



DON'T YIELD TO TEMPTATION

A sermon series by Pastor Michael Jackson

GONE FISHIN'

Many years ago, according to a legend found in *Guideposts* magazine, Indian youths would go away in solitude to prepare for manhood. One such youth hiked into a beautiful valley, green with trees, bright with flowers. There he fasted. But on the third day, as he looked up at the surrounding mountains, he noticed one tall rugged peak, capped with dazzling snow. I will test myself against that mountain, he thought. He put on his buffalo-hide shirt, threw his blanket over his shoulders and set off to climb the peak. When he reached the top he stood on the rim of the world. He could see forever, and his heart swelled with pride. Then he heard a rustle at his feet, and looking down, he saw a snake. Before he could move, the snake spoke.

"I am about to die," said the snake. "It is too cold for me up here and I am freezing. There is no food and I am starving. Put me under your shirt and take me down to the valley."

"No," said the young man. "I am forewarned. I know your kind. You are a rattlesnake. If I pick you up, you will bite, and your bite will kill me."

"Not so," said the snake. "I will treat you differently. If you do this for me, you will be special. I will not harm you."

The youth resisted awhile, but this was a very persuasive snake with beautiful markings. At last the youth tucked it under his shirt and carried it down to the valley. There he laid it gently on the grass, when suddenly the snake coiled, rattled, and struck, biting him on the leg.

"But you promised..." cried the youth.

"You knew what I was when you picked me up." said the snake as it slithered away."

Temptation is somewhat like that deadly snake. It can look beautiful. It can be very persuasive, but we also know what it is.

This morning, I want to begin a new series of messages on the subject of temptation. A few of the things we will study include:

- The progression of temptation.
- Is it a sin to be tempted?
- Temptation and infidelity.
- How do I overcome temptation victoriously?

James 1:14-16 will serve as a key passage of Scripture throughout the series is. It says, "**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**"

The Amplified Bible puts this, in part: "**But every person is tempted when he is drawn away, enticed and BAITED by his own evil desire (lust and passion).**"

HAVING SAID THAT, THIS MORNING I WANT US TO LOOK AT THE PROGRESSION OF TEMPTATION

This message will have four points:

1. Choosing the proper bait,
2. The appeal of the bait,
3. Hitting the bait,
4. Swallowing the bait.

THE DEVIL WOULD MAKE A GREAT FISHERMAN. YOU SEE, HE KNOWS ALL TOO WELL THE VALUE OF CHOOSING THE PROPER BAIT

I dearly love to fish - salt water or fresh water, it makes no difference. I find fishing to be a most enjoyable, relaxing activity. Then too, I appreciate the fact that Jesus and a number of His disciples were fishermen. Having said that, would you like for me to tell you about the time that I caught....?

Seriously, in my years of fishing, I've come to learn that proper bait selection is one of the most important parts of being a successful angler. While redfish love shrimp, red snappers prefer squid, crappie like small minnows and certain types of jigs, and catfish likes anything that stinks.

As a rule, when I fish, I prefer to use lures. I have a number of fishing lures, as you can see, here on the table. Some are large, some are small. Lure size is very important. For instance, I would not want to try to catch a crappie with one of these musky lures. Then too, the color of the lure is important. Chrome/black is more effective after dark while white is a good year-round color.

A good fisherman exploits a fish's weakness for a particular bait. He or she knows that if you dangle the proper bait before a hungry fish, chances are pretty good that that fish is going to allow his inner desire for that bait to override his natural caution and thereby allow you to catch him. The end result is fried fish!

How does Satan know which bait to use?

1. WE USUALLY TELL HIM

Really! Listen now to this conversation: "Boy, my wife and I never get along anymore! We don't talk, we don't share, we simply have nothing in common. She never seems to understand me. I know we're married, but...."

What happened there? The fellow just told the enemy of his soul WHAT BAIT TO USE FOR HIS NEXT TEMPTATION! I'm serious! The devil, more than likely, will send a nice, understanding, easy-to-talk-to temptress who will most certainly possess all of the qualities that combine to seemingly make a perfect wife. She could come in the form of a new employee at the plant, a next-door neighbor, or even a lady at the supermarket.

It's almost as if a 36 inch northern pike were to jump into our boat and tell us, "You know, I really feel in the mood for a nice, fat, juicy leach today. Boy, if you would just put one of those on the end of your line, I would be on that thing in a heart beat!" Silly? Yes. And yet, are we not just as silly when we tell the devil which bait to use when he comes against us to tempt us?

The Bible, in Proverbs. 6:2 (*The Amplified Bible*), states: "**You are snared by the words of your lips, you are caught in the speech of your mouth.**" Our words are important. We need to choose them carefully.

2. THEN TOO, THE DEVIL WATCHES.

No doubt you remember the story of Job in the Old Testament. Both chapters one and two contain this passage: "**And the LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.'**"

It is no coincidence then that Job cries in Job 3:25, "**What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.**" Satan knew of Job's fears, and he carefully chose the very things that Job was afraid of, the very things that the brother dreaded, in his effort to get Job to fail.

What happens when you try to go on a food fast? Everyone that you come in contact with, everything that you see on television, every thought that pops in your mind, reminds you of food.

Let's say that you are angry with someone whom you know. Haven't you seen this happen? All at once, they are everywhere. Every time you turn around someone is talking about them. They got a new car, or a raise, or some other good thing has happened to them. It doesn't take long before the temptation hits. Satan whispers that you are the one who deserves the breaks. Life is not fair. Has God forgotten you? Slowly the anger, the jealousy, the hatred, grows. The temptation is so tempting because the bait looks so good!

Our enemy, simply put, is out to exploit our weaknesses! He knows what bait to choose to accomplish this task.

THIS BRINGS ME TO THE SECOND STEP IN THE PROGRESSION OF TEMPTATION: THE APPEAL OF THE BAIT

Just as it takes different kinds of bait to attract different kinds of fish, so it is that the devil uses various kinds of temptation to appeal to different individuals.

- He appeals to some people by dangling the bait of dishonesty before them. He knows that they are a sucker for a fast and easy buck. He may have tried this bait on them before and found them vulnerable.
- I like food especially rich, gooey, desserts. Recently a lady served me a delicious pecan pie while another one made my wife and me some homemade chocolate éclairs. There was no way on earth that I could resist those temptations.
- The names of Darrel Strawberry, the ex-baseball player, Robert Downy, Jr. and Jeanna Bush have all been in the news lately because of their problems with drugs and/or alcohol.

They remind me of the fellow who said that he could resist everything, everything that is except temptation.

It could be that you are more open to temptations of the flesh while someone else might be more vulnerable to sins of the spirit. Nevertheless, while we are tempted with different things, we are all nonetheless tempted.

Again, James declares in James 1:14 (*The Amplified Bible*) that, **“every person is tempted when he is drawn away, enticed, and baited by his own evil desire (lust and passion).”**

The phrase **“drawn away”** here is a hunting word. It literally means to be "snared in a trap." Think of a wild animal being drawn out of its place of safety to a place of danger where it can be attacked and captured. James illustrates how that when we are tempted, the devil draws us out of our place of shelter, into a place where we are vulnerable to sin.

James also uses the word **“enticed.”** This is a fishing word. It speaks of **“being baited, or lured by bait”** Picture a fish that is attracted by something moving in the water. It immediately moves over to the object and bites down on it. As soon as it closes its mouth, it is caught! The color, the size, the smell, the movement of the bait enticed the fish to bite.

What are some of these evil desires that lurk inside of each of us? Mark 7:20-23 gives us a partial list. Here Jesus says, **“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”**

Galatians 5:19-21 adds to the list. Listen to the passage from the *New Century Version*: **“The wrong things the sinful self does are clear: being sexually unfaithful, not being pure, taking part in sexual sins, worshiping gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people, feeling envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties....”**

These things can work their way into our spirit. When they get in there, then they want to work their way out; they want to express themselves.

No, they may not be us all of the time, in fact, some of them such as murder may rarely if ever pop up. However, when and if they do manifest themselves, when we do yield to one or more of them, we are merely expressing something evil (a particular lust or desire) that is in our hearts at that particular moment.

I want to name a number of things. Check off in your minds which ones, if any, appeal to you:

- To win “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?”
- To be the most popular male or female on campus,
- A Limburger Cheese sandwich complete with Tabasco Sauce and alfalfa sprouts?
- To be known as a an outstanding Christian,
- To blow up your neighbor’s lawnmower,
- To become a model for *Glamour* magazine,
- To retire at the age of 45,
- To have your best friend’s car,
- To win a hundred people to Christ this year,
- To perform on stage with Madonna.

The only ones that struck a cord in your heart are the ones that spoke to some inner desire. I doubt that any one of you felt any tug to perform on stage with Madonna or to eat a Limburger Cheese sandwich complete with Tabasco Sauce and alfalfa sprouts. Neither of those things appealed to you. On the other hand, no doubt the idea of early retirement did ring a few bells as did winning a hundred people to Christ this year.

In order for a temptation to have any power over us, it has to have something in us to appeal to – plain and simple. Paul notes in 1 Timothy 6:6-10: **“But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take any-thing out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who WANT to get rich FALL INTO TEMPTATION and a snare and MANY FOOLISH AND HARMFUL DESIRES which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For THE LOVE OF money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by LONGING FOR IT have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.”**

Here the apostle stresses the importance of contentment. Why? Is he opposed to money, riches, or other things of this life? No. Rather his concern is seen in these words: Those **“who want (desire) to get rich fall into temptation... many foolish and harmful desires... the love (desire) of money... by longing (desire) for it...”** Many folks have done an injustice to this powerful passage of Scripture by stressing the financial aspects of it. The passage, though, isn’t about money; IT IS ABOUT DESIRE. Money is simply the illustration that the writer uses.

He could have just as easily used any number of other things. The danger is unbridled desire for **ANY**thing outside of God. The answer is contentment.

Some people seemingly spend their entire lives fomenting desire:

- They ALLOW THEIR THOUGHTS to follow certain tracks;
- They ALLOW THEIR STEPS to go to certain places; enjoy certain company;
- They ENCOURAGE THEIR EYES to linger on certain forbidden things.

If a man nourishes and encourages desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence: **DESIRE BECOMES ACTION!**

Some time back *Reader’s Digest* carried this little story. While my wife and I were shopping in a mall, a shapely young woman in a short, form-fitting dress strolled by. My eyes followed her. Without looking up from the item she was examining, my wife asked, “Was it worth the trouble you’re in?”

THE THIRD STEP IN THE PROGRESSION OF TEMPTATION IS, HITTING THE BAIT

A couple of years ago, my son-in-law Aaron and I were out fishing on a lake. The fish were obviously not very hungry that particular morning. Oh, we had caught a few, but nothing to really brag about. As we were about to call it quits, we trolled over near the shore and started casting our lures out under some overhanging branches. It was then that it happened. My cast went a little high and my bait went into a

tree. For a moment I thought that I had lost the lure, but then I noticed that it's weight pulled it down through the branches until it was just above the water. Aaron and I were not the only ones watching the bait, for just before the lure fell into the water a three pound, ten ounce largemouth bass came up out of the water and grabbed it as it dangled in midair. It was one of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen as a fisherman. The fish hit the bait that morning and was on my plate that evening.

Solomon asks (Proverbs. 6:27-28): **“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?”** The point is, play with fire and eventually you will get burned.

The enemy loves to deceive us by telling us that we are too smart to get caught. That getting caught only happens to other people – stupid people – careless people. It will happen to you or me though. No way; not in a million years.

The list of history's great sinners though includes some pretty impressive names:

- Adam's wife Eve; (She swiped some fruit that belonged to God – not a good idea).
- King David of Israel; (He thought being king provided him with a free pass. It didn't).
- Samson the strong man; (He caved in to someone who appealed to his weakness).
- William Jefferson Clinton; (His legacy will always include Monica).
- Congressman Gary Condit; (Two extramarital affairs and counting. As a congressman he didn't have time for his wife, after next year's election, he should have plenty of time for her – if he still has a wife).

Each of these individuals have been forever marked by the fact that they caved in, they yielded to that which was in them and around them! In other words, the devil dangled the bait, and they hit it hard!

Listen to these statements. I have heard some of them over and over:

- Don't tell my wife
- You won't tell my parents, will you?
- Pastor, how was I to know that it would end in this?
- He lied!
- She lied!
- It's all over now....
- Now what?
- Is there any hope?
- This is all a mistake.
- I could just die.
- I just feel sick all over.
- I didn't do it; I'm innocent. Really.
- No body believes me.
- I'm sorry, okay?
- Will you pray for me?

Wouldn't it be something if we could have read the mind of that bass that day out on the lake. That lure looked so good, so inviting, so delicious. He simply couldn't resist the bait. In a matter of moments after the hit though, he was on my stringer.

THE FOURTH STEP IN THE PROGRESSION OF TEMPTATION IS DEATH – SWALLOWING THE BAIT

Again James wrote, **“when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”**

Please remember this simple formula: L - S - D.

Lust
Sin

D eath

Playing with temptation, toying with it, yielding to it, is certainly dangerous! In fact, IT CAN BE FATAL!

