

Dr. Hugh Hamilton
Trinity Presbyterian Church – Pensacola, FL
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HOW TO DEAL WITH TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-11 Psalm 32

All of us face temptation. None of us is too old or too young, too sophisticated or too naive, to escape it. Temptation leads us into all kinds of problems.

When Sandy and I lived in Tennessee, a Nashville newspaper reported the story of a man who attempted a simple burglary. While collecting the valuables in this house, he came across a .44 Magnum pistol and accidentally shot himself in the leg with it. He now had a very painful and dangerous wound, but obviously he couldn't take his problem to the hospital. And about this time, the woman who lives at the house returned home. The burglar felt he had no choice but to tie her up, complicating his original burglary offense.

Now wounded, the man needed a getaway car, so he stole the woman's car. That's Grand theft-auto. The pain and loss of blood from his leg wound caused him to drive rather crazily, which attracted the attention of a police officer. The burglar pulled off the road in his car and the policeman pulled up behind him. The man, now desperate, shot through the windshield of the patrol car and wounded the officer. However, the patrol car was still moving forward and ran over the shooter.

Although the car didn't do much damage because the burglar was in a ditch as the car passed over him, neither that nor the complication of the attempted murder of a police officer was improving his day.

Next, the man fled into the woods on foot. Somewhere back in the woods, he apparently came close to a moonshine still or a marijuana patch. At least that is the best explanation suggested for why the landowner put three .22 caliber slugs in his rear. Obviously in no shape to walk, he crawled to another car and stole it!

When police finally captured the man, he had been shot four times and run over once. He faced charges for attempted murder, armed robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, two counts of grand theft-auto, and a host of lesser crimes. All this in his attempt to cover up a simple burglary! (1)

We all face temptations! None of us is ever old enough, smart enough, or good enough to escape temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. We sin when we give in to temptation. Jesus was able to resist temptation, and with his help, so can we. Let me suggest a few things that can help you battle temptation.

FIRST, YOU HAD BETTER ADMIT TEMPTATION IS REAL! If you say temptation is no threat to you and believe that you cannot fall, you're a fool. We are all susceptible at times, and if we are not vulnerable in one area, we are in some other.

During the Civil War, body armor became a big fad. Though some body armor did save some lives, much of it did not work very well and it failed to stop bullets. The danger lay in believing it made you invincible. When the 21st Alabama unit was skirmishing with Union soldiers in Mississippi, one Union soldier wearing body armor stood and exposed himself to fire from the rebels. Twice Rebel sharpshooters hit him but with no effect. Then a third sharpshooter aimed for the arrogant soldier's head. That ended the matter. Only a fool deliberately exposes himself to gunfire or temptation! Better persons than you and I have given in to temptation. (2)

ADMIT THAT TEMPTATION IS REAL – and ADMIT THAT TEMPTATION IS ADDICTIVE!

It keeps you coming back for more, it traps you before you recognize how serious it is.

Author Bruce Larson writes about a friend who is an avid eagle-watcher and who witnessed a strange incident. Rick watched a familiar eagle go through his normal routines, soaring and swooping. Then the eagle dove down to the valley floor and came up with a large animal gripped in its claws, struggling. Rick watched with fascination, then with growing apprehension. The eagle began to fly crazily and erratically, still gripping his prize. Finally, he wheeled abruptly, crashed headlong into a cliff, and plummeted to the valley floor.

After a long search, Rick came upon the eagle with his dead prey still in his grip. The strange events were immediately explained. The eagle's prize was a badger, one of the meanest and most ferocious animals alive. The scenario was obvious. The eagle had gotten his prize, but the badger was no easy victim. He retaliated by gnawing away the stomach of the eagle. The eagle's prize was his undoing. (3)

That's the powerful grip of temptation and why the Bible commands us to flee temptation. Sin is so addictive that even when we know this situation will ruin our lives, we refuse to let go, refuse to stop. Sin gets the best of us! If we don't flee temptation in the beginning, we really can't claim later that we don't know how we got in this situation. Even when the initial thrill is gone, we find ourselves trapped by our own worst instincts.

A few years ago, at the Minnesota State Fair people boarded a ride called the "Enterprise" that spun around at high speed for about four minutes. Being dizzy and scared is a thrill for which we will still pay good money! The ride, however, malfunctioned and could not be stopped for almost 20 minutes. When people were finally rescued from their thrill, all were sick, many requiring medical attention.

There is something exciting about certain areas that the Bible tells us to avoid, but the excitement is an emotion you feel when you get ON the ride, not when you get OFF the ride! (5). Ask the man whose sin has cost him his marriage and the respect of his family and friends. Ask the woman whose sin got her fired from her job. A little leads to a lot and the end is a tragedy for all concerned.

HOW THEN DO WE OVERCOME TEMPTATION? In the words of that great theologian, Barney Fife, "You gotta nip it in the bud!" Nip it, nip it, nip it. Nip it in the bud!

Stop playing dare devil with the devil and stop deceiving yourself! Ask God to deliver you from evil. "Lord, lead me not into temptation and deliver me from evil." "Don't let me be tempted; deliver me from the evil one." If you try to live for Jesus and honor him with your life, he will give you power to resist temptation and do what is right.

