

3 Things to Know About Temptation

Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist anything but temptation."

Before I was a Christian, I never really thought about temptation. I pretty much gave in to it. It wasn't a struggle. If something seemed appealing, I just went and did it. But after I gave my life to Christ at the age of 17, other Christians warned, "Greg, now watch out, because you're going to get tempted."

"Well, how will I know when I'm getting tempted?"

"You'll know," they said.

Now, in one of my classes, there was a really cute girl who never paid attention to me. She never even looked at me. But after class one day, this girl walked up to me and said, "Hi, what's your name?"

I was so dumbfounded that she acknowledged my existence that it took me a few seconds to tell her my name.

Then she said, "Oh, you're really cute. Uh, this weekend my parents are going to be out of town, and we have a little cabin up in the mountains. Why don't you come up and spend the weekend with me?"

I thought, "This is temptation." How did I know? Because stuff like that didn't happen to me. And then another thought occurred to me. I realized there must be something to my newfound Christianity. And it made me even more determined to find out what it meant to follow Jesus Christ. Needless to say, I didn't accept her offer.

When to Expect It

When temptation comes knocking on your door, it isn't the easiest thing to resist. Yet the Bible tells us that temptation can be overcome: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).

From this verse alone, we can learn three things about temptation: 1) It can be endured; 2) there's a reward for the person who endures it, and 3) you'll be a happy person if you resist the pull of temptation.

The apostle Paul wrote, "The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure" (1 Cor. 10:13, NLT). There is always a way out of every temptation, no matter what.

After Jesus began His public ministry and had just been baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist, He went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days.

This serves as a reminder that temptation generally comes after times of great blessing. Jesus had just been baptized, which was a glorious moment. And without delay, along came Satan. After the blessing came the temptation.

The same can happen to us. But we need to realize one thing: It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted, after all. It isn't the bait that constitutes temptation; it's the bite. If you say no to it, then you're fine.

But some of us might say, "Well, just for research I ought to check it out. Of course I would never do it, but I'll just see what we have here."

It's like those cookie stores at the mall. You're drawn to the incredible aroma of freshly baked cookies, and as you walk by,

they offer you a free sample. Why do you think they do that? Is it because they love you and want you to have free cookies?

No, it's because they know that if you take one bite, you're going to want the rest.

The Part We Play

You see, we play a role in our own temptation. The Bible says, "And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, 'God is tempting me.' God is never tempted to do wrong, and He never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away" (James 1:13-14).

For instance, have you ever seen salespeople trying to move their products at a cemetery? Of course not. They're going to try to find someone who can buy what they want to sell.

In the same way, where there's no desire on our part, there is no temptation. We set ourselves up for temptation when we put ourselves in a place of vulnerability.

That's why the best place to be when temptation comes is in the will of God. Scripture tells us that Jesus "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted by the devil for forty days" (Luke 4:1-2, MEV). He was in the will of God.

Yet far too often we're out of the will of God, essentially bringing temptation upon ourselves. What makes resisting temptation difficult for so many people is they don't want to discourage it completely. Many people want to be delivered from temptation but would like to keep in touch.

To pray against temptation yet put yourself in a place of vulnerability is like putting your fingers into a fire and praying they won't be burned.

Jesus said, "For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you" (Matt. 15:19-20a, NLT). So the

heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

It's like a bumper sticker I saw that read, "Lead me not into temptation. I can find it myself."

Temptation often comes to those who are making a difference for the kingdom of God. So if you say, "God, I want you to use me. I want to make a difference in my world," then don't expect a standing ovation in hell.

Expect opposition.

Expect hardship.

Expect temptation to come your way.

When you've been through temptation and have resisted it, you'll be stronger for it. And you will be happier as a result. {eo}

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