A woman was bathing in the Gulf of Mexico. She was enjoying the comfort of relaxing on an inflated cushion that kept her afloat. When she realized that she had been swept about a half mile out from the beach, she began to scream, but no one heard her. A coast guard craft found her five miles from the place where she first entered the water. She could have easily died. She just did not see her danger until it was almost too late.

Romans 6:23 warns: **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Nowhere is this progression better seen than in the story of the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. Let us read a portion of the story and see if we can pick out the four steps that I have outlined this morning. Genesis 3:1 **“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”** The serpent dropped the bait, didn't he? What was it? The forbidden fruit.

Now notice verses 4-5: **“You will not surely die....” “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** He now appeals to her inner desire.

Verse 6 then continues: **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also DESIRABLE for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”** Here Eve yielded to the temptation -- the third step in the progression.

And finally, God drove both her and her husband from the garden and from His presence. They died spiritually at this point and later on they died physically. Death happened!

Lust.

Sin.

Death!

The progression of unchecked temptation.

In the Australian bush country grows a little plant called the "sundew." It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to dance on it. Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky and will imprison any bug that touches it. As an insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. This innocent-looking plant then feeds on its victim. What a picture of the dangers of temptation. Is it any wonder then that someone said, "When the tempter comes knocking at your door, send Jesus to answer it!"

2 Peter 2:9 promises (*The Living Bible*), **“So also the Lord can rescue you and me from the temptations that surround us....”** God can deliver the godly.

IN CONCLUSION, in every temptation there are three persons present: the tempted one, the tempter, and God. The battle is always an unequal one, one against two. The one who is tempted always casts the deciding vote as to which side has the majority. Which side do you generally side with?

ALL MIXED UP

“It seems that a man had requested membership in a denomination that required the congregation to vote approval. The Church Council of the congregation was examining the candidate for membership. One question was ‘What part of the Bible do you like best?’ Whereupon the man answered, ‘I like the New Testament best.’ ‘What book in the New Testament?’ asked the interrogator. ‘The book of Parables, sir.’ ‘Would you kindly relate one of these parables to the Council?’

‘Once upon a time,’ the man began, ‘a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, and the thorns grew up and choked him. And he went on and met the Queen of Sheba, and she gave that man a thousand talents of gold and silver and a hundred changes of raiment. And he got in his chariot and drove furiously. And he drove under a tree where his hair got caught in a limb and left him hanging there. And he hung there many days and many nights, and ravens brought him food to eat and water to drink.

‘And one night, while he was hanging there asleep, his wife, Delilah, came along and cut off his hair, and he dropped and fell on stony ground. And it began to rain, and it rained for forty nights. And he hid himself in a cave.

‘And he went on and met a man who asked him to come in and have supper. But he said, “I cannot come in for I have married a wife.” And the man went into the byways and highways and compelled him to come. Finally, he went on and came to Jerusalem and saw Queen Jezebel sitting high up in a window, and she saw him. She laughed and he said, ‘Throw her down out of there!’ And they threw her down, and he said, ‘Throw her down again!’ And they threw her down 70 times 7, and of the fragments they picked up 12 baskets full. Now whose wife will she be in the Day of Judgment?’

Now in the Church Council, there was no one who felt qualified to question the candidate further, for each Council member had a deep suspicion that his own organized Bible knowledge was as sketchy as that of the candidate. So the man was voted into the Church.” (Author unknown)

Hosea the prophet noted in Hosea 4:6, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** Nowhere does this seem more true than in the area of temptation. Lots of people are as mixed up in this area as was in the fellow in the story that I just read.

To be sure, the purpose of this series is to help each one of us better understand as well as deal with temptation. Last week, I talked to you about the progression of temptation. This morning I want to help clarify some of the mystery that surrounds this issue by giving you five important guidelines:

1. **TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE, WE ALL SHARE IN IT**

Sometimes we feel as if we are standing all alone, when we are walking through the valley of temptation.

- No one else understands.
- No one else has ever been down this road before.
- These are uncharted waters.

Not so.

Please notice James 1:13, **“Let no one say WHEN he is tempted. . .”** The statement does not say “if”, it says “when....” **“Let no one say WHEN he is tempted. . .”** Temptation is taken for granted; there are no ifs, ands, or buts about it!

Likewise, 1 Corinthians 10:13 says in part: **“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is COMMON TO MAN. . .”** Again:

- **“The only temptation that has come to you is that which everyone has....”** (*New Century Version*)
- **“But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience.”** (*New Living Translation*)
- **“You are tempted in the same way everyone else is tempted.”** (*Contemporary English Version*)

Simply put, the trials of common Christians are but common trials: others have the like burdens and the like temptations. My friend, no matter what temptation you experience, there have been others who have had the same kind of temptation.

Hebrews 4:15 even says of Jesus, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE--yet was without sin.”**

Wouldn't it be great if we could find some hideaway where the fingers of temptation could not reach us? Sadly, though, I only know of one such place, and that's the grave. If you think you've found a place where Satan cannot get to you with temptation:

- such as in some deeper life experience with Christ, or
- some uninhabited island, or
- that ideal church,

then BE FOREWARNED -- even there you will be tempted.

Thoughts of error, of sin, of desire, can attack us anytime, for they issue from inside of us, according to Jesus. In fact, those thoughts seem to favor attacking us when we feel safe and secure -- such as when we are on some spiritual “high”.

- Remember, our Lord's temptation in the wilderness came right after the Holy Spirit had descended on Him at His baptism,
- Peter's great failure followed the Passover meal we call The Last Supper,
- Elijah faced the temptation of his life immediately after his great victory over the 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel.

Think back over some of your greatest spiritual victories. Weren't they followed by some equally great spiritual battles? The point is, you/I will never be “so spiritual”, so remote, so perfect, so **ANY**thing that we can be immune to temptation, that is, again, unless we're dead!

I love the story of an old priest who is asked by a young man, “Father, when will I cease to be bothered by the sins of the flesh?” The reply: “I wouldn't trust myself, my son, until I was dead three days!”

CLARENCE E. MCCARTNEY WAS ONE OF THE BEST LOVED, BEST KNOWN PREACHERS OF HIS TIME. IN ONE OF HIS SERMONS, HE NOTED: “HOW LONG TEMPTATION HAS BEEN HERE! HOW OLD IT IS! HOW UNCHANGING IT IS! IT IS AS NEW AS BIRTH AND AS OLD AS DEATH.

- It touches the life of the philosopher and the fool,
- the prince and the pauper,
- the sage and the savage,
- Christ and Judas.

Wherever man has gone temptation has gone. It is man's shadow, haunting him wherever he goes and wherever he appears. It is the warfare from which there is no discharge.”

No, my friends, no one is immune from temptation for it is a malady that is COMMON TO MAN.

2. GOD DOES NOT TEMPT US TO SIN

Again, James 1:13 says: **“Let no man say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”**

- Psalm 5:4 (*King James Version*) adds to this: **“For Thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with Thee.”**
- 1 John 1:5 states, in part: **“...God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”**

Friends, we need to know who the enemy is, and one thing is abundantly clear: THE ENEMY IS NOT GOD!

- God is holy and good.
- He is light.
- He is totally separated from sin.
- He is not tempted with evil.
- He does not put evil on anymore.

You know, it's the strangest thing. I have NEVER been robbed of a million dollars. NEVER! I've had people steal my car radio, tape players, my wife's jewelry, a little money and even my daughter's piggy bank. But no one has even come close to getting a million dollars off of me.

Do you know WHY? Because I've never HAD a million dollars to steal! It's obviously impossible to steal that which isn't there to steal. But let me tell you this: A person could come closer to getting a million dollars from ME than he or she could come to getting SIN out of GOD. There is NO SIN IN HIM AT ALL. If sin were money, God would be bankrupt, flat broke, without a penny! **"In Him there is no darkness."**

You might as well try:

- to get ice out of fire,
- darkness out of the sun,
- blood out of a turnip

as to try to find any trace of sin in God.

Surprisingly, though, mankind has been trying to put the rap of sin on God for a long, long time. A classic illustration of this is seen in Adam. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden by eating of the forbidden fruit, he immediately blamed God! Genesis 3:12 notes, **"The man said, 'The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'"** What was Adam saying? "God, You did this to me. It was your fault; You set me up by giving that awful female to me! Here I was, enjoying the bounty and blessing of the garden, when you brought this woman into my life. If it hadn't been for her, I wouldn't have been tempted."

Let's look at his argument a little closer.

- It is true that God placed Adam in the garden.
- It is also true that God gave Eve to Adam so she could be a helper and companion to him.
- It is also true that God placed a tree, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, in the middle of the garden and ordered the two of them to not eat or even touch the tree.
- AND it is also true that the tree was not a source of temptation to them UNTIL Satan came and said, according to Genesis 3:4-5 (*The New King James Version*), **"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."**

Satan does several things here:

1. He DISCOUNTS the judgment of God
2. QUESTIONS the Word of God
3. BLINDS Eve to the goodness of God
4. LIES as to the motive of God
5. AWAKENS within Eve an inner desire for that which was forbidden by God.

The tree, again, was not the real problem. I believe that it had been there all along. Satan simply used it as bait to entice, to attract, that which was fleshly in Eve. The tempter used the fruit to appeal to the desires of her flesh, the desires of her eyes, and the desires of fleshly pride. Adam simply followed her lead.

Genesis 3:13 then declares, **“The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”** Even Eve knew God was not tempting or deceiving her.

GOD IS TOO HOLY TO BE TEMPTED, AND HE IS TOO LOVING TO TEMPT OTHERS.

The Scriptures call Satan the Tempter.

- That is his name;
- that is his mission,
- that is his character.

We would be wise to remember that when we are being tempted to sin.

3. **SATAN CAN TEMPT US TO SIN, BUT HE CANNOT MAKE US SIN**

Flip Wilson, a popular TV comedian in the '70s, would often use the famous line “The devil made me do it.” The biblical truth, however, is quite the opposite. The devil can not make you do anything.

- The devil can pressure you,
- The devil can persecute you,
- The devil can sorely tempt you, but God has not allowed the devil the ability or power to make you or me sin.

Some people dread temptation because they think temptation forces them to do that which they do not want to do. The truth of the matter is, though, since the world began, man sins because man chooses to sin -- plain and simple.

TEMPTATION AT ITS STRONGEST IS ONLY AN INDUCEMENT, AN ENTICEMENT. Temptation Is Not Compulsion!

Notice: Satan said to Jesus, Matthew 4:8, **“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’”**

The evil one offered the temptation -- he could do no more than that.

- He didn't; he couldn't force Jesus to do anything He didn't choose to do Himself
- Along this line, the devil couldn't make Eve eat the forbidden fruit.
- He tempted Job to curse God and die, but he couldn't make Job curse God and die.
- He tempted Judas to sin, but Jesus offered the man a way out even up to the very last possible moment.

Do you get the point? Romans 6:14 promises, **“For sin shall not be master over you. . .”**

Don't you know that the devil would love -- truly love -- to have the power to force sin upon us?

- Wouldn't he love to make some of you go out and get plastered?
- Wouldn't he love to get some of you to go out and kill your boss?
- Wouldn't he love to get some of you to lie, cheat or steal?
- Wouldn't he love to force some of you older saints to deny your faith and walk away from God?

He can't though. He can tempt you to fall; but he can not make you fall!

4. **TEMPTATION IS BASED ON A LIE**

This only stands to reason. Again, the tempter is the devil. The Bible goes on to note that the devil **“is a liar, and the father of lies”** (John 8:44).

I want to challenge you, tell me of a time when Satan didn't lie? Again, the Bible says that the truth isn't even in him. He couldn't tell the truth if he wanted too!

Let's return now to the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Again, Satan told Eve, **“You**

will be like God.” Of course that was a lie. They were already as close to being like God as two humans could possibly be -- except for Jesus.

1. They were without sin.
2. They were created in God’s image and likeness.
3. They had been given dominion over all of the Earth.
4. They could have lived forever.
5. They lived in perfect peace, health, harmony, and more.

Their yielding to the temptation though robbed them of all of this! Instead of becoming like God, they became allied with Satan! Instead of getting more, they wound up losing everything that they had!

When David looked upon his neighbor's wife as she was bathing, Satan whispered, “David, you are king; you can have her. She'll make you happy. God will forgive you. What harm could possibly come from having a little fun? Go ahead man, have your fling.”

That was the lie. Here is the truth:

- The baby born to that adulterous relationship died under the judgment of God.
- The “fling” cost Bathsheba's husband (Uriah) his wife and life.
- This sin directly led to the rape of David’s daughter, Tamar.

The end of the story certainly looked much different than did the beginning.

I love this quote: “Is it not significant that in the hour of Christ's hunger Satan brought no food? Is it not strange that he came not carrying trays filled with steaming and savory food? With what did he come to Christ in this hour of temptation? He came only with stones and promises. In fact, he came only with promises, for he called the Master's attention to the stones of the earth and promised bread as a reward for His willful disobedience. Let everyone, both young and old, remember that Satan gives no food, no riches, no satisfying portion of any kind. He merely calls attention to the cold material stones of earth and endeavors out of them to paint for us pictures of sublime satisfaction with his brush of lying promises.”

