

Temptation

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Last week, Joyce spoke wonderfully about the signs in our lives, about how they lead our way to where God wants us to go. She spoke about the star of the Lord that led the Magi from the east all the way to Jesus in Bethlehem. In scriptures, we received the "stage version" of this trip, the highlights of their journey, them succeeding for the glory of our God. A powerful statement of not only the birth of our Lord as the King of Jews, as the King of Kings but of the marvelous work of our God in the hearts, minds and souls of this Magi. Can you imagine how many reasons and excuses you would find to NOT make such a trip? Even in our modern days of easy travelling, think of it as taking a plane to another country, visiting the king, queen or president of said country as well as their top advisors to enquire about The newborn King whose shiny star in the sky you are following based on prophecies written hundreds of years before... The spiritual maturity and the faith of this Magi is astounding, and that, my dear brothers and sisters, is God's business. God must have worked on their character, on their faith, on their understanding all of their lives. Likewise He is working in yours, every day, in every way, in every circumstance through every person around you, He makes things fall into place so you can see them and see Him working and telling you what to do. Joyce also shared some of the negative feedback they received when David and her discerned that God was leading them to serve in Mexico, things like...

"You can't drink the water"

"What about dengue fever?"

"More people get kidnapped in Mexico than any other country in the world."

...etc. and that, my dear brothers and sisters, is Satan's business, to prevent us from seeing and following God's signs in our lives, to prevent us from growing in faith, in spiritual maturity, etc. As David and Joyce saw God's will in the events falling into place and came to bless us here in spite of the many reasons and excuses

they surely had not to come, we shall seek, see and follow our signs in order to bless others.

Today I am going to talk about Satan's favorite strategy to prevent us from seeing, following and reaching our stars. Temptations. Before we read the text and get into our subject, I will need you to remember the anecdote of the flight attendant who asked a guy: can I offer you something to eat? And he replied what are the options?

"YES" and "NO".

That is also true for temptation, we always have two options:

"YES" and "NO"

Our starting text is:

James 1:12-13

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. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

As I told you the other day, I'm reading a book called The Purpose Driven Life, which is designed to be read in 40 days, one chapter per day, no more, no less. You are supposed to think, pray, and digest each one through a day so you are transformed in a 40-day period. Undoubtedly, it is a life changing book, which I strongly recommend you to read. However, I must tell you that, by far, it has been the hardest book to read in my life. Not because of the book which is fun and easy to follow and understand but because of the many problems and temptations I'm having since I started reading it. The first week I lost my job, the second week the lawsuit on our house had a bad twist, the third week my wife Ana left to Mexico for his dad's 80th birthday leaving us three (kids) in charge of the house, the food, her clients, etc. then came one paragraph in chapter 25 that took a week and a sermon to get over with, etc, etc, etc. One thing is for sure: Satan does not want me to read it. I has taken 2 months to read 32 chapters He have already talked about growing through problems, so I decided to talk about growing through temptations today. I will use some ideas of the chapter about temptation that are helping me understand them. For starters, please hold on to this idea:

Temptations are to us what wind is to a tree; it makes the roots get stronger or causes the tree to fall. The difference is that we have a choice.

Every temptation is an opportunity to do good.

Temptations are opportunities to grow, steps up or slides down in the path to spiritual maturity, we choose. While temptation is Satan's primary weapon to destroy you, God wants to use it to develop you. Every time you choose to do good instead of sin, you are growing in the character of Christ.

Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. Against such there is no law.

The fruit we eat matures and ripens slowly. The same applies to the fruit of the Spirit.

Rick Warren

God develops the fruit of the spirit in your life by allowing you to experience circumstances in which you're tempted to express the exact opposite quality!

For example God teaches us *love* by putting some unlovely people around us. It is easy to love a lovely person that loves you. But it takes a lot of character to love an unlovely person or an enemy.

God teaches us real *joy* in the midst of sorrow, when we turn to Him. Happiness has to do with external circumstances, but joy on your relationship to God. Real *peace* develops by trusting God instead of being afraid or worried in difficult times, not by being in peaceful situations. God teaches us patience by giving us spouses and kids not by giving us things when we want them.

So we choose to love the unlovely instead of hating, we choose to trust God instead of being afraid, we choose to be patient instead of desperate, etc. character grows by our choices. Integrity results from defeating the temptation of dishonesty. Humbleness comes by refusing to be prideful, endurance by rejecting the temptation to give up, etc.

