

Are You a Target for Seduction?

Many people who by the grace of God have never been “had” by the devil wrongly assume that all departures from godliness are nothing but rebellion and proofs of inauthenticity. They have no idea of the suffering involved when someone with a genuine heart for God slips from the path.

I don't know how many times I've repeated the statement I'm about to make, but I'll keep saying it until at least one skeptic hears, “Not everyone in a stronghold of sin is having a good time.”

The times in my life when the powers of darkness seemed to rage most violently against me were seasons when I had never loved God more. I was not walking in sin prior to either of the times I fought my hardest battles with the kingdom of darkness.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, the apostle Paul wrote: “But [now] I am fearful, lest that even as the serpent beguiled Eve by his cunning, so your minds may be corrupted and seduced from wholehearted and sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (The Amplified Bible).

How does a wholeheartedly, sincerely, and purely devoted servant of Jesus Christ become vulnerable to demonic seduction? If you're thinking, Surely there is something that the enemy is latching onto, you are absolutely right. At the same time I will tell you that the thing Satan latches onto often is not sin.

How the Godly Are Beguiled

None of us is ever sinless, but where this kind of victim is

concerned, the enemy more often latches onto weakness—a hidden spot of vulnerability. Satan knows that weakness can turn to sin in a heartbeat when exposed to the right amount of pressure.

I have become more and more convinced that victims of seduction share certain vulnerabilities at the time of their attacks. Please consider carefully this list of the weaknesses that many Christians carry in their hearts, minds and souls.

1. Ignorance. Without exception, the No. 1 element that sets believers up for seduction is ignorance. Throughout the remainder of the list, you will see signs of ignorance—things the seduced did not know.

Speaking of the high priest who served in the Old Testament tabernacle, the writer of Hebrews said, “He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness” (Heb. 5:2, NIV). We are at great risk of going astray over ignorance and weakness.

In The Amplified Bible, 2 Corinthians 2:11 tells us to forgive, “to keep Satan from getting the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his wiles and intentions.” The apostle Paul and his well-educated crew may not have been ignorant of Satan’s schemes, but most of us are.

How many times have I looked at some of the ways I allowed Satan to defeat me in the past and cried to myself: “How could you be so stupid! You idiot! Haven’t you learned anything?”

Long after I was set free, I was still punishing myself unmercifully. So much so, the self-condemnation became its own form of bondage.

The last thing I want to do is give the enemy another moment’s satisfaction. That’s exactly what self-condemnation does. Let’s be delivered from it.

2. *Spiritual passion that exceeds biblical knowledge.* The Scriptures talk about the serpent getting to our hearts through our minds (see 2 Cor. 11:3). The person described in this verse has wholehearted devotion to Christ, but his mind still is vulnerable.

Most of our minds are, too—until we have a horrible scare that teaches us to love God with our whole mind and not just our whole heart. The church in Corinth was passionate but lacked the knowledge to provide a firm foundation.

Paul's thesis on tearing down strongholds is this: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5, KJV). If we don't have the knowledge of God, we are ill-equipped to recognize imaginations that are exalting themselves over God.

We can't have just knowledge about warfare to defeat Satan. We need the knowledge of God! Our only means of getting it is through an intense relationship with God through His Word.

You might be wondering, "Why do so many godly pastors fall to the seduction of Satan when they are constantly preparing sermons?" Let me tell you what I think.

I think many of them unknowingly fall into the trap of spending time in the Word almost entirely for message preparation. Satan desires the destruction of anyone who keeps his or her sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) sharpened by personal use.

He knows that weapon becomes dull once the believer's use of Scripture becomes mechanical. I believe that many of those in ministry who have fallen for seduction were so busy doing the work of God that they slipped away from pure intimacy with God.

We must remember that God doesn't want only to talk through us; He wants also to talk to us—intimately. When we cease

letting God speak to us, it is only a matter of time before He will cease speaking through us.

Allow me to offer a word of caution on the other side of this issue. Yes, spiritual passion exceeding biblical knowledge is a definite weakness. But biblical knowledge without a heart passionately in love with Christ is terribly dangerous. If we are not given to godly passion, we will be tempted by counterfeits.

3. A lack of discernment. I am convinced that discernment is one of the most important criteria in the devoted believer's life to provide protection from seduction. Most victims of seduction have not had a history of particularly great discernment.