All temptation is based on a lie! It simply thrives on offering that which it cannot deliver! Notice:

THE TEMPTATION	THE LIE	CONSEQUENCES
SUICIDE	Revenge Relief Freedom	Separation from loved ones Loss of potential Heartbreak for the survivors Disobedience to God’s laws
SEXUAL IMMORALITY	Popular Fulfilled Know love	Sin against God Sin against one’s own body Compromises testimony and reputation Possibility of diseases and an unwanted pregnancy
TO RUN AWAY	Happy and free No responsibility Revenge You can be with friends	Difficult to survive on the streets Drugs Crime Prostitution Loss of family
DISHONESTY	Spared punishment. Get ahead	Loss of testimony and Christian witness

Something for nothing

Tainted character

Possible legal consequences

Sin

Someone once noted that dishonesty is dangerous because it first becomes a habit, then a pattern, and finally a way of life. It is like a fungus and it grows on people.

Since temptation is based on a lie, it is good to look past the moment and consider what the real cost of yielding might be. Today's decisions impacts tomorrow.

The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, once observed: "You can not play with the animal in you without becoming wholly animal, play with falsehood without forfeiting your right to truth, play with cruelty without losing your sensitivity of mind. He who wants to keep his garden tidy doesn't reserve a plot for weeds."

Satan has offered--but has he delivered? No. He only offers a lie, a front, a mask, a facade. His enticements are based on promises that are all false. He is a liar; temptation IS his lie.

5. IT IS NOT A SIN TO BE TEMPTED

- Temptation IS a call to battle.
- It IS a call to righteousness.
- It IS a call to move ever closer to God and His Word.

It is all of this and more. However, it is not a sin.

Hebrews 4:15 states, **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was WITHOUT SIN."**

No man ever endured such severity of temptation as did our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Satan tempted Him with food -- after a 40 day fast;
- Satan tempted Him to show off -- to be Jesus Christ Superstar;
- Satan tempted Him with power -- to be the ruler of the world.

In truth, what the devil was doing was offering Jesus the easy way out. The Lord knew that at the end of His journey was a cruel, painful, deadly cross. The devil was saying here is your free pass around the cross. That was at the heart of the temptation. Knowing what you know, would you have been tempted?

I have had people try to deny the humanity of Jesus by saying that He wasn't really tempted by any of these things. Of course He was tempted; the Bible says that He was! Da!

However, the Lord's temptations did not stop with Matthew 4. Later, in Matthew 16:21-26, we read: **"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"**

This time Satan used one of the Lord's closest friends to tempt Jesus. Again the temptation was to avoid the Cross. Again, this temptation offered ease: don't go to Jerusalem; don't suffer; don't die. Jesus would have none of that! He recognized the tempter for who he was -- Satan -- and rebuked him flat out! Again temptation was offered and again Jesus refused.

Then, in Mark 14 we again find the Lord facing temptation. Notice Verses 33-36. **"He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch.'**

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"

This had to have been one of the most difficult temptations that Jesus ever faced. Here He was looking not only at His pending death, and the suffering that went with it, but He was also looking at your sins and mine. They were all there – in the cup.

- The temptation was to forego the cup,
- To let the hour of trial pass,
- To forget about us and get Himself off of the hook,
- To escape the howling mob,
- The kangaroo court, and
- The agony of the crucifixion.

The temptation: give in to the desires of the flesh! This battle was so great that it caused Him to sweat great drops of blood!

I have known people who claimed that Jesus never was tempted like they are tempted. No, they have it all wrong! We have never been tempted like Jesus was tempted! Look at His temptations and dare to compare them with the temptations that we encounter!

What was the result?

- He passed the test!
- He went through with it --
- WITHOUT SIN!

Tempted? YES. A sinner? NO!

HAVING SAID THAT, LET ME WRAP THIS UP. Someone has noted, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." In a similar vein, you can't keep temptation from coming your way, but you do not have to give it a place in your heart.

Remember:

- Temptation is inevitable, we all share in it,
- God does not tempt us to sin,
- Satan can tempt us to sin, but he cannot make us sin,
- Temptation is based on a lie,
- It is not a sin to be tempted.

It is good to KNOW these things when one is trying to win over temptation.

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Since Adam and Eve, temptation has been mankind's Achilles heel. In fact, the great "doers of evil" were, at one time, the very men who thought THEY could NEVER DO IT.

- As a youth, Napoleon wrote an essay on the dangers of ambition.
- Nero wrote: "Would that this hand had never learned to write!" when asked to sign his first death warrant.
- The same Robespierre who, during the Reign of Terror in France sent thousands to the guillotine, resigned his office as a provincial judge early in his career because he could not bring himself to pronounce the sentence of death upon a man convicted of a capital crime.
- Had the young David been told that he would live to see his reign as Israel's king darkened with murder and adultery, he would have said, "Such a thing could never be!"
- If the wise Solomon would have been told that he would someday forsake his father's God and bend his aged knees to heathen deities and follow after strange women, he would have no doubt cried, "You must be kidding! I couldn't do that!" But the sad truth is, he did!
- A few short hours from when Peter boasted of his fidelity to Jesus, he succumbed to denying Him with an oath.

Psalm 19:12 notes: "**Who can discern his errors?**" None of these men set out to commit such gross sins and yet the truth of the matter is, when temptation called they caved in.

THIS MORNING I WANT TO RETURN TO THIS LAST POINT – IT IS NOT A SIN TO BE TEMPTED

Can I be very human with you? I don't like the devil – really. My daughter Marci used to have a T-shirt that describes my sentiments exactly. It said: "Satan is a Poo-Poo head." He is. Help me, please. Turn to your neighbor and tell him or her that Satan is a poo-poo head. Come on, do it. Don't you feel better now?

In addition to his being a poo-poo head (whatever that is), the devil is also:

- A liar,
- A cheat,
- A murderer,
- A child molester,
- As well as an egotistical fool.

Are you getting the point? I really do not have any use for this evil monster at all.

Listen to me. A moment ago I told you that it is not a sin to be tempted. Nonetheless, the Evil One makes sure that guilt accompanies temptation. He wants us to feel sinful, yucky, guilty simply because we are tempted.

Do you see this ball? (**TOSS BALL UP AND DOWN**). What if I threw the ball to you and then got onto you for having a ball in the sanctuary? Wouldn't you say, "But pastor, you threw the ball to me. Why are you getting on me when you are the one who is at fault?" You would be right.

One of the issues in the O. J. Simpson trial of several years ago was whether or not the Los Angeles Police Department planted the evidence so as to make O. J. look guilty.

Well Satan is a master at this kind of stuff.

The devil is like a burglar who breaks into a man's house to steal and, upon getting caught, **BEGINS TO ACCUSE THE OWNER OF BEING THE THIEF**. One of Satan's favorite ploys is to come to us and whisper evil suggestions, doubts, as well as jealous, envious, and proud thoughts. Then he will say, "Oh, you are so wicked, so terrible, so hypocritical, to think such things. Obviously, you are not right with God or such thoughts would NEVER have entered your mind." This reasoning sounds so logical that the saint often accepts it as being true.

Has he ever caught you in that trap?

SO WHEN DOES TEMPTATION BECOME SIN?

Let's return to James 1:15: **"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.."**

We have no idea how long Adam and Eve were in the Garden before they were tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit.

- Were they there a week,
- a month,
- a year,
- ten years?

No one knows for sure. The Bible is silent in this regard.

We do know this one thing though, the tree had been there all along. It had not a problem. It was not an issue. Adam and Eve walked with God, communed with Him friends to friend. Perhaps they even walked by the tree on occasion. No big deal.

The Bible points out that the trouble arose when Eve – following the suggestion of Satan -- looked upon the forbidden tree with desire. When she looked upon that which God had forbidden, when she said in her heart:

- "I want that fruit..."
- "That fruit will make me wise...."
- "That fruit will make me like God...."
- "It doesn't matter what God said, I have to have that..."
- "Surely, the Lord has been holding out on me..."

Sin was conceived in her heart which in turn resulted in the birth of her wicked deed.

Jesus warned, in Matthew 5:28, **"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**

Weymouth's Translation notes: **"But I tell you that whoever looks at a woman and cherishes lustful thoughts has already in his heart become guilty with regard to her."**

The *New Century Version* says: **"But I tell you that if anyone looks at a woman and wants to sin sexually with her, in his mind he has already done that sin with the woman."**

The word "lustfully" here in the *New International Version* is the same Greek word translated "desire." Somewhere between the normal desire to be with a member of the opposite sex, and having a full-blown extra-marital affair is a place where sin is conceived. Jesus states that that point is when the look goes from the normal appreciation of the personality or appearance of another person to when that look turns to wanting more than just a glance. It is when, according to Dr. Billy Graham, the fellow starts to undress the lady in his mind that desire turns sour and lust is given birth.

The Apostle James uses a very important word. He said, **"after desire has conceived...."** By this he means, when our desire results in action:

- We take the second look;
- We decide to go for it;
- We say yes to the temptation and no to God;
- We give in to the desires of the flesh.

We are serious about some forms of purity in American society. A whole department of the federal government, the Food and Drug Administration, is charged with monitoring and protecting the purity of what we eat. But our standards of purity are not always what we might hope. Here are the federal guidelines of purity for a few familiar products:

Apple butter: If the mold count is 12 percent or more, if it averages 4 rodent hairs per 100 grams or more, if it averages 5 or more whole insects (not counting mites, aphids, or scale insects) per 100 grams, the FDA will pull it from the shelves. Otherwise, it will go right onto your English muffins.

Coffee beans: (Caffeine addicts beware!) Coffee beans will get withdrawn from the market if an average of 10 percent or more are insect-infested or if there is one live insect in each of 2 or more immediate containers. (The FDA says people just don't like getting too many live insects with their coffee beans. One per container is okay, but with more than that we draw the line.)

Mushrooms: Mushrooms can't be sold if there is an average of 20 or more maggots of any size per 15 grams of dried mushrooms.

Fig paste: If there are more than 13 insect heads per 100 grams of fig paste in each of 2 or more sub-samples, the FDA ruthlessly tosses the whole batch. (Apparently other insect body parts are tolerable, but we don't want to be staring at too many insect heads.)

Obviously, we humans place a high value on purity. God does too. He desires that we have an undivided heart. One that isn't infested with compromised standards, divided affections, or contaminated desires.

I like the story of the little boy who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. His mother asked him what he was doing to which the lad replied, "I just climbed up to smell the cookies, when my teeth got caught in one of them."

Now, did the child go immediately from desire to stealing? No.

- First he smelled the cookies,
- Then he thought about how he would like to have a cookie,
- Next, he devised a way to get into the cookie jar,
- And finally, he carried out his plan.

As Christians, we must learn to discipline our minds to not allow them to ponder, to rationalize, to linger on matters that are forbidden. To do otherwise is quite simply, an invitation to danger and defeat!

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Please notice 1 Corinthians 10:13 with me, ". . . **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.**"

The writer points out two very important things that God is faithful to do:

1. HE IS FAITHFUL TO PROVIDE A WAY OF ESCAPE

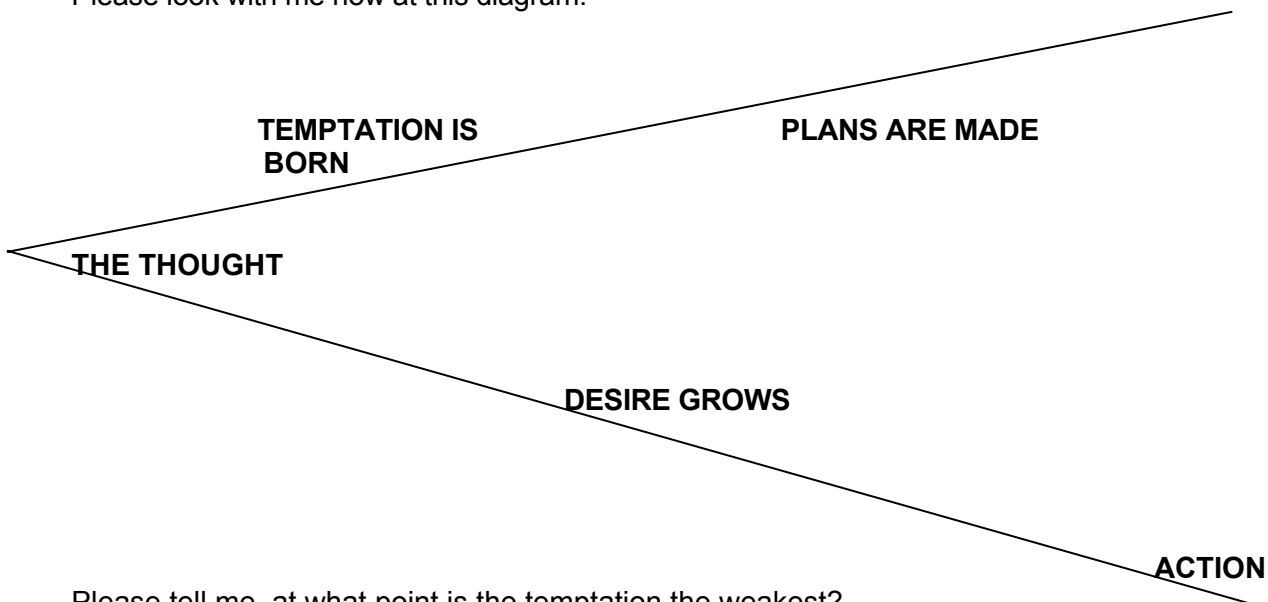
Paul is drawing a military picture here. An army is apparently surrounded, they appear to be hemmed in on every side, and then, suddenly an escape route appears; a passage way that leads to safety.

