

How to Resist Temptation

Mom had just baked some fresh cookies and placed them on the counter to cool. Little Johnny said, "Mom, those cookies sure smell good." Mom warned, "Just leave those cookies alone. We're going to eat dinner in a few minutes and you'll spoil your appetite if you eat them now." A few minutes passed and Mom walked back into the kitchen and there was Johnny with crumbs on his face, trying to hide a half eaten cookie behind his back.

Mom was angry and Johnny knew it. "Just what happened here young man?" she asked. Johnny had to think quickly so he gave the best his 4 year old mind could come up with. He said, Mommy, I climbed up on the counter to smell the cookies and my teeth got caught on one."

Have you ever felt like that? Snared by temptation? We don't get up in the morning and say, "I think I'll lust after my coworker today." or "My plan for this week is to covet my neighbors new car."

Take place shortly after Jesus starts His 31/2 Humorist Robert Orben has observed, "Most people want to be delivered from temptation but would like to keep in touch." Someone else has questioned, "Why is it that opportunity knocks only once, yet temptation bangs on the door constantly?"

Temptation is something that everyone of us has dealt with since the day we were first able to understand the meaning of the word *no*. And although we can often laugh about some of life's temptations, the truth is that in it's truest essence temptation is no laughing matter.

The NT Book of James explains it this way: *...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

There are 3 important facts to remember about temptation:

1. God tests us to develop our faith, our endurance and our character.
2. Satan tempts us to sin in order to destroy our lives and our relationship with God.
3. Temptations occurs when we feel compelled to satisfy or fulfill our God given desires in an ungodly and unlawful way.

The same Book of James gives us this promise from God. *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

Did you catch that? There is a prize, there is a reward, for enduring temptation.

First you'll be blessed. That word actually means *happy*. Happiness comes from having your life under control, so that there is no bad habit that is controlling you. When you know how to say "no" to temptation it produces happiness in your life.

Second, there is a "crown of life". In the Greek this literally means "the crown which is life". When you understand temptation, when you overcome it, when you learn to say "no" then you begin to really live. It is a crown which is life -- abundant life -- itself.

The question this morning is, How? How do I handle temptation? How do I say *no* when my desires want to say *yes*?

Open your Bibles this morning to **Luke chapter 4 pg 994**

In just a few weeks we'll begin a season known as Lent. Lent is supposed to be 40 days of soul-searching and repentance as a preparatory time for Easter. Lent always begins on Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter and extends for 40 days based upon the passage we're going to look at this morning.

Luke 4 opens shortly after Jesus began His public ministry. **Read vs 1 + 2a (through Devil)**

Jesus was ready to begin his ministry within the Jewish nation as its long awaited Messiah. On a human level we might think that he would have headed right up to Jerusalem with John the Baptist and the remnant of baptized Jews, entering the city as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. What the Father had in store for him, however, was a face-to-face battle with Satan himself.

The book of Hebrews explains it this way: *...in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God...*

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus' mission on earth was to become one of us - to live in a flesh tent just like us, to suffer what we suffer and celebrate what we celebrate. He came to live a sinless life, so that He could be our sin bearer, but He also came to show us how we can live - how we can resist temptation - how we can say *no* to sin.

If Jesus hadn't been tempted, his human experience would have been incomplete - because all humans are tempted. But Because he did experience it, just as we do, he became sensitive to the pressures we endure. He became an example of victory.

Jesus was tempted to the fullest. I doubt there's anybody in this room who is important enough to be tempted by Satan himself. We're constantly coming up against his subordinates but Jesus was tempted by the Prince of Darkness himself.

Of course we might wonder, “Was Jesus’ temptation really real? If He was the sinless son of God and therefore unable to sin was He really tempted? Can we really learn from His example?”

The Biblical statement is that Jesus had no sin nature. He could never be tempted from within like we can. But Jesus Christ had a full human nature so He could be tempted from without.

Temptations we face fall into some very basic categories. Satan choose three, right at the beginning of Jesus three year ministry, that every one of us can identify with.

*I. Temptation Often Comes Through the Path of a Basic Human Desire. **Read vs 2b-3***

For forty days Jesus eats nothing, and at the end of the forty days he is hungry. His flesh is pulled tight against his ribs and cheeks. He is weak. But he waits.