Some of you think you are strong and that you can resist the devil by sheer will power. You're fooling yourself! None of us can fight temptation by ourselves. Temptation drags us down streets we don't want to go and leads us in paths of UN-righteousness far more often than we dare admit. We are weaker than we think, and too ashamed to admit it.

A man on a diet changed his driving route to work so that he wouldn't drive by his favorite bakery. But one morning he arrived at work with a giant coffee cake! He explained to his co-workers that he accidentally drove by the bakery and saw this cake in the window. He felt it was no accident and prayed, "Lord, if you want me to have that cake, open up a parking space right in front of the door." "And sure enough," the man said, "the fourth time around the block, there was a space!"

I Peter 5:8-10 warns: *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, ...and the God of all grace, ...will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

Jesus was hungry and weary from 40 days of fasting, how did he resist the temptation of bread, food and water? How did he resist Satan's challenge to throw himself off the temple and prove God's divine deliverance – thereby winning followers? How did Jesus resist the promise of a worldwide kingdom if he'd just bow down to Satan one time? What enabled him to battle the devil? He had spent time with God, being filling with the Word and the Spirit of God. Jesus resisted every temptation of Satan by quoting scriptures. To gain that strength to resist temptation you must **get into God's Word and get God's WORD in you!** It's not enough to have the Bible in your computer hard drive so you can **cut and paste it**; you've got to have in your heart so you can **know it and taste it!** You must learn and memorize Bible verses, so that God is an ever-present help in time of trouble and temptation. The resource you need is not just knowing the words of the verses, but it's 1) your commitment to live by the WORD of God; 2) resting your confidence in what God says and what God promises you, and 3) choosing to act in harmony with God's divine will.

If you're going to win your battle with temptation: get God first, THEN combat sin. Look to God for escape. Gain as much of God as possible through prayer and reflection and reading and discipline: talk with God, seek God; let God strengthen you first before you battle Satan.

THE SMARTEST THING TO DO IS TO FLEE TEMPTATION. Use your legs and walk away from the place or persons or activities that tempt you. On the old TV Show "Hee-Haw," Archie Campbell, playing the doctor, talks with a patient who says he broke his arm in two places. "Well, then," says Doc Campbell, "stay out of them places!"

Well said! You cannot dare the devil and expect to escape temptation unaffected. Stay out of them places!

Jesus taught us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* It is better translated, "Let us not fall, when we are tempted by the evil one." You know, opportunity only knocks once; temptation lingers and knocks unceasingly. Recall Martin Luther's words in our opening hymn, A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD: *"Though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed, his truth to TRIUMPH through us!"*

ASK GOD'S FORGIVENESS FOR PAST SINS AND WEAKNESSES, THEN ASK GOD TO HELP YOU TO THROW AWAY THAT WHICH TEMPTS YOU. Ask him to help you stay away from the places that lead you astray. Ask His help to stop seeing those people who drag you down and mess up your life. That's what Jesus did. He told the devil that he didn't need what the devil offered. Defeated for the time being, the devil withdrew. Though he sulked, the Devil did not surrender. Luke 4:13 says that the Devil departed from Jesus *"until an opportune time."* Though we win occasional skirmishes with Satan, Satan knows us well and he follows us and waits for the right time to trap us when we are weak or unsuspecting. Satan knows how and where to find us. He wears us down and traps us.

I've told you before about the shepherd who described his sheep as basically good sheep who just get in trouble. They chew the grass right up to the fence, then see the tempting grass outside the fence, they stick their head through and nibble that grass. Once they've eaten that

grass, they stretch their neck and shoulder through the fence to graze the grass just beyond. Before they know it, without even looking up to notice, they've stepped through the fence, grazed on over the hill and down the far bank. When they finally look up, they are lost and panic to find themselves so far from the safety of the herd. The shepherd said, "They ain't bad sheep, and they don't mean to do it, but they just nibbles themselves lost."

How often we nibbles ourselves lost!

When you fall victim to old temptations and sins again, all is not lost! You are human, like the rest of us. Accept your relapse, confess it, commit again to following Jesus; He will forgive you and help you begin again. I say that because in John 3:17 God says He sent Jesus into the world not to condemn it, but to save it!

Temptation is real. Temptation is strong. Stronger than we are sometimes.

God knows that -- and God knows us. God loves us, God forgives us, God accepts us. God is here to deliver us!

I leave you with a Bible verse to help you battle temptation: I Corinthians 10:13;
I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 13:

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out, that you may endure it!

Romans 6:23: *"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

That poor burglar found himself in a heap of trouble--shot four times, run over, arrested for grand theft-auto, attempted murder, armed robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, and a host of lesser crimes. All this by his attempt to cover up a simple burglary! That's what happens sometimes when we open the door to just a minor temptation. Satan is stronger than you and too wily in his tempting

Ask God for strength to resist temptation and God will help you.

You then do your part by staying out of them places and things and persons who tempt you! Don't give the devil a chance! Amen.

"Lord, Lead us not into temptation. And deliver us from the evil one." Amen.

Sources

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