The Lord has provided an escape route out of each and every temptation: NOT the way of SURRENDER; NOT the way of RETREAT; rather, A WAY OF CONQUEST IN AND BY THE POWER OF THE GRACE OF GOD!

- 2 Peter 2:9 declares, ". . . **the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation. . .**"
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3 adds, "**But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.**"
- Romans 6:14, "**For sin shall not be your master....**"
- 1 Corinthians 15:57, "**But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Do you get the point? Simply, the Lord has undertaken to defend and deliver his servants! The same God who delivered Daniel from the lion's den, and Peter from prison, makes a path of safety for those who trust in Him.

Please look with me now at this diagram:



Please tell me, at what point is the temptation the weakest?

- A thought;
- Temptation is birthed;
- Desire grows;
- Plans are made;
- Action?

The answer is really rather simple; at the onset of the temptation. Temptation rarely if ever hits us full-bore. It starts small. A passing thought; a slight fancy. Satan's dangles some thing that he knows will appeal to our inner desires. The easiest way out -- the best way of escape -- is to reject the temptation right then and there. Don't let it grow!

Another way to think of this is to think of a tree. Many of you have to deal with volunteer trees that spring up in your yard. Squirrels, birds, the wind, as well as people do a great job of scattering the necessary seeds. While many of these trees are beautiful and desirable, many others are nothing more than a nuisance. When is the best time to deal with one of these volunteer trees?

- When it first pops it's stem out of the ground?
- When it is a six foot sapling?
- When it is thirty feet tall and five feet a round?

The answer is obvious.

When is the best time to discover God's way of escape? The answer is equally obvious.

The Bible says, in James 4:7-8, **“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you....”**

Know this, God is long-suffering. Satan is impatient. Most temptations will not stand up in the face of stiff resistance. Therefore:

- Break out in praise and worship;
- Pray for strength;
- Read or quote aloud some verses from the Bible;
- Call on a trusted friend for encouragement.

A survey some time back in *Discipleship Journal* revealed that temptations were more potent when:

- The respondents had neglected their time with God (81 percent) and
- When they were physically tired (57 percent).

These same people found that they best resisted temptation by:

- Prayer (84 percent),
- Avoiding compromising situations (76 percent),
- Bible study (66 percent), and
- Being accountable to someone (52 percent).

So often we say “Maybe” to sin instead of “No,” leaving the option open for us to say “Yes” at some later date. We are like the person trying to get rid of a salesman on his doorstep with-out saying a firm “No” and closing the door. Close the door to the enemy! Close it tight! Close it immediately! Let him know that you mean business; that you won’t be opening the door again a little later. To resist temptation we must say a firm “No” and mean it!

2. NEXT, GOD IS FAITHFUL TO “NOT ALLOW YOU TO BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT YOU ARE ABLE. . .”

Our temptations, although not brought on by God, are nonetheless under His control. His eyes are upon us, His hands are outstretched, His voice is ever ready to cry, “That’s enough! No more!”

Let me illustrate. When the children of Israel first left Egypt, the Lord didn’t lead them through the country of the Philistines (the nearest route). Why? Exodus 13:17-18 states the reason: “...**for God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt.’ Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea....”**

They **COULD TAKE** the wilderness and even the Red Sea; but at that time they could **NOT** take the Philistines. Later, when they had learned more about trusting Him, He let them face the enemies’ army, but **NOT BEFORE THEY WERE READY**. And, to be sure, these eventual battles of the wilderness were nothing compared to those of the promised land, where they had to face walled cities, overcome giants, conquer seven great nations, and defeat 31 kings.

They weren’t allowed to fight the greater battles **UNTIL** God saw that they were **READY FOR** the greater battles! Temptation is a real part of our spiritual conflict. Expect the battles and know that they will grow as you grow! There is no sin in that.

What temptation has the enemy brought to you recently?

- There was more than one? I am not surprised.
- Was it a powerful temptation or not so powerful?
- Was it new or a rerun?

Whatever it was, the Lord knew that the two of you could handle it.

Call upon Him. Move forward when and as He directs. Why? God is faithful!

- Faithful to make a way of escape.
- Faithful to make sure that you are able to bear up under the temptation.

God is faithful.

TEMPTATION AND INFIDELITY

Part 1

The following is a true story. "Our train rolled into Kansas City at 1 a.m. Dim lights came on to help the new passengers find seats. Many of us who had been riding home through the night had spread out to occupy two seats apiece.

An attractive woman made her way down the aisle with her bags. She was looking from side to side, hoping for someone to move. I turned toward the window and watched her in the reflection.

'May I sit here?' she asked.

'Sure.' I looked up and smiled as I moved over. She threw her things into the rack above and sat down. Near the back of the car, only one of my colleagues from the church had managed to keep his extra space. 'Lucky guy'.

'My name's Kathy. What's yours?'

I told her, and we talked quietly for a while. She was on her way to visit her mother after some rough spats with her husband. I was eager to get home and see my wife and family after an exhausting church leadership conference.

Soon we both slipped off to sleep. At some later stop, I awoke to find Kathy cuddled next to me. 'You don't mind if I lean my head on your shoulder, do you?' she said sleepily.

'Uh, no. I guess not.' She was just tired... wasn't she? And besides, I had a wonderful wife and a great marriage and would be home before noon. I looked around to see if anyone was noticing.

She cuddled closer. I wondered what she really wanted--or would allow. At first I couldn't believe what I was thinking. But then it was her fault. She knew exactly what she was doing. I might as well enjoy it. After all, what could happen on a train full of people? Nothing, nothing really... except what Jesus warned about happening in the heart.

Finally, I excused myself so I could go back and talk with my friend--the 'lucky' one with the empty seat beside him. Or maybe I was the lucky one since that extra space was still available. I only knew I didn't need to stay where I had been.

Perhaps it wasn't luck at all. Maybe that was the "way of escape" that 1 Corinthians 10:13 talks about, which God had provided from the beginning."

Long, long ago, God erected a sign. It says, "Don't commit acts of immorality. Don't do it; in fact, don't even think about it!" Then too, He added, don't let yourself want **"your neighbor's wife, male or female servant"** (*The New Living Translation*).

This morning, as I continue on with my series of messages on temptation, I want to spend some time looking at temptation and infidelity. To be honest, a series on temptation would lack credibility in today's culture if it didn't cover such a topic as this.

THIS PAST WEEK'S NEWS HAS FOCUSED ON SUCH PEOPLE AS:

Congressman Gary Condit who made a rare public appearance in Washington on Monday, after weeks of seeking refuge from the deluge of media attention that has overwhelmed him since Chandra Levy's mysterious disappearance. The married Condit has had at least three extra-marital affairs.

Barbara Walter who had one of her highest rated interview specials in several years as she talked candidly with actress Ann Heche. Heche who recently married a cameraman was the one-time lover of Ellen 'Degenerate'. Heche now claims that she was crazy during the time that she was a lesbian.

Notorious California child molester Theodore Frank who died of an apparent heart attack at the age of 65. Frank died on death row as an inmate of San Quentin State Prison. The child molester was twice sentenced to death for torturing, raping and killing a 2-year-old girl. Frank's personal diary contained accounts of his molesting more than 100 children over 20 years.

Sex has not left the front page simply because Bill Clinton left office.

A while back the *USA TODAY* newspaper had as it's front page cover story an article entitled: "Sex on the internet. Sex, sex, sex, sex..." Our world seems to have an insatiable appetite for anything that has to do with sex. Sex sells. Sex entertains. Sex captures our attention as few other things can and do.

Think with me now for a moment about television. Virtually every program – including the news -- is riddled with immorality, seduction, as well as varying amounts of nudity. And you know what? Hollywood has made it all appear so romantic, exciting, fulfilling, and yes even funny. The image makers surround sex with laughter, beautiful music, and lavish settings. At the same time, they carefully airbrush away the inevitable shame, deceit, betrayal, and ugliness.

Then, too:

- listen to the music that is out there.
- Look at the covers of the magazines at the checkout counters, as well as
- the books at the book stands.
- Listen to the conversations that take place during break time and over the lunch hour. Again, sex is everywhere!

A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported that there are close to 200,000 porn sites on the Internet. The *Washington Times* reports that pornography has indeed become big business. America spends \$11 billion annually on porn, compared with a mere \$1.2 billion on fundraising for both political parties combined.

In addition, America is currently dealing with such sexuality issues as: abortion, homosexuality, birth control, pornography, premarital sex, sex-education, sexual child abuse, violence against women, differences over the role of men and women in the work place, in schools, churches, and the military.... The list goes on and on.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO TO DEAL WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATION?

Let me repeat a story I told in the second message in this series. An old priest was asked by a young man, "Father, when will I cease to be bothered by the sins of the flesh?" The older gentleman replied: "I wouldn't trust myself, my son, until I was dead three days!"

Speaking of Catholics, a young priest was serving in a confessional booth for the first time. As is usually the case for a novice, an older priest was listening in to see how the young man was getting along. At the end of the day, the elder priest took the green-horn aside and said, "When a person finishes confession, you've got to say something other than "WOW!" I would say that that was some good advice, agreed?"

Just to be honest, there have been a few times in my office that I have been tempted to say "wow" myself.

So, again, how does one deal with this matter of sexual temptation? I want to give you a number of important points, some of which will spill over into next week's message.

1. UNDERSTAND, NO ONE IS COMPLETELY IMMUNE TO THIS TEMPTATION

You aren't. I'm not. None of us are. We can usually get away from such things as alcohol and drugs, if we really want to. However, it is a whole lot harder to completely remove oneself from the lure of immorality. Jesus said that it springs forth out of one's own heart. In other words, the potential is always there, within each and everyone of us.

Think back over the last number of years. How many people do you know of that has gotten caught up in some sexual scandal? The list of names would make up a virtual "Whose Who" of politics, the

arts, religion, and sports.

We can even find tales of sexual failure in Scripture:

- The biblical King David failed here, as did
- Noah,
- Judah,
- The wise Solomon,
- Lot's two daughters,
- The strong Samson,
- The Woman at the Well,

And many others.

If I were to take a poll of the men that you admire the most today, I am confident that Dr. James Dobson of *Focus On The Family* would score pretty high on most of our lists. Nonetheless, even Dr. Dobson has had to deal with sexual temptation. Listen to his story: "Shirley and I had been married just a few years when we had a minor fuss. It was no big deal, but we both were pretty agitated at the time. I got in the car and drove around for about an hour to cool off. When I was on the way home, a very attractive girl drove up beside me in her car and smiled. She was obviously flirting with me. Then she slowed down, looked back and turned on to a side street. I knew she was inviting me to follow her. I didn't take the bait. I just went on home and made up with Shirley. But I thought later about how vicious Satan had been to take advantage of the momentary conflict between us. The Scripture refers to the devil as '**a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**' (1 Peter 5:8). I can see how true that description really is. He knew his best opportunity to damage our marriage was during that hour or two when we were irritated with each other."

Notice now these troubling statistics:

- Surveys as to the incidence of infidelity in a marriage vary. One survey reveals that over half of the married women and nearly three-quarters of the married men have engaged in at least one extramarital affair. This comes from an article entitled "After All, Maybe It's Biology" by Helen Fisher in *Psychology Today*.
- Another such survey states that two-thirds of all married men will commit adultery sometime during their marriages.
- Tim Stafford wrote in his *The Sexual Christian*, that twenty-three percent of those in the church ADMIT to having been unfaithful to their marriage partner.

Anyway you slice it, the problem is huge.

Understand this, Satan never plays fair. His evil forces keep an eye open for every opportunity to tempt us such as when we have been involved in behavior that he knows will weaken our Christian faith, when we are emotionally depleted, mentally tired, or overwhelmed from battle fatigue.

I will never forget the day as long as I live when a lady in my congregation called me with the news that Jimmy Swaggart had been caught with a New Orleans prostitute. Just this past Friday I saw his name used in ridicule by a sports reporter in a national newspaper. Again, the point is, none of us are immune from this evil temptation.

1 Corinthians 10: 12 warns, "**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.**" That advice is open ended. It applies to each and every one of us here this morning.

2. COUNT THE COST -- THE TRUE COST -- OF IMMORALITY

I heard once about a counselor who drew up a list of consequences that he would have to endure should he ever give in to sexual temptation. I like his list. I want to share it with you:

- I will grieve the One who redeemed me.
- I will drag His sacred name through the mud.

