Explore:
Wrestling with Faith

At a Glance:
Students will explore the forces at play during temptation. Start things off with a Tug-of-War and then read passages from the Heavenly Doctrine. Students write down the what the angels and evil spirits do when our minds are engaged in spiritual wrestling and assemble them on a diagram to gain greater insight into what happens during temptation.



Supplies Needed:
- 2-3 yards (2 meters) rope for a Tug-of-War
- *Wrestling with Faith* page printed in color for each student (Note: if you do not have a color printer, print fewer copies and highlight or underline the colored words in the document.)
- poster board or blank paper
- pens or markers
- Post-it notes to allow several people to work on the project at the same time (if possible, use 3 different colors of Post-it notes)

Teacher Preparation:
- Mark the center of the rope e.g. by tying a strip of fabric at the center point
- Set up a poster or piece of paper by writing “Angels” at the top, drawing an outline of a person in the middle and writing “Evil Spirits” at the bottom.

Directions:

1. Ask for three volunteers for a Tug-of-War. Give them a rope with a marked mid-point. One volunteer will hold the mid-point of the rope; the others will each take an end. The goal is for the person in the middle to remain stationary while the two ends are pulled in opposite directions. People pulling should tug with controlled strength so that the person in the middle moves towards their side. The person in the middle tries to stay put, pulling in which ever direction is needed to do this.
2. Ask the volunteers: Was it easy? Was anything frustrating? What might make it easier? Explain: Scenarios like this take place in our minds every day. The forces at the ends of the rope are like the forces of heaven and hell. While we live in the world, our minds are mid-way between these forces. The Lord guards our freedom every second by balancing these forces in our minds. It is because of this that we can freely choose between the influences of heaven or hell in our lives.

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Explore: Wrestling with Faith continued

3. Jacob wrestled all night. Many wrestling matches are less than six minutes long. What would it be like to wrestle as long as Jacob did?
4. Every person who wants to go to heaven experiences tests of their love and faith. These temptations prepare us for heaven.
5. Sometimes our mental "wrestling" is mild, but at other times it feels long and hard—as if it goes on "all night". We may doubt everything we know and wonder if God even exists. We may know what is the best thing to do, but feel like it will cost us something precious. The New Church calls this kind of wrestling "temptation." The Heavenly Doctrine explains what is happening spiritually during temptations.
6. Hand out *Wrestling with Faith* student page and read aloud with students.
7. We will make a diagram showing the spiritual forces with a person during temptation.
8. Divide students into three groups. Using the *Wrestling with Faith* student page, assign tasks. **Group 1:** copy words that are printed in bold blue letters on Post-it notes and put notes on the figure. **Group 2:** copy words printed in bold black letters on Post-it notes and put them around the word "Evil Spirits". **Group 3:** copy words printed in bold red letters on to Post-it notes and put them around the word "Angels".
9. What tactics do the evil spirits take to persuade us of their point of view? (Make us feel hopeless about ourselves because of things we've done in the past; twist our love of good things into a love of evil and false things; attack the things we love; hide or twist our understanding of what is true including the Lord's mercy and focus our attention on judgment; make us feel as if truth is not a good option; hold us in evil states because they enjoy them, etc.)
10. In what ways do the angels defend us against these attacks? (Help us remember relevant good and true ideas we've learned; inspire our love of what is true and good; help us experience the Lord's presence; inspire us with new truths, inspire us with hope and strength to fight, etc.)
11. Why is it hard to detect the hells at work? (They act secretly and make us feel as if we are acting from our own free will.)
12. What do we experience during temptation?
13. Can a person experience spiritual temptations if they do not care about the Lord and heaven? (No.)
14. Jacob received a new name and as he finished wrestling the sun rose. In what way does the sun rise in our lives when we have overcome in temptation? What new name does the Lord give us?

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Wrestling with Faith

Temptation is a conflict that happens when **a true idea or a good motivation that is important to us is attacked** by the evil spirits and **defended by the angels** who are with us. In terms of a person's faith there can be no temptation unless a person **loves the truth that he or she knows**. Anyone who does not love the true ideas he knows, or is not affected by it, is not troubled about it at all, but anyone who loves the truth **worries that the truth might be harmed and lose its power to guide that person** (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4274).

People who are going through temptation **experience doubts about the end in view or goal being pursued**. That end is the love against which evil spirits **fight** and in so doing place the end in doubt. The more a person loves something, the more it is placed in doubt. Unless a person's love or purpose is placed in doubt, and **even to despair**, there would be no temptation (*Arcana Coelestia* 1820).



During temptation evil spirits **activate a person's false ideas and evil loves**. They **bring out memories** of whatever he has thought and done since early childhood. Evil spirits do this so **cleverly** and **wickedly** that it is impossible to describe it. But the angels who are with him **draw out good and true ideas** that he has **and** in this way **defend him**. A person experiences this as his **conscience tormenting** him.

There are two kinds of temptation, the first involves the understanding, the second involves the will. When a person's temptation involves his understanding, evil spirits **bring up evil deeds** he has done, and use these to **accuse and condemn him**. They **activate his good deeds** too, **but corrupt them** in a thousand ways. At the same time they **activate his thoughts**. Temptations like this are mild.

When a temptation involves what a person loves, it is not so much what he does and thinks that are activated. Instead evil spirits **inflame his evil desires** and destructive loves and direct their **attack through what the person actually desires**. They do it so **secretly** that nobody can believe it is them doing it. They **worm their way into everything** a person wants and almost instantly **twist** and **convert** the **love for what is good and true into a love for what is evil and false**. They act in such a way that people inevitably think that these things come from themselves and from their own free will. Temptations like this are very severe and are felt as **inward pain** and **burning torment** (see *Arcana Coelestia* 751).

The Lord gives each person **true ideas** of the understanding **and good loves** of the will. These truths and goods are **remnants**…. When a person experiences temptations, the angels with him **draw out true ideas** with which they **protect him against the evil spirits** who **activate false ideas** with him (see *Arcana Coelestia* 737).

Temptations are the means by which the **evil loves and false ideas** with a person **are exposed** and **removed** (*Arcana Coelestia* 5246).

So long as temptation continues, a person **thinks that the Lord is absent** because he is troubled by evil spirits so severely that he **can hardly believe that God exists**. Yet **the Lord is** more **closely present** than a person can ever believe. When temptation stops, the person **receives consolation** and then **believes that the Lord is present** (see *Arcana Coelestia* 840).

After temptation **new light** shines forth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5246).