

How to Handle Temptation

Message for Sunday, January 12, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 1:13-18

Children's Message: from 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Tell the children I'm trying to watch my weight, so I shouldn't eat much chocolate. *Pull out a chocolate bar.* So I shouldn't eat this chocolate bar.

I shouldn't even look at it (*look at it*).

I should put it away right now (*unwrap it*).

I should not even think about chocolate (*smell it, inhaling deeply*).

I'm not going to eat it; I just want a taste (*lick it; then nibble a bit*).

Ask the children: What's wrong with what I'm doing? *They will jump all over this one with answers!*

Point: Don't play with temptation. Turn away at the first opportunity.

Message "How to handle temptation"

A man was on a diet and struggling. He had to go downtown and as he started out, he remembered that his route would take him by the doughnut shop. As he got closer, he thought that a cup of coffee would hit the spot. Then he remembered his diet.

That's when he prayed, "Lord, if You want me to stop for a doughnut and coffee, let there be a parking place in front of the shop." He said, "Sure enough, I found a parking place right in front—on my seventh time around the block!"

The tabloid papers are famous for their sensational headlines, which they use to entice readers. A newspaper, making a mockery of them, once published an article with this headline:

Miraculous cure discovered that cures no known diseases.

Someone remarked that he knew someone who had caught the cure and died!

Well, there is a disease which everyone in this room has. It's a terminal illness, which will lead to certain death. Modern medicine cannot help us; even the most powerful of the super-antibiotics are useless.

Herbal remedies and new age cures don't work either.

The disease is sin. It infects us through temptation. A spiritually healthy person is able to fight off most attacks, but the bug will eventually find a weakness somewhere in a person, and invade that way.

Researchers have discovered a therapy which can limit or even prevent that infection. They came across this method in a study of literature on the subject. They found it in the Bible, in the letter of James, chapter one.

James prescribes a course of treatment for anyone who suffers from temptation.

[In the past I've mentioned that Paul's letters in the Bible begin with teaching about God and faith, and conclude with how to apply those truths to everyday life. James jumps right in with how to live out our faith. So instead of having "Next Steps" at the end of this message as I usually do, the next steps *are* the message.]

1) Be Realistic

James 1:13, New Century Version:

When people are tempted, they should not say, "God is tempting me." Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone.

Circle the first word of verse 13, "*When*." It's not "if" you are tempted, but "when." Temptation to do wrong is inevitable.

No one is immune. The very time when you think, "That temptation can't touch me; I'm stronger than that," — that's the moment of greatest danger.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13, God's Word

People who think they are standing firmly should be careful that they don't fall. There isn't any temptation that you have experienced which is unusual for humans.

Let's be clear about one thing, though. It is not a sin to be tempted. Temptation becomes a sin when we give in to it, when we actually *do* it, not just think about it.

Even Jesus was tempted.

Hebrews 4:15, New International Version:

[Jesus] was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin.

If Jesus was tempted, you be sure that you will be tempted. Be realistic. Be prepared.

2) Be Responsible

We regularly hear stories in the news about people trying to weasel out of some situation by blaming it on others. One man in the States who was charged with sexually assaulting children — and pleaded guilty — turned around and sued the government for hundreds of thousands of dollars for damaging his reputation. I can imagine him saying, “It’s not my fault I’m like this. Don’t make me look bad.”

James 1:13-14, New Century Version:

When people are tempted, they should not say, “God is tempting me.” Evil cannot tempt God, and God himself does not tempt anyone. But people are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them.

Be responsible. Don’t try to pin the blame somewhere else.

King Frederick II, an eighteenth-century king of Prussia, was visiting a prison in Berlin. He talked with the inmates, and each prisoner claimed complete innocence of the crime for which he was convicted. Each claimed to be a victim of a frame-up or some other form of injustice.

All except one. That one sat quietly in a corner, while all the rest protested their innocence. Seeing him sitting there oblivious to the commotion, the king asked him what he was there for. “Armed robbery, Your Majesty.” The king asked, “Were you guilty?” “Yes, Sir,” he answered. “I entirely deserve my punishment.” The king then gave an order to the guard: “Release this guilty man. I don’t want him corrupting all these innocent people.”

It’s only when we accept responsibility for our actions that we have the freedom to deal with them. As long as we hide behind some excuse, we are unable to face the real problem.

3) Be Alert

James 1:14-16, New Century Version:

People are tempted when their own evil desire leads them away and traps them. This desire leads to sin, and then the sin grows and brings death. My dear brothers and sisters, do not be fooled about this.

Temptation leads to sin, and sin cuts off our relationship with God, which is the same as spiritual death. Romans 6:23 warns us, “The wages of sin is death.” This is serious!

We need to watch ourselves. I often say that I’m my own worst enemy. That is, I do the wrong thing and get myself in more trouble than anyone else has ever done to me.

Of course, no one wants to get in trouble. Sin is poison, but temptation puts a candy coating on it, so it looks good, it feels good.

A man from South America was describing how they catch wild pigs. The first thing you do is to put a pile of corn out in a clearing. Wild pigs will come along eventually and eat the corn. Do this for several days. Continue putting the corn in the same spot every day, but on about the fifth day put up a fence on one side of the clearing. The pigs will be wary at first but will still return to the corn—they can’t resist the easy food. Each day add on another portion of fence, gradually building an enclosure. The final section is the gate. On the last day, simply close the gate while the pigs are eating.

The principle here is to be aware of how sin grows in our lives. It starts out small—we say things like, “It’s just a little thing; it’s not important; everyone does it; I can handle it; it’s no big deal.” But it grows and soon takes control. It’s better to not let sin get a foothold at all.

A man was confessing to a friend that he had committed adultery with a co-worker. “I couldn’t help it! She came onto me, and the attraction was so strong I couldn’t resist.” The friend replied, “Oh, really? Tell me, how long have you been fantasizing about doing this with her?” The man lowered his eyes and answered, “Six months.”

Be alert. Be aware of what's happening in our lives. Don't let temptation gain entry; get rid of it as soon as you become aware.

4) Be Renewed

James 1:17-18, New International Version:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

In contrast to the consequences of sin, consider the goodness of God. All the good things we have are from God. Take some time today to reflect on that. Renew your mind by focussing on God's goodness.

Philippians 4:8, Today's English Version:

In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable.

And God's most precious gift of all is the gift of a new life with him. Verse 18 says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth." This is the new birth that Jesus Christ brings into a person's life.

Maybe you're struggling with temptation. Maybe you're beyond that, and you've really messed up your life, and perhaps even the lives of others as well. You don't have to stay that way.

Today is the day to pray:

Lord Jesus, I want to be reborn. Release me from the sin and guilt of my past and give me a fresh start with you. I know that is why you died on the cross and rose again. It was to give me this second chance. And so I ask you to come into my life... be my life coach. Give me the courage to break a bad habit, to end a bad relationship. Help me to quit compromising. Help me to quit flirting with temptation and help me do what is right. Amen.