letter to humanity. The narratives, prophecies, and instructions within the Bible communicate God’s heart and most foundational quality: love. It’s truly wonderful that humanity has been given this love letter, which has spoken to untold billions throughout the millennia. God ensured that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16). His guiding hand was on the entire development of Scripture. We can have confidence that the process of gathering the various biblical books as well as the words within them were divinely orchestrated.

As we know, God went above and beyond all He ever had to do for us. His desire to be with us, as repeatedly expressed in His love letter, led to the grandest manifestation of God to humanity in all history: Jesus. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Bible was written to communicate God’s Word; Jesus came to demonstrate God’s Word. Consider the following parallels between the Bible, the Word versus Jesus, the Word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Bible, the Word:</th>
<th>Jesus, the Word:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the written Word of God.</td>
<td>Is the Word of God made flesh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was written in human languages.</td>
<td>Became human and lived as one of us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains languages and expressions that have human limitations.</td>
<td>Had a human body and experienced human limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was written during specific times, in specific places, and in various cultural circumstances.</td>
<td>Was born into a specific time, place, and cultural circumstance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was written by humans but authored by the Spirit, making its words fully human and fully divine.</td>
<td>Was born to a human woman but was the Son of God, making Him fully human and fully divine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be understood not only as human words but also as God’s Word.</td>
<td>Should be understood not only as the Son of Man but also as the Son of God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jesus is the Word made flesh. He experienced life with us, as one of us. He understands the human experience with all its pains, challenges, and problems. He can perfectly provide for our needs because He knows exactly what it’s like. His incarnation teaches us that God is truly our Immanuel; He is with us, and He is for us! Jesus came to show us the love of God that had already been promised in His written Word.

Meditate on Matthew 4:1–10 again and see what else you can learn about Jesus.

Prayer Response:

If Jesus is the Word made flesh, how should this impact your devotional time and the way you approach Bible study?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through the text of the week?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/GC09-6

09 The Spiritual Warfare, Part 2: The Word
“In our own strength it is impossible for us to deny the clamors of our fallen nature. Through this channel Satan will bring temptation upon us. Christ knew that the enemy would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God. And by passing over the ground which man must travel, our Lord has prepared the way for us to overcome. It is not His will that we should be placed at a disadvantage in the conflict with Satan. He would not have us intimidated and discouraged by the assaults of the serpent. ‘Be of good cheer,’ He says; ‘I have overcome the world.’ John 16:33....

“‘The prince of this world cometh,’ said Jesus, ‘and hath nothing in Me.’ John 14:30. There was in Him nothing that responded to Satan’s sophistry. He did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ’s humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character.

“And how this is accomplished, Christ has shown us. By what means did He overcome in the conflict with Satan? By the word of God. Only by the word could He resist temptation. ‘It is written,’ He said. And unto us are given ‘exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’ 2 Peter 1:4. Every promise in God’s word is ours. ‘By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’ are we to live. When assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours. ‘Thy word,’ says the psalmist, ‘have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.’ ‘By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.’ Psalm 119:11; 17:4.” (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages [1898], 122, 123.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How can we see through Satan’s deceptions, especially if they’re cloaked in biblical lingo?

How can we discern between genuine truth and falsehoods in today’s world?

In what ways has the concept of truth become distorted today?

In what ways have you experienced or seen the transforming power of God’s Word, whether in your own life or in someone else’s?

What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Word made flesh?

Why is it important to build our lives on God’s Word? What does it look like in practice?

How has God helped you find victory when you were tempted?

How can you share God’s Word through your social media platforms?