- I will have to look Jesus in the eye one day and give an account of my actions.
- I will inflict untold hurt on my wife, who is my best friend and who has been faithful to me.
- I will lose my wife's respect, love, and trust.
- I will hurt my beloved daughters.
- I will destroy my example and credibility.
- I might lose my wife and children forever.
- I will shame my family.
- I will lose my own self-respect. (Though God could forgive me, could I forgive myself?)
- I could form memories and flashbacks that plague future intimacy with my spouse.
- I could reap the consequences of diseases.
- I could cause a pregnancy that would be a lifelong reminder of my sin.
- I could invoke lifelong shame and embarrassment on myself.

What a wise man. In looking at the "deal" Satan was offering, he truly considered the total cost including the long-term payment plan. He determined the penalty of unfaithfulness was simply too high for him to pay.

I want now briefly focus on seven areas of consequence or cost that surround sexual sin:

1. WHEN WE ENGAGE IN SEXUAL SINS, WE JOIN JESUS CHRIST WITH THAT EVIL RELATIONSHIP

"Now you are the body of Christ..." (1 Corinthians 12:27). We represent Jesus here on this earth. Our name, our lives, our testimony are all linked to Him. When we commit a sexual sin, we drag His name and person into that sin. One writer noted in this regard, "We link the Holy Son of God with a harlot.

2. PAUL NOTED THAT WHEN WE SIN IMMORALLY, WE SIN AGAINST OUR OWN BODY

Not only do we defile the Lord's body, we also defile our own flesh. This is one reason why sexual immorality is called uncleanness and pollution. I personally believe that this is one of the reasons that sexually transmitted diseases carry the stigma that they do. They are dirty diseases.

3. WHEN WE COMMIT SINS OF IMMORALITY, WE BECOME ONE WITH THE PROSTITUTE

We are no better than him or her. We share equal shame as well as equal guilt. Notice 1 Corinthians 6:16 with me from *The Living Bible*: **"And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute she becomes a part of him and he becomes a part of her? For God tells us in the Scripture that in his sight the two become one person...."**

The Greek word that is translated "prostitute" here is "porne" from which we get our word pornography. One of my Greek dictionaries gives its meaning as "a woman who sells her body for sexual uses. Any woman indulging in unlawful sexual intercourse, whether for gain or for lust."

If you join yourself with such a woman, you become one with her in the sight of the Lord! If she is a harlot, you become a harlot with her. If she is a prostitute, you become a prostitute in the sight of the Lord with her. If she is an adulterer, either for gain or out of lust, then you share in her guilt! Brothers, there is no room in Scripture for us to take an attitude of moral superiority over the ladies in this sin. There is plenty of guilt to go around.

4. IT IS A SIN AGAINST THE CHURCH

Because, again we are one in the body of Christ, when we engage in sexual immorality, we sin against the whole church.

If you want to inflict real harm on this church. If you want to taint the good name of the others

that attend here, then get caught up in some sexual sin. You will only provide additional fodder for those who live off of the excuse, "there are too many hypocrites in the church."

5. **IT IS A SIN AGAINST THE CHILDREN**

When the teenagers in the church see their parents, their leaders, grown men and women struggle and fall in this area, it makes them all the more vulnerable here. If we can't handle and win over sexual temptation, how in the world can they hope to be victorious?

Dr. Frank Pittman wrote in his book, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*. "The traumas of infidelity... are hardest on adolescents, who are sexually supercharged, and alternately delighted and terrified by sex. A parent's inability to maintain sexual control can be frightening, stimulating, and permissive."

One Christian mother, knowing this wrote herself a note which she attached to a corner of the bulletin board above her desk. The message said: "Lord, let there be at least two people in this world that my children can respect as Christian examples --- their father and me."

6. **IT IS A SIN AGAINST THE SPOUSE**

Dr. Charles L. Allen, pastor and counselor, wrote: "Two things must exist in a marriage: First, a solid affection, a love for each other entirely different from the love for anyone else. Second, complete trust in each other." That trust is seriously compromised if not destroyed whenever infidelity invades a marriage. Can that trust be restored? Yes, but don't expect it to happen overnight. It won't. It can't.

Immorality not only attacks the spouse's level of trust, it attacks nearly every area of his or her life:

- The home,
- finances,
- jobs,
- church,
- parents,
- children,
- in-laws,
- holidays,
- pictures,
- future plans,
- ministries,
- friends,
- security and more!

It is a betrayal of love, trust, hope. She or he can not just write it off as if it never happened! Infidelity therefore greatly increases the likelihood of divorce.

7. **IT IS A SIN AGAINST GOD**

Listen now to what has to be one of the saddest passages of Scripture found anywhere in the Bible. The scene is captured in 2 Samuel 12:7-14. Here the Prophet Nathan rebukes David for his adulterous sin with Uriah's wife Bathsheba. The Bible says: "**Then Nathan said to David, 'You are that man!' The Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. I gave you his house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah and stolen his wife. From this time on, the sword will be a constant threat to your family, because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own. 12 You did it secretly, but I will do this to you openly in the sight of**

all Israel.' 14 You have given the enemies of the Lord great opportunity to despise and blaspheme him..."

David acknowledged his sin in Psalm 51:4 and cried, **"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."** Friends, sin is a clinched fist and it's object is the face of God!

SOMEONE ONCE POINTED OUT, IT WILL BE OUR LOVE FOR GOD ALONE THAT WILL -- IN THE END -- KEEP US FROM FAILING INTO SEXUAL SIN. IF WE DO NOT HAVE A LOVE FOR GOD THAT IS GREATER THAN THE INTENSITY OF OUR TEMPTATION, WE WILL GIVE IN. THINK ABOUT IT.

Not only is sexual sin a sin against God, this is also a sin that He pointedly condemns:

- He condemns adultery (unfaithfulness on the part of one who is married);
- He condemns fornication (sexual activity before marriage, between singles),
- He condemns homosexuality (sexual activity between members of the same sex).

Notice:

- Deuteronomy 5:18 and Exodus 20:14 both cite adultery as being a violation of God's law.
- Proverbs 2:17-19 teaches that the adulteress leads one down the path to death.
- Galatians 5:19 calls immorality a work of the flesh.
- I Corinthians 5 calls the church to remove a certain immoral man from the fellowship.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 likewise declares that this sin can result in one being barred from the Kingdom of God. Listen: **"Did you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, or idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God."**

Hebrews 13:4 notes: **"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."**

Revelation 21:8 then details those who miss heaven: **"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."**

The Bible in Ephesians 5 teaches us that the love that a man has for his wife, a woman has for her husband, is to serve as a model of God's love for His church – His bride. Immorality distorts that message!

- God is faithful;
- God loves unconditionally;
- God is good;
- God is kind;
- God is true;
- God is pure.

Therefore a husband and wife:

- Are to be faithful;
- Are to love unconditionally;
- Are to be good;
- Are to be kind;
- Are to be true;
- Are to be pure.

Immorality violates each of these virtues. Again, It sends the wrong message.

Malachi 2:13-15 (*The Contemporary English Version*): **“And what else are you doing? You cry noisily and flood the LORD's altar with your tears, because he isn't pleased with your offerings and refuses to accept them. And why isn't God pleased? It's because he knows that each of you men has been unfaithful to the wife you married when you were young. You promised that she would be your partner, but now you have broken that promise.... Don't ever be unfaithful to your wife.”** Are you too experiencing spiritual leanness as were these Israelites? If so, could there be some unresolved moral issues in your life? He hates the sin enough that He could choose to close His ears to your cries and His eyes to their tears as He did here in Malachi.

HEAR ME PLEASE. I DO NOT THINK THAT I CAN NECESSARILY STOP SOMEONE FROM YIELDING TO SEXUAL TEMPTATION BY MY SAYING DON'T DO IT.

God has already said that. If His Word won't cause people to refrain from such actions, I know that my words won't cut it either. However, I do draw strength in knowing that at least I have spoken up. I have raised my voice as the pastor of this church against impurity and immorality. I have told our young people that it isn't right, regardless of whose doing what, and regardless of what the world says.

I have watched during my lifetime as one taboo after another has fallen prey to our liberal culture:

IT USED TO BE that church people wouldn't think of going to a movie, now we bring soft and hard porn movies right into our homes and think nothing of it. I've heard of so-called Christian dads who watch the stuff right in front of his children.

IT USED TO BE that homosexuality was considered a perversion. Polite people didn't even talk about the vice. Now the debate is over whether or not gays should be able to adopt children, get married, and be ordained into the ministry of certain denominations. Gays are even accepted as having entertainment value on television.

IT USED TO BE that the marriage vows were considered sacred and a man and woman married for life. Now we engage in what is commonly called trial marriages. If our partner does not make us happy, or if he or she does not meet our needs, then we discard them in favor of some other pretty face. If a marriage lasts five to seven years, that is now considered an accomplishment.

IT USED TO BE that only married people lived together, now we have domestic partners, significant others, live-ins, room-mates, and who knows what all? What used to be called "shacking up" has now been legitimatised and in many parts of the country is considered the norm.

IT USED TO BE that our young ladies and young men understood that they were to save themselves till marriage. Being a virgin was an honor, something that he or she could take pride in. The fact that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was a virgin was not meant to imply in Scripture that she was weird, unwanted, or ugly. The angel saluted her and told her that she was highly favored of the Lord. I believe the same holds true for virgins today!

What will be the next taboo that will fall?

- Incest?
- Sex with children?
- Rape?
- Wife swapping?

Whose to say? Where do we draw the line and say enough already? But just to be sure, that line has already been drawn. God drew it - and He hasn't changed His mind either.

Friends, I want to call you to change the world, rather than let the world change you. Romans 12:2

(Moffit's translation) tells us to not let the world squeeze us into its mold.

The Bible teaches us to not yield to temptation. I believe that this is doubly true of sexual temptation.

TEMPTATION AND INFIDELITY

Part 2

Back in May, Bill O'Reilly of *"The O'Reilly Factor"*, a news show on the Fox News channel, conducted an interview with Dan Rather of CBS News. At one point, the subject of honesty came up. I want to now share with you the exchange that took place between these two men from an exact transcript of the program:

O'Reilly: "I want to ask you flat out, do you think President Clinton's an honest man?"

Rather: "Yes, I think he's an honest man."

O'Reilly: "Do you, really?"

Rather: "I do."

O'Reilly: "Even though he lied to Jim Lehrer's face about the Lewinsky case?"

Rather: "Who among us has not lied about something?"

O'Reilly: "Well, I didn't lie to anybody's face on national television. I don't think you have, have you?"

Rather: "I don't think I ever have. I hope I never have. But, look, it's one thing--"

O'Reilly, jumping in: "How can you say he's an honest guy then?"

Rather: "Well, because I think he is. I think at core he's an honest person. I know that you have a different view. I know that you consider it sort of astonishing anybody would say so, but I think you can be an honest person and lie about any number of things."

O'Reilly: "Really?!?"

Rather: "Yeah, I do."

O'Reilly: "See, I can't. I want my government to be honest across-the-board. I don't want people lying."

Years ago someone noted that we are living in topsy-turvy land. What once was considered wrong is right and vice-versa. If our culture is blurring the lines between honesty and dishonesty, then it is not at all surprising that the lines between morality and immorality are being blurred as well.

It will be my intent this morning, as I continue on with my series of messages on temptation, to help redefine those lines as we again look at the issue of temptation and infidelity. Also, as I pointed out last week, a series on temptation would lack credibility in today's culture if it didn't cover such a topic as this.

Before I move to my next point, I want to want two observations.

First, Although I have dealt with people--men and women--who said that they were setting out to deliberately have an affair, those folks are still fairly rare. Most adulterers seem to stumble into infidelity. It happens almost as if by accident. King David in the Bible happened to see Bathsheba talking a bath. He didn't plan to. The rest, though, is history.)

More often than not:

- It is a friendship that goes to far,
- It is a working relationship that crosses the line between right and wrong,
- It is a brother and sister in the Lord who become a little too loving, too compassionate, too understanding.

It is a relationship that simply goes farther than anyone planned.

Next, I want to talk for a few moments about "Emotional Infidelity." This is a term that I feel as if the Lord gave me several years ago. Since then, I found a book that had been written on the same subject proving again that there is nothing new under the sun.

Anyway, let me explain what I mean by the term. **EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY** takes place when any person or activity becomes more important to you than your marriage partner. It is when some thing/any thing takes from the spouse that which is by right his or hers. It can be time, touch, understanding, communication, and of course, affection. **THE ADULTERER WILL INVARIABLY CROSS EMOTIONAL BARRIERS FIRST, AND THEN SEXUAL ONES.**

I want you to now look with me at 1 Corinthians 7:3. We will read it from several translations:

- First, the *King James Version*, “**Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.**” (Please underline "due benevolence" in your Bible.)
- (*New International Version*), “**The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.**”
- (*New King James Version*), “**Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.**”
- (*New American Standard*), “**The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.**”

Now I want to apply that passage to the context of this message. Husbands, you owe your wife certain things; wives, you in like fashion are responsible to provide certain things to your husband that you and only you should provide. Again, these translations call these things: “**Due benevolence, marital duty, that which is due, that which is his or her rights.**” As you can tell, this involves much more than just sexual relations.

Most of the comments in preaching and teaching concerning this passage are limited to the sexual duties of the husband and wife in a marriage. My understanding of the passage is much much broader than that.