Then as the heat of the scorching sun fades. . . a presence. And then a voice.

"Jesus, Oh Jesus. You must be so hungry. Why don't you turn these rocks into bread? You can do that, right? You are the Son of God, right?"

Now let me ask you an important question. Were these words of Satan all true? Is Jesus hungry? Does He have the power to change the rocks into bread? Is He the Son of God?

All of those things are true. Along with that, is it wrong to feel hunger? Is it wrong to want to eat? Obviously not. Hunger is a basic human desire.

Satan's premise, on which he based his proposition, seems to be something like this: Felt need + the power to meet that need = satisfaction of that need, no matter what.

On the surface, his offer seems harmless. After all, there’s nothing wrong with meeting basic human needs. In fact hunger is a need which Jesus would later meet in His public ministry.

He fed the 5,000 by miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes.

Obviously if Jesus would have gone much longer without eating he would have died. So then what was the evil that caused Jesus to resist Satan and to continue to hunger, even though death might be the result?

The answer’s in Jesus’ answer: **Verse 4**

In this passage Satan is going to come at Jesus with three different temptations. Each time Jesus is going to meet the temptation in the same way. In verse 4, in verse 8 and in verse 12 He says, “It is

written.” This is what God’s Word says.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.” That’s a quote from Deuteronomy 8.

Turn Deut 8 pg 174

The Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians for hundreds of years. They cry out to God and He sends Moses to lead them out. God brings plagues by the hand of Moses until the Pharaoh of Egypt sends them away. They leave, get to the Red Sea and here’s Pharaoh bearing down on them with his army.

God parts the sea and Moses leads them to safety. These guys have seen it all. Miracle after miracle. But then they get to the land that God has promised them and they refuse to go in. They’re scared of the inhabitants as if the God who has delivered them and brought them this far would abandon them now.

In His anger God sends them into the desert to wander for 40 years. A whole generation has died off and a new generation is about to enter the promised land. **Read 8:1-3**

God fed them with bread from heaven. Why? So that they’d know that while He had led them into difficulty He would meet their needs. God was using the physical to teach them about the spiritual.

Now go back to Luke 4

God led the Israelites into the desert to confirm their faithfulness to God and to demonstrate His faithfulness to them.

God led Jesus into the desert to confirm His faithfulness to the Father and to demonstrate the Father’s faithfulness to the Son.

If Jesus would have zapped a few stones into bread there’d have been two problems:

1. He would have been acting of His own volition instead of His Father’s. He came to always do the will of the Father not follow His own human will and the Father hadn’t directed Him to do a miracle.
2. He would have been saying, “I don’t trust the Father in my time of need.”

See, just like with the Jews in the wilderness there’s a bigger issue than just bread. God will supply when and how he chooses.

It's not up to us to jump outside the will of God to satisfy normal physical needs. That's what Satan was asking Jesus to do.

Obviously we'll never be tempted by the Evil One to turn stones into bread. (I've left the rolls in the oven too long already and turned bread into stone.)

We'll never be tempted to turn stones into bread, but we will be tempted to satisfy our physical needs in improper ways.

People say, "What's wrong with you Christians. How come you're such prudes? Why this big hang up about sex? God created us male and female. He created sexuality. What's wrong with freely using what God has given. What's wrong with pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, sex outside of marriage?"

Remember Satan's equation: need + power to meet that need = satisfaction of that need, no matter what.

What is the answer? The answer is: There's more to sex than the physical act. God did create sex. He did create that physical need. But He also gave the context in which we meet that need. It's called marriage. *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

When we jump out of God's boundaries we're: 1. Acting of our own volition instead of God's. God has clearly called sex outside of His parameters *sin*. 2. We're saying, "I don't trust the Father in my time of need."

There are spiritual consequences to sin no matter what form that sin takes. No matter what physical need we have if we end up trying to meet that need apart from God's direction and wisdom we're headed for trouble. We can end up dealing with envy, gluttony, jealousy, laziness, a whole host of aftereffects God identifies as sin.