Rick Warren

Every time you defeat a temptation you become more like Jesus!

2 Corinthians 2:11

Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Satan is predictable my friends, he has used the same 4-step-trick since creation and we continue to fall, in his game, time after time... Desire-doubt-deception-disobedience.

1. Desire. We all have desires, some are normal, like the desire to be loved, to be respected, to have pleasure and others are sinful, like desiring revenge, to control others, etc. Satan uses them to tempt us to either give in to a sinful desire or to fulfill a normal one in a wrong way or at the wrong time. The typical little devil in your shoulder suggesting to go for it, have it now, it feels good, etc.

Mark 7:21-23

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

James 4:1

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

Rick Warren

Temptations always start in your mind

2. Doubt. The next step is to make you doubt, is it really a sin?, is it really bad? Or was it a sin only in ancient times, culture and law? Was it a prohibition for someone else? Lets go to the first and oldest one:

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

Hebrews 3:12

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God

3. Deception. When it comes to lies Satan is the master blaster...you will be wiser, no one will notice, everyone is doing it, you will be like God, etc.

Genesis 3:4

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Hebrews 3:13

But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

4. Disobedience. And then of course comes the sinful behavior, the fall, you act upon the idea you have been playing with.

James 1:14-16

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Understanding how it works helps us overcome temptation but it is not enough. There are key steps to overcome temptation:

Learn to live with it. We can't overgrow temptation, even Christ was tempted. We should not feel guilty for being tempted or for having tempting thoughts. Actually, being tempted is a compliment, Satan does not need to tempt sinners, but righteous. Two well known examples are:

Job 1:1

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.

Genesis 39:2

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

We cannot avoid temptation,

James 1:13a

Let no one say *when* he is tempted

notice that in our text says WHEN we are tempted, not IF we are tempted. Also we read in

1 Corinthians 10:13a

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man...

Temptation only becomes a sin when you give in to it.

Martin Luther

You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair

Be prepared. The best way to face temptation is not facing it. Instead of trying to fight against a thought, you can think of something else.

Rick Warren

The battle for sin is won or lost in your mind. Whatever gets your attention will get you.

Also, we all have situations that make us more vulnerable depending on our weaknesses. We are to avoid such circumstances.

Ephesians 4:27

Nor give place to the devil.

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Proverbs 16:17

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who keeps his way preserves his soul.

Ask for help. God is always ready to help us overcome temptation.

Psalm 50:15

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Express prayers if necessary or if there is no time for more.

DELIVER ME!

Or simply

HELP!

The bible says that our cry for help will be heard because Jesus is sympathetic with our struggle...

Hebrews 4:15

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.

There is always a way out.

1 Corinthians 10:13b

But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

James 4:7

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

When Jesus was tempted in the desert, he only used the scripture to respond, he did not try to argue. We shall do the same because the

devil fears the word of God and because the devil is too good at arguing.

Ephesians 6:17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

God is always ready to help us, we should not feel ashamed to ask Him for help because we keep giving in to the same temptation because that is precisely where we need His help the most!

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Temptations keep us dependent upon God. Like the roots growing stronger when the wind blows against the tree we become more like Christ every time we defeat a temptation.

Temptations keep us dependant upon others. Share your struggle to a godly friend or support group. Like in many addictions or behaviors, friends and support groups are key to defeat some types of temptations.

Rick Warren

The truth is, whatever you can't talk about is already out of control in your life.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.

We live in a fallen world, we are sinners, so when you stumble (and you will) look up to God and ask for help. Also ask for help to your godly friend or to your support group. Do not give in or give up, remember that our reward is waiting.

James 1:12

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.

In closing, I want to live a thought with you. Like the famous words

Everything that does not kill you, makes you stronger

Every temptation that does not make you fall, makes you stronger.

And again

The devil did not come to tempt sinners but righteous.

So if you are being tempted to give up, you are probably in the right track and if you are being tempted to give in, you are probably getting stronger.

So cheer up!

Thank you all.

Lets pray...

God we thank you for everything you send and allow in our lives, and we thank you for your word that is so powerful and comforting and encouraging and opens our hearts and minds so we can see the path you have for each of us to walk towards you and to become better and stronger. Help us follow the right way and endure temptations.

We ask for your blessing this week and that you deliver us from evil and provide for our needs.

We praise and pray in the name of Jesus our Lord, amen.

God bless you all!