Glance at the following Scriptures and relate them to our subject matter:

"Rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge" (Prov. 19:25, NIV). Those who have discernment don't get defensive and start rationalizing when they're rebuked! Instead, they gain knowledge.

"This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9-10).

After God broke my cycle of defeat, I began praying, "God, I can't do anything to change the past. I have been neither pure nor blameless, but would You enable me by the power of Your Word and through the filling of Your Holy Spirit to live every day of my remaining years in purity?"

To come anywhere close to my deep hope, I am going to need lots of discernment. Celebrate the fact that God honors the heartfelt petition for discernment and will graciously give it and more.

4. *A lack of self-discernment.* David, a man who fell into sin after godliness, wrote this very private prayer: "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression" (Ps. 19:12-13).

In this particular verse, the Hebrew word translated "error" is shgiyah. According to the "Old Testament Lexical Aids" of the Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible (AMG Publishers), it means "error, transgression, sin committed inadvertently." It stands in contrast to the psalmist's petition for God to keep him also from willful sins.

We commit some sins willfully and presumptuously. We commit others inadvertently. The former flows from rebellion and the latter from error, ignorance and weakness.

Our weaknesses and areas of ignorance can quickly lead to sins committed inadvertently. However, Satan's seduction is purposeful and utterly intended for evil. Nothing about it is accidental or coincidental.

In the book of Proverbs, most of the seducers and seductresses were intentional in their actions. Most, but not all.

Could it be that some who are used as puppets for Satan's seductions have themselves been seduced? I think so. In fact, the seduced may become seducers if they fail to let God radically deal with them through and through.

One of our best defenses is to recognize where our own personal weak places are. We've got to replace our self-condemnation with self-discernment.

5. *Exposure to or experience with false worship or depravity in the past.* I am convinced that one reason the apostle Paul was so worried about the Corinthian church is that they had been exposed to so much false worship and depravity (see 2

Cor. 11:4). In addition, they were surrounded by ungodliness in their attempts to live godly lives.

Any level of exposure can open a door in the mind that Satan might decide to take for his advantage. I've heard people talk about finding pornographic magazines in their father's things when they were young. Such a discovery frequently has a huge effect on that life and gives Satan a trump card for later.

Experience can open an even wider door than exposure. As a child, I was not only exposed to things I shouldn't have been but also forced to experience some things no child should ever experience.

I tucked many of those memories as far down in my subconscious as possible. The problem was, Satan had stuffed them in his pocket for later.

In addition to being victimized, I also made numerous poor choices. Don't think he didn't use those against me as well.

Thankfully, God has taught me volumes, and I am no longer easy prey. Still, I will always have to be on guard because I have a past that other, less vulnerable believers don't have.

If we don't let God deal with every part of our pasts—hurts, secrets, errors in judgment, mistakes or sins—any one of them can be like a hibernating bear. Satan, the prowling lion, stalks the mouth of the cave, waiting for just the "right" season.

What to Do About the Past

Beloved, Satan plays hardball. When we have a disaster, we can count on his being right there confronting us at our weakest point.

We can't just put our pasts behind us. We've got to put our pasts in front of God.

The very thing Satan used against me was precisely that I had not done anything about my past! We can take our pasts to Jesus. We need Him to take full authority over them so that they are no longer a playground for the enemy.

God longs to let us see our pasts against the backdrop of His glory. Let Him redeem every bit of your past, not just the injustices but the willful sins and the excruciating losses (see Ps. 130:7).

For 30 years Satan used my past in various ways until I allowed God to snatch it from him and use it for Himself. I have given God permission to take every one of my memories captive to Christ.

Now I see my abuses and sins in the forgiving, nail-scarred hands of Jesus where He is cleansing them and transforming them into the stuff of mercy. Now, God uses them every single day in ministry, in parenting and in friendships.

Satan targets sincere believers through their sins as well as their weaknesses. One of the times when Satan used my sins against me, I had already repented of them. But I had never asked God to heal me completely, redeem my past, sanctify me and help me to forgive myself.

Until I allowed God to take full authority over them, my past sins were still areas of vulnerability where Satan could prey. Thank goodness, they're not anymore, and yours don't have to be, either.

God is so inconceivably faithful. Hear His tender voice speak to you now. "'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid'" (Matt. 14:27).

I've learned to give Him full authority over my past and bring every part of it under His wings and into His possession. Trust God with every inch of your past, present and future. Because until you do, you are susceptible to seduction.

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