

## Tackling Temptation

**James 1:12 (LB)** Happy is the man who doesn't give in and do wrong when he is tempted, for afterwards he will get as his reward the crown of life that God has promised those who love him.

Thomas Costain's history, *The Three Edwards*, describes the life of Raynald III, a fourteenth-century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means "fat." After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the Nieuwkerk castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room. This would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. He couldn't fit through the door because he was too fat. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods into his rooms to tempt him. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew fatter. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." Raynald stayed in that room for ten years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined he died within a year, a prisoner of his own appetite.

**Every temptation is an opportunity to do GOOD!** On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block when you realize it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing.

Temptation simply provides you with the CHOICE. It can be the weapon of Satan to destroy you or the tool of God to develop you. Every time you choose to do good instead of sin, you will grow in the character of Christ.

What is the character of Christ like? Here's the best description:

**Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)** But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

The fruit of the Spirit always matures and ripens SLOWLY. God develops the fruit of the Spirit in your life by allowing you to experience circumstances in which you're tempted to express the opposite quality.

You can't claim to be good if you've never been tempted to be bad! You can't claim to be faithful if you've never had the opportunity to be unfaithful! Every time you defeat temptation, you become more like Him!

It helps to know that Satan is entirely predictable – he has been using the same strategy on human beings since creation.

**2 Corinthians 2:11 (KJV)** Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

**2 Corinthians 2:11 (NLT)** so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes.

Temptation always follows a four-step process. Satan used it on Adam and Eve, on Jesus, and on everyone else he has ever tempted!

**DESIRE:** This may be a sinful desire or a legitimate desire. Temptation starts when Satan suggests that you give in to an evil desire or that you fulfill a legitimate desire in a wrong way. Always beware of shortcuts – they are often temptations! Temptation starts in the mind, not in circumstances (if you didn't have the desire, the temptation could not attract you).

**Mark 7:20-23 (NLT)** It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God.

**DOUBT:** Satan tries to get you to doubt what God has said. Is this really a sin? Does this really apply to me today? Doesn't God want me to be happy?

**DECEPTION:** Satan is incapable of telling the truth, so anything he says will be untrue or half-true. He tries to replace what God has said in His Word. "You can get away with it; no one will ever know; everyone else is doing it; it's only a little sin."

**DISOBEDIENCE:** This is when you finally act on the thought you've been toying with in your mind. What began as an idea gets birthed into behavior.

**James 1:14-15 (TEV)** But we are tempted when we are drawn away and trapped by our own evil desires. Then our evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

## HOW TO TACKLE TEMPTATION:

### 1. REFUSE TO BE INTIMIDATED.

You will never outgrow temptation; in fact, you can consider temptation a compliment (you don't belong to Satan), a sign that Satan hates you, and a normal part of being human in a sinful world. Temptation is NOT a sign of weakness in and of itself. It is not a sin to be tempted – Jesus was tempted!

**1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)** But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.

God has promised never to allow more ON you than He puts WITHIN you to handle it.

### 2. RECOGNIZE YOUR PATTERN OF TEMPTATION.

Every human being is unique, and each one of us has unique areas of weakness. There are certain situations that make you more vulnerable to temptation than others. You need to know them because Satan surely does!

**1 Peter 5:8 (KJV)** Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

**1 Peter 5:8 (MSG)** Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping.

Ask yourself: WHEN am I most tempted? WHERE am I most tempted? WHO is with me when I am most tempted? HOW do I feel when I am most tempted? Avoid these situations as much as possible! Wise planning reduces temptation!

**Proverbs 16:17 (CEV)** God's people avoid evil ways, and they protect themselves by watching where they go.

Remember that it is easier to stay out of temptation than to get out of it once you are in. So don't get careless!

**1 Corinthians 10:12 (KJV)** Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

**H.A.L.T. = Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired ... BEWARE!**

### 3. REFOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON SOMETHING ELSE.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to “resist temptation” (we are told to “resist the devil”). This is because resisting a thought doesn't work; in fact, it actually reinforces it. The battle for sin is won or lost in your mind – whatever gets your attention will eventually get you.

Ignoring a temptation is far more effective than fighting it! This is the principle of replacement – you overcome evil with good. That's why the Bible repeatedly tells us to keep our minds focused on Jesus.

**Philippians 4:8 (TEV)** In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable.

**Proverbs 4:23 (TEV)** Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.

### 4. REVEAL YOUR STRUGGLE TO A GODLY FRIEND.

God's plan for your life includes other Christians! Real fellowship is the only antidote to your struggle against sins that won't budge.

**James 5:16 (NIV)** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. Problems grow in the dark, but shrink when exposed to the light of truth. You are only as sick as your secrets! Whatever you can't talk about is already out of control in your life. If you could handle it on your own, you would have already done so.

### 5. RESIST THE DEVIL.

**James 4:7 (KJV)** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**James 4:7 (MSG)** So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper.

The Bible often compares Christians to soldiers fighting in enemy territory – but with awesome weapons at their disposal. Our ultimate weapon is the word of God, because it reveals the truth about Satan's lies. (If you don't have any Bible verses memorized, you've got no bullets in your gun!) That's why Jesus quoted Scripture when He was tempted in the wilderness.

## 6. REQUEST GOD'S HELP.

Heaven has a 24/7 emergency hotline when we are feeling tempted, and the Bible guarantees that we can find help!

**Psalm 50:15 (GW)** Call on me in times of trouble. I will rescue you, and you will honor me.

**Hebrews 4:15 (NLT)** This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin.

If God is really waiting to help us defeat temptation, why don't we turn to Him more often? The honest answer is, sometimes we don't want to be helped! We want to give in to temptation even though we know it's wrong. At that moment we think we know what's best for us more than God. Other times, we're embarrassed to ask God for help because we keep giving in to the same temptation. But God never gets irritated or impatient when we keep coming back to Him.

**Hebrews 4:16 (TEV)** Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.

One of the greatest benefits of temptation is that it keeps us dependent on God! (Strong wind strengthens the roots of a tree!)

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