NOTICE:

OTHERS

SPOUSE

EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY

Love
Touches
Affection
Emotional Support
Communication
Certain Names
Intimacy
Friendship
Faithfulness
Compliments
Memories
Respect

The Bible teaches that I owe my wife **LOVE**. It is hers. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25, “**husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church....**” Verse 33 goes on to add, “**However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**”

Can a person love more than one person at a time? Yes! We love our family members, other Christians, good friends, and whoever else the Lord may bring into our lives. As Christians, we are loving people. However, when I take that special love that romantic love which is my lady's, and give **THAT** love to another person, then I cross the line of emotional infidelity. Is that wrong? Of course it is

wrong.

There are certain **TOUCHES** that are hers. Pats, kisses, holding hands, and hugs. They are intimate. They are personal. Again, they are hers by right. If I take those touches that belong to her and give them to someone else, then again I cross the line and cheat my lady out of that which is hers alone by right.

I remember well a lady that attended one of my churches years ago. She was the church secretary/treasurer. She and her husband were very successful in business. They lived in a beautiful and large house. They also had four lovely children. On one particular occasion, Shara went to a business conference across the state. There she ran into an acquaintance, a man, from back home. They struck up a conversation. In the course of the evening, the man took hold of her hand. She admitted to me later that she enjoyed his attention. She didn't pull her hand away. She said that it made her feel like a child once again. Nothing else happened between the two of them over the course of the next six months. Then they met again. This time it went farther. Eventually, the two of them had a sexual affair. She divorced her husband; he his wife. She forsook her faith, alienated her children, lost her job, and more. Even her mother turned against her. Shara and I were friends. She was to tell my wife and me after it was all said and done that "it wasn't worth it." The cost was simply too high. "She wished that it would have never gotten started." When did it start? With a stolen touch!

Listen to these words found in Proverbs 7:13-19, **"She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said.... I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy our-selves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey."** This woman was an adulterer! As with Shara, she began her evil seduction with stolen touches.

Again, certain pet names are reserved for one's spouse. Not every Tom, Dick, and Harry should be addressed as Honey, Babe, or Sweetheart. To use them on someone other than your beloved might make you appear to be flirtatious.

Then to remind you, certain compliments, certain considerations, certain looks are meant to be shared with one's spouse and one's spouse alone.

My mother-in-law is an 86 year old widow. She has always been attractive, she is especially attractive for her age. A number of years ago a fellow tried to help mom Smither on with her coat. This man was known for his reputation with the ladies. She stopped him immediately. She said something to the effect that: "when you start helping your wife with her coat, then you can start helping other women with theirs."

Now to my next point on how to win over sexual temptation -- ESTABLISH SOME GOOD, STRONG, SEXUAL BOUNDARIES.

- Boundaries are invisible lines that we place around ourselves and our family members to create a zone of safety and security;
- Boundaries help us know when we should say yes, and when we should say no;
- Boundaries help us decide when enough is enough;
- Boundaries determine our behavior in given situations.

For instance, I think of the Bible in general and the Ten Commandments in particular as a set of boundaries. The Golden Rule also works in this regard. Having clear boundaries is essential to a healthy lifestyle and a safe and secure marriage.

I want to now give you a list of suggested moral boundaries:

- Don't visit members of the opposite sex alone at home;

- Do not travel alone with a member of the opposite sex;
- Do not go out to eat alone with someone of the opposite sex;
- Do not express any act of affection that could be questioned as to its propriety;
- Do not discuss detailed sexual problems or issues with members of the opposite sex;
- Do not discuss any of your marital problems with members of the opposite sex;
- Make quality time with your spouse a daily priority;
- Conscientiously keep yourself from wrong magazines, Internet sites, television shows or movies, or other traps of Satan;
- Build your fantasies and desires on God's ideal--your mate. When Satan or flesh pops something in your mind about a member of the opposite sex, one who is not your spouse, redirect it as much as possible toward your own mate.

A faithful partner is committed to maintaining marital integrity in both observable and unobservable behavior.

ALONG THIS LINE, I WANT YOU TO TAKE A QUICK QUIZ. (Adapted in part from *Ministry* magazine, September, 1986) ASK YOURSELF:

- Do I find myself drawn to a certain person to the extent that I look forward with unusual expectancy to planned meetings?
- Do I find myself making sure I am particularly well groomed, perfumed, and well dressed at these times?
- What about my fantasies? Am I allowing myself to daydream, neglecting to put forbidden thoughts out of my head at once?
- Do I tell myself that the innuendoes and teasing that take place are just for fun, even though my pulse does sometimes race a bit?
- Do I encourage long looks, hesitations of glances, and sustained eye contact?
- Do I choose to listen to music that features suggestive lyrics?
- Do I find myself being drawn into pornography?
- What is my motive for a pat on the shoulder, a touch on the arm?
- Is there anything between us that I would not want my mate to know?
- Is there a growing obsession to share ever more deeply?
- Is this friendship causing me to distance myself from my mate, actually or in my thoughts?
- Have I really talked with the Lord about this?

Have you? Really?

To master temptation, you have to have a clear line of communication open between you and the Lord. He has already faced down the devil and won. He has faced every temptation that Satan could throw at Him and He overcame them one by one. In other words, He knows the ropes. He can help you too. Call out to Him for He wants you to win in this area too.

TEMPTATION AND INFIDELITY

Part 3

Lets take a informal poll this morning. Five questions. Yes or no. Ready?

- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service in the military?"
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service in the clergy?"
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service as an elected official?"
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service as a CEO of a corporation?"
- "Should adultery be a crime?"

Back in 1997, MSNBC surveyed it's readers on "The Fidelity Factor." The poll included nine different questions. I just shared with you five of the questions. Let me read to you the questions once again along with the percentage that answered yes:

- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service in the military? **(19% answered yes)**
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service in the clergy?" **(60%)**
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service as an elected official?" **(27%)**
- "Should adultery disqualify a person from service as a CEO of a corporation?" **(16%)**
- "Should adultery be a crime?" **(21%)**

How did your answers compare with those on MSNBC?

Since I am dealing with questions, let me ask you a few more:

- Do you realize that adultery is sill illegal in 26 American states? Should those laws be changed? (By the way, adultery is a Class D felony in Wisconsin).
- Should adultery be moved from the "sin" column to the "no big deal" column?
- Is the Seventh Commandment – **“you shall not commit adultery”** -- out of date?
- Do you think that morals and character are interrelated?
- Is adultery a sin?

Due to my position, I have to deal with the issue of infidelity every so often. A number of years ago, I was involved as a pastor/counselor in seven different cases of adultery, either directly or indirectly, at the same time. I was beginning to wonder if something was in the water.

In line with this, I have had to study a great deal on the subject. I find it interesting that today's writers or reporters are very careful of the words that they use when it comes to covering this issue. The word "mistake" comes up quite frequently. "Human error" is another catch word as is "sexual misconduct." It is rare, though, that the word "sin" is found in regard to a moral issue. If one does find it, it will generally be used in a mocking fashion.

Speaking of words, we have come to change the words that society uses in dealing with adultery. Today, we hear such terms as: fooling around, sleeping around, flings, love relationships, affairs, and dalliances. Some have even suggested that adultery is just a recreational activity like playing softball or going to the movies. Well, don't pass the popcorn, please.

Let me give you an example of today's politically correct view of morality. Columnist Eric Alterman wrote that the fact that one has committed adultery "tells us almost nothing about their character." Do you share that view? Do you think God does?

This morning I want to continue my series on temptation. My next guideline is:

1. **STAY OUT OF TEMPTATION'S WAY**

On the TV show "Hee Haw," Doc Campbell was confronted by a patient who said that he had broken his arm in two places. The doc replied, "Well then, stay out of them places!"

He may have something there. We cannot regularly put ourselves in the face of temptation and not be affected. When faced with the problem of temptation, we need to take the good doctor's advice and "stay out of them places."

I want to share with you now a little story. It has Five Chapters:

Chapter One: A man was walking down the street. He fell into a hole. He fumbled about in the darkness. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole.

Chapter Two: A man was walking down the same street. He pretended not to see the hole. He fell in. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole.

Chapter Three: A man was walking down the same street. He sees the hole. He falls in. He says it's not his fault. After a long time, he made his way out of the hole.

Chapter Four: A man walks down the same street. He sees the hole. He knows it's there. He tries to walk around it. He falls in. He knows it's his fault. He quickly gets out.

Chapter Five: A man takes another street.

Which makes more sense? The answer is obvious.

An old southern preacher once told this congregation how to escape temptation: "When you're tempted to steal one of your neighbor's apples, you may not be able to change your love for apples, but you sure can change the route you walk home.

- I think we would all agree that an alcoholic can't hope to whip his alcoholism if he continues to drive by his favorite bar on the way home from work.
- The kid who is doing drugs will never break his habit as long as he or she keeps running with the same crowd.
- This is not rocket science, folks.

Hear me, please. Winning over temptation might mean that you have to:

- Get rid of cable television;
- Change jobs;
- Get another boyfriend or girlfriend;
- Change your taste in reading material;
- Or move to another seat in the classroom.

You see, we have a role to play in winning over temptation. It is not all up to the Lord.

A RATIONAL PERSON would not jump into the Niagara River above the falls and then expect that by some miracle, God would keep him or her from being swept over the falls.

A RATIONAL PERSON would not put a match to a keg of gunpowder and then expect that God would keep him from being blown to bits and pieces.

YET THERE ARE SEEMINGLY RATIONAL MEN AND WOMEN who walk in the way of temptation, expecting to be delivered at the last possible moment! That is naive and can be spiritually lethal!

John Burroughs, the naturalist, says that when a hawk is attacked by crows or other birds, he does not make a counterattack. Instead, he soars higher and higher in ever widening circles until his tormentors leave him alone.

Psalm 101:1-4 shows us how we can do the same thing when we are being hounded by the crows of immorality and temptation: "**I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing praise. I will be careful to lead a blameless life... I will walk IN MY HOUSE with blameless heart. I WILL SET BEFORE MY EYES no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart SHALL BE FAR FROM ME; I will have NOTHING TO DO WITH EVIL.**"

Romans 13:12-14 from *The New Living Translation* adds, "**GET RID OF your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes. CLOTHE YOURSELVES with the armor of RIGHT living, as those who live in the light. We should be decent and true IN EVERYTHING we do, so that everyone can approve**

of our behavior. DON'T PARTICIPATE in wild parties and getting drunk, or in adultery and immoral living, or in fighting and jealousy. But let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires."

Another translation has this last line, ". . .don't make plans to enjoy evil." NO! Avoid it!

According to 1 Thessalonians 5:22, we are to, **"abstain from evil--shrink from it and keep aloof from it in WHATEVER FORM OR WHATEVER KIND it may be."**

The judge looked down from the bench and, in a somber voice, declared, "Mr. Wilson, this is your day of reckoning!" Then he sentenced him to seven and one-half years in federal prison. In response, Wilson's lawyer requested that he be allowed a few minutes with his family and friends before surrendering to the authorities. The judge replied, "Mr. Wilson is going to be taken by the marshals right now. You should have thought of that before."

Wilson was one of four California men convicted of financial fraud and sentenced to prison. Five men were originally investigated, but the fifth, Mark Jacobs, was not arrested and charged. Jacobs had been invited to join the financial scheme by four friends (the men sent to jail) in a weekly Bible study. They had assured him their plan was totally legal. Yet something inside him said it wasn't right. While it was hard to say no to good friends, he chose to go with his conscience and tell them he wouldn't participate.

The lawyers for the four convicted men pleaded with the judge that their clients had simply made mistakes of poor judgment. They were good men who loved their wives and kids, gave to charities, and were active in their churches. The crime involved a "gray" area, crossing a line that wasn't clear. The judge disagreed. "It is not hard to determine where the line is," he said. The guy who drew the line is Mark Jacobs. He knew what was right and what was wrong, and he didn't hesitate. Hopefully, now we will have fewer people who are willing to walk up to the line and dabble with going over the line. We will have people like Mr. Jacobs, who wouldn't touch this thing with a ten-foot pole."

Again, Romans 13:14. This time from the *King James Version*, **"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to [fulfill] the lusts [thereof]."**

To win over temptation, stay out of it's way. Avoid it like a rattlesnake. Make no provisions for it in your home, on your job, in your relationships. No, don't even touch the thing with a ten-foot pole!

John Maxwell tells about a nursery in Canada that displays this sign on its wall: "The best time to plant a tree is twenty-five years ago... The second best time is today." I like that. Perhaps, you have compromised in the area of morals at some point in your life. The best time to stop is before you get started. However, the next best time is right now; right here. From this moment on, resolve to stay out of temptation's way.

2. RUN

No doubt, the majority of you remember the story in the Old Testament of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Their story is found in Genesis 39. The Bible says that **"Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came about... that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, 'lie with me.'"**

Joe was tall, dark and handsome. In addition to this, Potiphar had put him in charge of everything that he owned. Potiphar's wife caught Joseph alone one day and she set out to seduce him. She wanted the brother - BAD. The Bible points out that when her seductions didn't work, she then grabbed hold of his clothes and tried to pull him down to her side.