I. Temptation Often Comes Through the Path of a Basic Human Desire. But not always. So Satan tries tactic number two. *II. Temptation Often Plays on Personal Ambition.* **Read vs 5-7**

The Father had already promised the Son all the kingdoms of the world. In Psalm 2 we read, *"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.'"*

All was promised and all would be given, but first the Son had to suffer and die.

Philippians 2 says: *He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

First would come suffering, then would come glory.

Satan offered these same kingdoms if Jesus would once worship him. Satan promised glory without suffering. Satan has always wanted to take God's place and receive worship.

Notice though that Satan mentioned the glory, but not the sin and suffering of fallen humanity within the kingdoms-abuse, injustice, murder, deceit, immorality, and death.

Now the obvious question we all have here is, "Did Satan really have the authority over the kingdoms of this world? Could he make a legitimate offer to Jesus? What does Satan possess? What can Satan give to someone else?"

Here's what the Bible calls Satan: *The ruler of this world. The god of this age. The prince of the power of the air.*

What does it mean for Satan to be the "god of this age" or the "ruler of this world"? We know this much: it doesn't mean all that Satan claims in his words to Jesus.

Actually, according to the Bible the right to rule the earth was given to man, not Satan. Adam and Eve were commissioned to rule God's creation (Gen. 1:26).

According to Psalm 8 the rule of all creation still belongs to man. Eighty four times in the NT Jesus is referred to by the title *The Son of Man*.

Jesus, as the "Son of Man" ultimately fulfills this task of ruling, but it's the task of man, not of Satan. Furthermore, the ultimate rule of the earth is God's. Psalm 22:28 *For the kingdom is the LORD's, And He rules over the nations.*

Satan is the "ruler of this world" in the sense that he dominates fallen men through the power of sin and death, and through the "the world" and "the flesh." But he isn't in control over kings and kingdoms. He influences them but he isn't in control.

In fact the OT prophet Daniel wrote: *the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses*. God is the One who's in sovereign control of history.

Bob Deffenbaugh writes: Satan's claim is only partially true, at best, and thus his offer is exceedingly hollow. It is worth noting that throughout the Bible Satan is continually offering others things which are not his own. He offers Adam and Eve the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but it was not his to give. Our Lord, on the other hand, offers what He possesses, and the life which He offers is that which He has obtained at the cost of His own blood.

It's like Satan thought that the same things that appealed to him would appeal to Jesus. And what appealed to Satan was to be in control. Jesus came to bring in the kingdom of God. Satan wanted to derail God's kingdom and rule instead.

Satan's always been driven by personal ambition. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 show that he was impressed with his position and power, but that he wanted more. In fact he wouldn't be satisfied until he was in total control. Since God was in control over him, he tried to elevate himself to the place where he possessed God's power and control.

I believe that Satan hoped to find that same compulsion to control, to be in charge, in the man Jesus. That's why he offered him a kingdom which he thought was too tempting to refuse. Dominion and power and glory are all those things which appeal to people who yearn to be in control. Satan was impressed by power, and so he figured Jesus would be too.

It was all so simple. Just a quick bow. No one would ever know. And then Jesus could rule. Just cut this corner. Break this commandment. Just do it your way instead of God's way.

Ever been tempted like that? Ever been tempted to take control instead of following God's directions? We all have, over and over again.

Doing things God's way and doing things Satan's way is like passing through a funnel. You know a funnel has a wide end and a narrow end.

Satan says to us, "You don't need to trust God. Trust yourself. Run your own life." And so he says, "Come on, I'll show you the easy way." The problem is it's like going in the wide end of the funnel. It looks like the easy way till we really get into it and in the end we're squeezed.

People say, "What you're pregnant, unmarried. You don't want this baby. Here's the easy way. It's your right to choose. Have an abortion." And because it looks like the only way out for them a lot of women go down that path.

What Satan doesn't tell them is there's always a price to pay. His way starts off appearing easy, but it gets hard real quick. He conveniently eliminates some important information like the fact that 100,000 women a year in the US miscarry and lose a child they want due to a prior abortion. That there's a proven link between abortion and increased risk for breast cancer. That 90% of women who abort experience emotional and psychiatric stress and nearly 10% require professional help. That women who have had abortions are nine times more likely to attempt suicide than those who haven't.

