

# Get a Grip on Temptation

Message for Sunday, September 22, 2013  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Corinthians 10:13

**Children's Message:** Matthew 6:9-13 (Lord's Prayer; focus on the part about "lead us not into temptation.")

Mark was a boy who was very poor at spelling. There was a spelling test at school one day, and he was finding it really hard. The thought came into his mind, "Look at Joan's paper. She's sitting right next to you, and she always gets her words right."

Mark leaned over and, looking out of the corner of his eye, he could read her paper. He copied down several words. No one had even noticed... or so Mark thought. The teacher *had* noticed, but he didn't let on, and pretended to be looking at something else. He was very surprised, for he had always thought of Mark as an honest boy.

When he announced that time was up, the students brought their papers up to the front. He saw that Mark was still at his desk, fidgeting and frowning; it was like Mark was having an argument with himself. Mark closed his eyes and bowed his head for a moment. Then he brought his paper to the teacher, but he crumpled it into a ball and said, "My test is no good." He had decided to get zero on the test, rather than cheat.

The teacher motioned Mark to come over to him. The teacher said to him, "Mark, I saw what you did during the test. I'm very proud of you for what you just did. You may have failed your spelling test, but you passed another test today, one which is far more important."

What do you think the teacher meant by that? (Passed the test of honesty.)

*When you are tempted to do something wrong, remember: you can ask God to help you do the right thing.*

**Sermon** "Get a grip on temptation"

The pastor of a church worked hard month after month. Then one Sunday morning, he looked out the window and saw that it was going to be a beautiful day. He longed to be able to relax that day, instead of having to go to church. It would be a perfect day for a round of golf. The golf clubs downstairs seemed to be calling to him, softly singing his name. The temptation was too great for him, and he called the chairperson of the church council, saying that he was too sick to be there that day.

God had watched all this, and was disappointed. God said to a nearby angel, "Watch this. I'm going to teach that pastor a lesson."

After the pastor had played a few holes, he was at the 350 yard 5th hole. He teed off, feeling the driver connect solidly with the ball. The ball flew through the air, soaring higher and farther than ever before. It landed just before the green, bounced twice and rolled into the cup. The longest hole-in-one anyone ever made!

"Excuse me, Lord," the angel said, "but you call that teaching him a lesson?"

"I certainly do," God said. "That pastor has just made the greatest shot in the history of golf... and he can't tell anybody about it."

That's good for a laugh; but most temptations have consequences much more serious than that. This is an important subject for us.

## 1) It is not a sin to feel temptation...

**1 Corinthians 10:13, New Living Translation:**  
Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.

Everyone is tempted. It is a natural part of life. See the underlined part in that verse? It says "*When* you are tempted...", not "*if*."

Even Jesus was tempted.

**Matthew 4:1, New Living Translation:**  
Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil.

**Hebrews 4:15, New Living Translation:**  
This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin.

Jesus was tempted, the same as we are. Yet that was not a sin. There is nothing at all wrong with feeling temptation.

## 2) ... but it is dangerous to play with temptation

Would you have a rattlesnake for a pet? I don't mean one where the fangs are missing; I mean the kind where the fangs and venom are still intact, and still deadly. No,

of course not! That would be absolutely crazy! We don't play with things that are deadly.

Well, temptation is deadly, too.

**James 1:13-15, New Living Translation:**

**Remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death.**

I think this refers to spiritual death, rather than physical death. By "spiritual death," the Bible means when we cut ourselves off from God.

In one of Philip Yancey's books, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, he tells of the time a friend of his, a man who attended the same church as Yancey, invited him out for coffee. The man – let's call him Daniel – said there was "something he wanted to talk about."

When they got there, and had ordered their coffees, Daniel dropped the bombshell. After fifteen years of marriage, he was leaving his wife. He had found someone younger, prettier, someone who "made him feel alive again." He and his wife were not incompatible; they didn't have serious problems. Daniel simply wanted a change, like a man who gets an itch for a newer model car.

Then Daniel put forward *the* question: "I know that what I'm doing is wrong. But after the divorce is final, and I'm married to my new wife, and we're settled down, will God forgive me?" Yancey wrote that "the question lay on the table like a live snake, and I went through three cups of coffee before I dared attempt an answer."

Finally, Yancey said, "Of course God will forgive you. But the danger is that you may not want forgiveness by then." And that's exactly what happened. Daniel went through with his plan. He says he's happy. But he left behind most of his friends who cared about him. And he left behind God. He hardened his heart. And God let him go.

Temptation is a very, very dangerous thing. Get a grip on temptation, but not to play with it – throw it out!

### **3) Let your "no" be "yes"**

It's not enough to say "no" to temptation. You have to replace it with a "yes."

Dieters know this. It doesn't work to just say, "I don't want dessert. I *don't* want dessert." You need to replace the temptation with something positive, like going for a walk.

That's just an example. In general, we replace the "no" to temptation with a "yes" to God.

This is what Jesus did, when he was tempted in the wilderness. Three times the devil tempted him to use his unique powers, and each time Jesus refused. The way he refused is helpful: he quoted a relevant passage from the Bible.

Jesus had been fasting for forty days, as part of intense prayer in preparation for his ministry. Of course, he was very hungry, and the devil used that.

**Matthew 4:3-4, New Living Translation:**

**Then the Devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread."**

**But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'"**

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 for his answer. He didn't argue, he didn't try to resist or fight the temptation; he just rebuked the very notion of not obeying God.

We can always call upon God help in dealing with temptation. Look again at the very first verse we read:

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Let's do an experiment to show how this works. I have in my hand a glass jar. Tell me, how can I get all the air out of this glass?

(Someone may suggest pumping out the air, thus creating a vacuum. This works, but the problem is that the glass may be too weak to withstand the pressure and will shatter.)

The simplest solution is to take a pitcher and fill the glass with water! All the air is now removed.

If there is area of your life or my life where we are weak, and where temptation is strong, the answer is to be filled

with the Holy Spirit. When we allow God to move into our lives, temptation is pushed aside, just like the air out of that glass. Our weakness is replaced by his strength.

The paradox of Christian faith is that when we submit to Jesus Christ as our Lord, that's precisely when we have the greatest freedom to enjoy life to the fullest.

Temptation loses its power, because we serve a higher power.

What power are you living by?

**Next Steps:**

- Am I playing with temptation anywhere in my life?
- How can I replace that desire with a positive alternative?
- Pray, asking for God to give you power.