How did he react? First, he said, **"How... could I do this great evil and sin against God?"** Then to his credit--**HE RAN!** The brother hoofed it outside; he got away as fast as his two legs would carry him.

Hear me. Running is sometimes the best and maybe the only way to deal with certain temptations.

"But you don't understand; I couldn't help myself."

Really? If you believe that, I want you to ask yourself these four questions:

- Could you have helped yourself if your pastor or your mother would have been present?
- Could you have helped yourself if a police officer had been looking on?
- Could you have helped yourself if your spouse had been a witness?
- Could you have helped yourself if you really believed that God Almighty was looking both over your shoulder as well as into your heart?

I do believe that most if not all of us would agree that it is indeed rare that we can not really "help ourselves." All too often, the truth is, we didn't WANT to help ourselves.

Joseph could have said, "Hey, this is no big deal. I can withstand her flattery. I can take her pulling on my clothes. I can handle her seductions. Ho-hum. BORING. Another day, another dollar. Some of us have it; some don't." He could have, but he didn't! Again, he ran! God took obvious note of his victory, and forever recorded it in the Bible for the rest of us to see and follow!

AGAIN, RUN! RUN LIKE ALL ETERNITY DEPENDS ON IT. YOU SEE, MAYBE IT DOES!

3. DISCIPLINE YOUR THOUGHTS

In Colossians 3:2, Paul the Apostle tells us to "**Set your mind on the things above, not on earthly things.**" The human mind will always **SET ITSELF** on something -- heavenly or earthly.

Paul then gives us a simple list of things that we should set our minds upon. The list is found in Philippians 4:8. Notice: "**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**" Let's look at the key words of this verse, one at a time:

TRUE

Hear me, please. Sin and lust can never be satisfied. We just cannot get our fill to the point of satisfaction. A man once said to his counselor, "I need help. Even my perversions have become perverted." The counselor asked him what he meant by that statement.

"Well, when I started I drew a line and said everything up to this line was OK. But the enemy pushed me over that line, so I drew another one. Now he's pushed me over so many lines I can't draw any more. I can't go any further into this sin than I've gone."

Sexual sin is like that. It can never truly satisfy, nevertheless, it always promises more if we participate more. That's how Satan typically operates. Never content to leave us wading in the shallows of sin, he's always trying to lure us out deeper and deeper until we're in way over our heads. By the time we realize we're in that deep, we can't swim back to shore.

Isaiah 26:3 (*The Living Bible*) promises, "**He will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord!**" To think true thoughts, discipline yourself to think of Jesus and His Word when you are tempted.

Psalm 119:9 adds, "**How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.**" Jesus is true as is His Word. Know and think on Him.

NOBLE

This refers to that which is dignified, worthy of reverence; honorable, and honest. Many of today's thoughts are cheap, flimsy, of little substance. Our thoughts, on the other hand, are to be above this. We are children of the King; children of the MOST HIGH GOD. As I like to say, we are temples, not ghettos. Our thoughts should be far above gutter level! They should be worthy of our high position; they should be noble.

JUST.

The word also means right, innocent, faultless, guiltless and yes just. If our thoughts are right, we will not have to worry about our actions.

PURE.

The word describes that which is morally pure; that which is so holy that it is fit to be brought into the presence of God, and to be used in the service of God.

Those who are serious about winning in this battle against sexual temptation should ask themselves:

- Is this book/magazine pure?
- Is this movie or television show pure?
- Is this conversation pure?
- Is this thought pure?
- Is this motive pure?
- Is this relationship pure?

Titus 1:15-16 in the New Testament notes: **“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”**

This passage helps us gauge the purity level in our lives. The pure of heart and mind do pure things, say pure things, watch pure things, and so forth. The impure, on the other hand, are filled with corruption and doubt. To them, nothing is pure – including their minds and consciences.

Are you pure?

LOVELY

This means pleasing, attractive, and wholesome.

Staying with that word “wholesome”, do you realize that some of the psychology books and women's magazines circulating through our culture today actually promote extra-marital affairs? True. They say that:

- an affair can revive a dull marriage,
- make you a better lover,
- help you with your mid-life crisis,
- bring joy into your life,
- or even bring excitement back into your marriage.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth of the matter is, an affair might give the individual a sexually transmitted disease. It might bring more excitement to the marriage -- if one considers divorce court exciting. (Remember that adultery results in divorce 65% of the time.)

No, I dare say that such thoughts are not lovely or wholesome.

ADMIRABLE

The *King James Version* uses the term, **“GOOD REPORT.”** This term literally means “fair-speaking or gracious”. It might not be going too far to say that it describes the things which are fit for God to hear.

Paul tells us we are to **THINK ON**, to consider, to ponder, to let our minds dwell on, such things as these six virtues.

WITH THESE SIX WORDS IN MIND, LET ME GIVE YOU A SHORT QUIZ. Which if any of the six virtues apply to these stories?

- You're a married woman. Your male boss invites you out to a "cozy little place" for a light lunch. He says that he just wants to talk business but he has been especially friendly towards you as of late. You also know that his marriage is, at best, rocky. In your heart you feel a check about going, but you also know that the lunch could be good for your career. Would entertaining this temptation violate any of these six virtues?
- Your boyfriend wants you to go to a movie. From what you've heard about the flick, you know it isn't "Bambi". Up to this point, you have had a pretty high standard as to what you would allow yourself to watch. Now you feel yourself weakening. However, you do not want him to think of you as being prudish. Would giving in to this temptation possibly compromise any of the six things Paul mentioned?
- You are at work. It is lunch time and everyone is sitting around sharing in some small talk when one of the employees starts talking about an acquaintance of yours. Before you know what has happened, you hear a torrent of smut, lies, gossip, as well as some angry four-letter words! The temptation is to stay and listen for more information, but something inside you feels this is wrong; dirty. Would any of the six virtues help you determine whether or not you should stay or leave?

The point is: IF we learn to deal with the thought first, most if not all of our SINS WOULD BE STOPPED AT THE THOUGHT STAGE! The next time you have a temptation come to mind, one that you have questions as to its rightness or wrongness, ask yourself:

- Is this thought **“true, noble, just, pure, lovely, or admirable”**?
- Is such a thought in agreement with the Bible?
- Would you be comfortable bringing that thought into the presence of God?

If the answer to these three questions is "YES/YES/YES", THEN GO FOR IT! If not, S-T-O-P!!! Bring that thought into captivity, expel it, and think once again on that which is of God; that which again is **“true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and admirable.”**

IN THE BOOK, *THE 21 INDISPENSABLE QUALITIES OF A LEADER*, JOHN MAXWELL GIVES FOUR STEPS TO IMPROVE ONE'S CHARACTER. I WANT TO SHARE THEM IN CONCLUSION THIS MORNING: :

- 1. Search for the cracks.** Spend some time looking at the major areas of your life (work, marriage, family, service, etc.), and identify anywhere you might have cut corners, compromised, or let people down. Write down every instance you can recall from the past two months.
- 2. Look for patterns.** Examine the responses that you just wrote down. Is there a particular area where you have a weakness, or do you have a type of problem that keeps surfacing? Detectable patterns will help you diagnose character issues.
- 3. Face the music.** The beginning of character repair comes when you face your flaws, apologize, and deal with the consequences of your actions.
- 4. Rebuild.** It's one thing to face up to your past actions. It's another to build a new future. Now that you've identified any areas of weakness, create a plan that will prevent you from making the same mistakes again.

If you want to make a fresh start today, if you need to start over, here is the place, now is the time. New futures can be found at this altar. This is true even if your past or present involves temptation and infidelity.

DON'T GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION

Let me share with you an article from the Janesville Gazette: Defense attorney Don Weeden wonders what he'd do if an ATM, spewed a pile of somebody else's cash into his lap.

"I would hope I would inform the bank of the error," Weeden told Rock County Judge Daniel Dillon on Friday.

But one of Weeden's clients faced such a dilemma and made a different decision. When \$3,858 showed up in her credit union account last February, Sue Smith (not her real name) used it to pay bills. Smith, 28, of Janesville, pleaded guilty Friday to two counts of misdemeanor theft. When first contacted by police, Smith told them she'd thought the money was a gift from God. Wilson has no prior criminal offenses and has paid back the money to the credit union, he said.

"I know I made a mistake," Smith told the judge. "I'm sorry." In exchange for her guilty plea, prosecutors amended the single felony theft charge to two counts of misdemeanor theft.

Dillon accepted the plea after making sure Smith understood she was waiving her right to a jury trial.

"I would guess that a jury verdict in your favor would have been one more gift from God," Dillon said.

He followed the recommendation from the prosecution and defense and sentenced Smith to 18 months of probation. He also imposed a \$331 fine.

"Temptation is so great, it's easy to see how this could happen, " Dillon said.

One reason that temptation is so great is due to the fact that we are constantly being bombarded with it. My wife and I ate at a fast food restaurant this past summer. As we took our seats, I was somewhat taken back by this advertisement that was on each and every table: **"GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION!"** (Show advertising flyer) Under the words, as you can see, is a piece of chocolate cake with ice cream. By the way, I had permission to take this one. I didn't just give in to temptation and take it.

This morning I want to conclude my series of messages on the subject of temptation.

IS TEMPTATION GOOD OR BAD?

Think before you answer. Again, is temptation good or bad? If you said bad, you are right. If you said good, then you could be right too. You see, when one gets right down to it, temptation simply presents us with an opportunity to make a choice. If we make the wrong choice, then the temptation obviously resulted in that which was bad. If we make the right choice though, then the temptation resulted in that which was good.

You see, every temptation is, at the same time, a temptation and a test. It is designed so as to help us grow spiritually. James 1:2-4 (*King James Version*) therefore states: **"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing [this], that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have [her] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."** We are not to **"count it all joy"** because we are being enticed into some evil, no. Rather we **"count it all joy"** because we see the good, the growth, and the maturity that is coming out of the test.

When I was taking paramedic training in Texas, I had to study drugs -- prescription drugs. I found it quite interesting that every medicine has at least two effects--the primary effect and the side effect.

- For example, the primary effect of an antihistamine is to stop the runny nose, itchy eyes, and sneezing that goes along with hay fever.
- The side effect is that it will generally make a person drowsy.

Surprisingly, I've known people to take an antihistamine with them when they were going to take a long airplane ride. They took the drug along, NOT for the PRIMARY effect but rather for the SIDE effect -- to make them sleepy. Is an antihistamine for hay fever? Yes. Can it be used to make people go to sleep? Yes, again. It can serve both purposes.

Think with me for a moment. I want to present several issues that include both a temptation to do wrong (the primary effect) as well as a spiritual test (the side effect):

- The temptation: not to pay one's tithe;
- The test: to discover which we love the most -- God or money?
- The temptation: cheat on a test at school;
- The test: to discover whether or not we can be trusted.
- The temptation: to lash out at a sister in anger;
- The test: to see if we can exercise self-control under trying circumstances.

Understand this, each and every temptation of the devil, whether they fall in the mental, physical, spiritual, or natural realms, are meant by Satan to destroy the JOY, HAPPINESS, VICTORY, and the SOUL of the one who is being tempted! When you are tempted to sin, please remember that the one who is tempting you is devoid of any and all mercy; any and all love! His aim is evil and evil only!

Nonetheless, the Lord is just as hard at work in each temptation taking Satan's efforts for bad and turning them around for good! Romans 8:28 fits well here. It says: **"And we know that in all things GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."**

A part of the good is simply standing the test. James 1:12 states: **"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, BECAUSE WHEN HE HAS STOOD THE TEST, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."**

Likewise, 1 Peter 1:6-7 states: *(The Amplified Bible)*: **"[You should] be exceedingly glad on this account, though now for a little while you may be distressed by trials and suffer temptations, so that [the genuineness] of your faith may be tested, [your faith] which is infinitely more precious than the perishable gold which is tested and purified by fire. [This proving of your faith is intended] to redound to [your] praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, is revealed."**

Remember this, every temptation holds forth an opportunity for either evil or good. Again, temptation is basically a choice. You decide which prevails.

NOW, I WANT TO GIVE YOU FOUR STEPS TO VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

1. WATCH AND P R A Y

In Matthew 26 we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. His words are few; nonetheless, in those precious hours just before Calvary, He instructs His disciples, **"Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation..."** He knew that very shortly they would be tempted to run, to deny Him, to curse, to use the sword, to quit! His solution? **"Keep watching and praying."**

Listen now to the account from Luke 22:39-46, **"Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done. An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 'Why are you sleeping?' he asked them. 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.'"**

Jesus knew He was now facing death. The sins of the world were soon to fall full-force upon Him. So, what did He do? HE PRAYED. I am confident that this was where Jesus won the battle for our salvation. Here - in prayer.

- Here He bowed to the Father's will.
- Here He accepted the cup.

- Here He died to self.
Again, HERE - in prayer.

The point has to be made: He prayed and He passed the test. The disciples slept and they failed. The application for us is very obvious. If you want to win over temptation, we too must discipline ourselves to **“Watch and pray.”**

Perhaps you recognize the name of Bobby Leech. He went over Niagara Falls in a wooden crate and survived. Would you like to know what happened to Leech on the day following his heroic feat? He slipped on an orange peel that came out of the crate, fell and broke his leg. True story.