We could just begin to name one thing after another in life that that looks easy on the onset but crushes us in the end.

Compare that with God's ways. His funnel is turned around the other way. God's way is like going the narrow end first. The difference is His way leads to openness and freedom.

It's hard to trust God. It's hard not to take things into our own hands. It's tough not to buy into Satan's offers.

How did Jesus respond? **Back to Luke 4 Read vs 8**

Again Jesus quoted God's Word. Our authority is always God's Word. That's how we know what to do when Satan's appeals seem so captivating.

Jesus goes back to the book of Deuteronomy, where all three of the scriptures He quotes come from. This time it's Deuteronomy 6:16, which interestingly, talks about worshipping God but doesn't mention serving Him.

Satan hadn't mentioned serving either. But Jesus knew "what ever we worship we serve." Service to God is true freedom, but service to Satan is terrible bondage.

God's pattern is to start with suffering and end with glory. Satan's pattern is to promise glory, but to deliver suffering. Satan wants us to sacrifice the eternal for the temporary and take the "easy way."

The truth is always found in God's Word.

I. Temptation Often Comes Through the Path of a Basic Human Desire. II. Temptation Often Plays on Personal Ambition.

III. Temptation Always Calls Us to Act Independently of the Father's Will.

Read vs 9-11

We not only need to learn how to deal with temptation, we also need to learn how to recognize temptation. Sometimes it can come in subtle, even spiritual sounding terms.

Satan has heard Jesus respond to each of his temptations with Scripture so he figures if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Remember, Satan knows the Bible. In fact he knows the Bible better than any of us in this room. He knows it, and he knows how to *misuse* it.

What he was saying here was, "Jesus, let people know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are the Messiah, the Chosen One of God. What a spectacular stunt to leap from the Pinnacle of the Temple, drop the 450 feet straight down into the Kidron Valley, and land unharmed. God's angels will protect you.

People will surly listen to your message when they hear and see what you have done. God's already made the promise of protection."

Satan quoted Psalm 91: 11 but he left out part of the verse. It actually says: *For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.*

It would never be part of the "holy ways" of the Son of God to try to put His Father to the test like this.

So He answers one last time from scripture: **Read vs12**

Or as NASV translates it: *'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

Remember we said the Jesus quotes each time from the Book of Deuteronomy. This time its Deut 6:16 which actually says: *"You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah."*

Massah was a place in the desert where the Israelites were led by God. It was hot, dry, and barren. The people were thirsty and they griped and complained. They said to Moses, *Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? Is the LORD among us or not?"*

Now remember, this was the same bunch who had seen the miracles of God through Moses. They were all happy when they left the slavery of Egypt. Now they were complaining.

Finally Moses comes before God and says, "What should I do? They're ready to kill me!" God says, "Take your staff, hit a rock and I'll make water come out." Then Moses named the place Massah which means "tempted" or "trial."

These Israelites put God to the test by insisting that God perform according to their expectations and their demands. The promise of God wasn't sufficient. God's marvelous works for them in the past weren't sufficient. They wanted God to act now, to give them what they wanted, when they wanted it, or they would refuse to acknowledge His presence among them. God's presence among His people could only be proven by His on-going performance of miracles, so that none of their needs were unmet.

Satan was saying to Jesus, "Jump, God has to do it your way."

Haven't we all been guilty of that at one time or another? Our child gets sick, we lose our job, our spouse deserts us, our parent is stricken with cancer, our transmission goes out and we're broke, our kid rebels... (you can fill in the blank with "what ever").

And how do we react? "God what are you doing? Where are you? How could you do this to me?" And we demand that if God is really God He has to do it our way, and if He doesn't we're ready to give up on Him.

'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'

God is faithful to His promises. What are some of His promises?

...this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

That's a promise. Jesus didn't fail, He went all the way to the cross. **Look at vs 13 (read 13)**

Satan came back again and again to try to stop Jesus from going to the cross. There was more temptation, but Satan failed. He couldn't stop Jesus from being *obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

Jesus Christ went to the cross for our sins. He went because of all of those times we didn't say *no* to temptation. That's why *He who has the Son has life.* Do you "have the Son" today?