Isn't it true that it is not usually the big things in life that trip us up. It is the little things. The disciples didn't lie, cheat, or steal. They simply went to sleep when they should have went to God. They took a nap when Jesus warned them to watch, for temptation was lurking in the shadows.

As a result, Jesus went on to face the agony of the Cross, while Peter denied knowing the Lord, and he along with the rest of the disciples deserted Jesus, and scattered, according to the Bible, each to their own homes!

The call is to watch. Be prepared. You never know what Satan is going to throw your way. Then too, be prayed up. Someone wisely noted that a man or a woman can not fall if they are standing on their knees.

Are you facing some sort of temptation? Please understand that God has a twenty-four hour hot-line directly connected to His throne room in heaven:

- You will never get a busy signal nor will you find that no one is at home;
- The Lord will never have you talk into one of those silly answering machines;
- An angel will never put you on hold while he goes out looking for God;
- You will never be told to punch one if you want God, two if you want Jesus, three if you want the Holy Spirit, or 0 if you want to return to the operator.

The call is to **WATCH** and **PRAY!**

2. USE THE WORD

Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4 all contain the account of the Lord's temptation in the Wilderness. Jesus had been on a 40-day fast. He was no doubt somewhat weakened physically. The Bible states that He was also hungry.

Having said that, when do you think the actual temptation began? At the start of our Lord's 40 days of fasting? In the middle? At the end? Mark 1:13 notes, in part, **“And He was in the wilderness forty days BEING TEMPTED by Satan....”** Luke 4:2 adds: **“...for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”** The Scriptures teach us that the Lord was tempted the entire 40 days with the most intense temptations - - the big three -- coming at the end of the ordeal.

Matthew 4:10 then gives us the outcome: **“Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For IT IS WRITTEN....”** NO hesitation? NO plea bargaining! NO compromise! NO--NO--NO--NO--NO-- A THOUSAND TIMES NO! **“Be gone, Satan! It is written....”** Jesus always handled Satan in the same manner -- WITH SCRIPTURE. **“It is written...”**

- His answers did not bear the mark of some superhuman genius.
- They were not some deep metaphysical argument, some super-spiritual jargon that we could never understand.
- They were, simply put, nothing more than a few passages of Old Testament Scripture. An average child could easily commit them to memory.

The end result, though, was Jesus prevailed while the devil cowered away in utter defeat.

Listen to these words found in Psalm 119:9-11, **“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”** The point is, EVERY TIME YOU ARE TEMPTED, use the Word of God.

If you are having problems with certain temptations, study verses that relate to those areas:

- If you are tempted with the fear of dying, study verses that relate to fear;
- If you are tempted to lie, study verses that deal with that particular vice;
- If you are tempted to cave in to doubt, memorize verses on faith;
- If you are tempted to (fill in the blank) then study and read passages that again cover that area of need.

Remember, every time Satan raised an issue, Jesus had an answer from Scripture that covered that issue. That is our great example.

Again, the Psalmist noted, **“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”** The Word is a powerful hedge against sin and temptation!

3. SUBMIT AND RESIST

Listen to James 4:7, **“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”**

- To **“SUBMIT”** means to put yourself under God, under His care, power and strength; to yield to God, to His will, and Word; to surrender to Him.
- To **“RESIST”** means to take a stand against the devil; to exert the energy and effort to oppose and defeat the devil and his temptation.

Now, note the critical point: we must both surrender to God **AND** resist the devil. Both acts are required. When the devil or temptation confronts us, we can never defeat him and his hoards of evil...

- by standing and fighting alone
- by going our own way
- by giving in a little
- by refusing to listen to God’s Word.

We cannot even listen to the enemy’s tempting offer—not even for a moment. No, we must submit and resist!

Let’s say that you are a new Christian, and that when you came to Jesus, you brought with you some pretty heavy baggage: drugs, alcohol, smoking, pornography, or some other form of immorality. Just to be very honest, you may well be tempted in these areas, from time to time, for some while yet. Then too, Satan will delight himself in throwing your past up to you.

Nonetheless, the Word of God is true. You are now the victor. Sin is not to hold sway over you. You are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. Therefore, every time the enemy attacks, submit yourself to God and His Word, and resist the devil. Keep on doing this and in time, you have my word on this, you will discover the devil and temptation will flee farther and farther away and attack fewer and fewer times. While none of us will ever be completely free of temptation, we will walk through life more and more victoriously, triumphing more and more over Satan and his evil intensions.

We submit by: obeying the Lord
 Praying
 Rejoicing in the will of God.

We resist by: Running away from the temptation

Rejecting the enemy's offers
 Singing and praising the Lord
 Praying in the Spirit
 Calling a trusted friend
 I like to do just the opposite of what the tempter is trying to get me to do

Ephesians 4:27 adds to this thought: "...**do not give the devil a foothold.**" The word translated foothold here refers to the ground or a specific spot or location. Giving in to temptation is giving the devil ground, a "**foothold**" or an "**opportunity**", depending on your translation. One commentator says here, allowing the devil "no leeway... no room to move."

Any time we allow the evil one any place in our lives, regardless of how big or how small, we can fully expect that that area will be exploited by the devil.

I want to repeat something I said some time back on a Sunday night: Most alcoholics didn't start by announcing, "I plan to ruin my life and my family by drinking as much alcohol as I can hold every day from here on out." No, it begins with a drink, then two, then a couple to get the person going in the morning and a couple more to help him unwind after a hard day. The slide downward can be traced from the initial act of allowing Satan a foothold or opportunity in the life.

- Those who become liars start with one lie.
- Those who fall prey to pornography start with one magazine or video.
- Those who become hooked on drugs usually start with one timid attempt at smoking pot.

Just a little ground is given up at first, but that is all the devil wants. He is happy with what-ever he can get, because he knows that if he is patient, more ground will be given over to him later.

The key is resist the devil! Period! Don't even let him get his foot in the door. An old pro-verb states, "He who does not want fleas, should not sleep with dogs." This means, say no to any and all of his temptations.

BY THE WAY, maybe you have heard about the young lady, the newly wed, who went out one day to buy a new dress. Since she was newly married, she didn't have a lot of extra money. Nonetheless, she felt that she had to have something new to wear so away she went. As she was walking through the mall, she saw just what she was looking for in the display window in the front of a store. She went in to try the dress on, and sure enough, it was a perfect fit. Even the sales lady told her that she looked absolutely lovely in it. Well, finally she mustered the necessary courage to look at the price tag. It was expensive; certainly more than she could afford to pay, but she told the clerk that she would take it anyway.

When she got home with the dress she could hardly wait to model it for her husband. As soon as he saw her in it, he could tell that it had to have been rather expensive so he asked, "How much did you pay for the dress?"

She answered by saying, "but Dear, doesn't it look good?"

He said, "Yes it looks great, but how could you have spent all of that money at a time like this?"

"I don't know," she answered, "I guess I was just tempted; the devil made me do it!"

"Well honey, why didn't you say, 'Devil, get thee behind me?'"

"I did, but he said that it looked good from back there too!"

4. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

Ephesians 6:13-17 states, "**Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the**

flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The Apostle Paul stresses from the get-go **"take"** or **"put on"** the **"whole"** or **"full"** armor of God. The armor is absolutely essential. Why? Because of the **"evil day."** What is the **"evil day?"**

- It refers to **today**—to the onslaught of evil that is in the world today.
- It refers to **any day**—to the assault of temptations and trials that confront us at any given moment during a day.
- It refers to **the day of temptation and trial**—to a special attack and barrage of evil that is thrown against us.

We must withstand the day of evil. But we cannot withstand unless we have taken the full armour of God. WHAT IS THE ARMOR? LETS NOTICE EACH PIECE, PIECE BY PIECE.

FIRST WE FIND THE BELT OF TRUTH

The belt is what held the Roman soldier's armor together. It also held the sword in place.

Why do we need to put on the belt of truth? To answer that, all we need to do is ask, who is it we will meet in spiritual combat? Satan, the **"father of lies,"** that great deceiver -- the devil! The only way to stand against a liar or a deceiver is to stand in the truth.

As God's people, we should be well-equipped in this area.

- We have the Holy Spirit who is the **"Spirit of truth"**,
- We have the Bible which is the **"Word of truth"**,
- We are a part of the church, which is the **"pillar and ground of the truth"**, and
- We have Jesus who has declared Himself to be **"The Truth"**.
 - Jesus was truth about life.
 - He was truth about death.
 - He was truth about sin.
 - He was truth about heaven.
 - He was truth about hell.
 - He was truth --- period.

Jesus was and is TRUTH!

Think of **"The Belt of Truth"** as being a pair of night vision goggles. The army uses these devices today in Afghanistan to see the activities of the enemy in the dark. They allow a soldier to see ambushes and other tricks of the opposition -- even when it is pitch-black outside. Again, the purpose of the belt of truth is to enable us to see through the darkness of Satan's lies and deception.

NEXT COMES THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

This piece of armor, made of metal plates or chains, covered the body from the neck to the waist, both front and back. It was basically used to protect the heart.

When he comes against us with his evil charges and blasphemous lies, we can look down at the Breastplate of Righteousness and be immediately reminded of who we are in Christ Jesus -- we are the holy, righteous, sanctified, children of the Most High God!

- Jesus has purchased us with His own precious blood.
- He has, at the same time, cleansed us,
- purified us,
- justified us, and
- made us to be holy!

When the Father looks at us, He sees that we have been covered with the righteousness of Jesus. Why would any one of us want to give in to temptation, when we are wearing the Breastplate of

Righteousness?

SANDALS

In verse 15 Paul turns his attention to our feet. The Roman soldier wore sandals with hob-nails (think cleats) in the soles to give him better footing for the battle. The sandals were a sign of readiness—readiness to charge forward in victory, or to retreat from some awful temptation.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

The shield was large, usually about four feet by two feet, made of wood, and covered with tough leather. As the soldier held it out before him, it protected him from spears, and “**flaming arrows.**”

In Paul’s day arrows were oftentimes dipped in some inflammable substance and ignited. They were then shot at the enemy. They acted like small incendiary missiles. The *King James Version* calls them, “fiery darts.”

Satan uses these **flaming arrows** to try and tempt the believer:

- to question his salvation
- to question if he is worthy
- to question if he can really serve
- to question, doubt, and wonder
- to become discouraged, depressed, and defeated
- to burn with fleshly desire.

We never know when the devil will shoot a flaming arrow at us, so we must always walk by faith and use the shield of faith.

Oh, one more thing here. The edges of these shields were so constructed that an entire line of soldiers could interlock shields and march into the enemy like a solid wall! In the day of battle, Roman soldiers were to stand their ground, not retreat. As long as they stood together on a flat, open field and did not break ranks, their legions were considered virtually invincible.

Similarly, we do not only have our own faith, but we enjoy the collective faith of the rest of the Church. When you are weak, under attack, in temptation’s way, I can take my shield of faith and help protect you until you are able to continue again, and vice versa.

HELMET OF SALVATION

As the Breastplate of Righteousness is meant to protect the heart, so it is that the Helmet of Salvation covers the head and protects the mind of the soldier.

Unless a man has been saved, his mind cannot be protected from the flaming arrows of temptation. The mind of an unsaved man is focused upon this earth; it is normal and natural for him to want to give in to temptation.

Friends, make sure you have your minds guarded with the helmet of salvation; make sure you are truly born-again.

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Verse 17 then notes, “**Take the... sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**” The sword was a weapon used for both defense and offense. The sword was used both to protect and to fight off and slay the enemy.

I want to encourage you to, each morning, prayerfully put on the whole armor of God. Put on:

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness

- The Sandals of Peace
- The Shield of Faith
- Helmet of Salvation
- Sword of the Spirit

That you may stand in the evil day of temptation.

AS I CONCLUDE, LISTEN AS I SHARE WITH YOU HOW AN ESKIMO KILLS A WOLF.

FIRST the Eskimo coats his knife blade with animal blood and allows it to freeze. Then he adds another layer of blood, and another, until the blade is completely concealed by frozen blood.

NEXT, the hunter fixes his knife in the ground with the blade up. When a wolf follows his sensitive nose to the source of the scent and discovers the bait, he licks it, tasting the fresh frozen blood. He begins to lick faster, more and more vigorously, lapping the blade until the keen edge is bare. Feverishly now, harder and harder, the wolf licks the blade in the Arctic night. So great becomes the craving for blood that the wolf does not notice the razor sharp sting of the naked blade on his own tongue nor does he recognize the instant at which his insatiable thirst is being satisfied by his own warm blood. His tremendous appetite just craves more until the dawn finds him dead in the snow! (Paul Harvey quoted in "Sin's Peril," *Leadership* magazine, Winter, 1987)

What a picture of temptation and sin. Sin, like the wolf, is never satisfied. It demands more and more until finally it has robbed the hope, the joy, and the very life out of it's victim.

Friends, we needn't die on the field of battle in our war against the devil. Jesus has provided us with everything necessary for victory. The challenge then is, **DON'T GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION.**