

Chapter 7 - THE STRATEGY UNDERLYING EVERY TEMPTATION

A lot of people seem to adopt “the devil made me do it” attitude when it comes to facing temptation. They might say “I’m too weak,” “I’m not able to resist.” Then they use that attitude to justify their yielding to temptation and committing a sin. Accepting that you are weak can be good or bad. If you move closer to relying on God, the outcome is good! But if it allows us to sin or have feelings of self-pity, discouragement, or despair, the results are obviously bad.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). Jesus isn’t saying we should become entrapped in a cycle of defeat, which includes a loss of self-worth and the development of a victim mind-set. “Woe is me, I am weak and worthless.” He wants us to become humbled and reliant on the Holy Spirit. When you have the defeatist attitude, you will find yourself doing again and again the very things that you don’t want to do but can’t seem to keep from doing. Philippians 4:13 tells us that we can do all things through Christ. Even Paul struggled with this problem. Romans 7:15-20 tells us about them.

Romans 7:15-20 15 *“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”*

People sometimes confuse the terms trial and temptation.

“A trial is a time of testing with a goal of strengthening the person who is going through the trial. A trial reveals to a person an area of weakness so he can do something to strengthen himself or trust God in a deeper way to provide what is lacking. The trials God may send or allow in our lives are designed to test us and show us where we are weak and need to become stronger. “ (Stanley)

A temptation of the devil is intended to entice us to do evil. It is aimed at our eventual destruction. It is an enticement by the devil that always includes sin and is always aimed at destroying us in some way.

A temptation can occur through the devil speaking directly to our minds and hearts, or by the devil speaking through another person who is working under the influence of the devil. The temptation is aimed at getting us to use our God-given gifts to gratify our desires and drives in an ungodly, wrong way at the wrong time.

TEMPTATIONS COME FROM THE DEVIL

James 1:13 says *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”* So does God tempt us? No, God will never tempt us. Satan does the tempting. God has given him access to our hearts and

minds to plant temptations and ideas. Sometimes he speaks directly but sometimes he speaks through others who are used by the devil to deliver his message to us. The devil may plant an ungodly idea in a person's mind, not to entice him to commit sin, but to get them to suggest the idea to someone else.

Jesus warned us against this very practice. Read Matthew 18:1–7. Verse 6 says, *“but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”* This verse 6 tells us that we are not to cause someone else to stumble. He is not just talking about children in the physical realm, but also to those who are young in their faith. In other words, don't cause a weaker person to stumble and sin.

TEMPTATIONS MAY BE AIMED AT OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS

The devil will attack you in your time of need. The need may be emotional, physical or spiritual. The attack or temptation may be aimed at one of your strengths. For example, the devil might come to a believer at their job at a time when that person is feeling a need to receive greater recognition and appreciation. The devil does not come with the lie, “You really aren't good worker.” No! He usually comes with the lie, “You should get a promotion.”

As another example, the devil might come to a woman who is seeking to do everything in her power to be the best wife, mother, and homemaker she can be. His attack may come in the form of a lie. Such as, “Your husband should be complimenting you more and doing nicer things for you. He doesn't deserve you. You are way too good for him.”

TEMPTATIONS ARE ENTICEMENTS TO MEET GOD-GIVEN DESIRES AND DRIVES IN AN UNGODLY OR WRONG WAY

The devil may say to you when you are feeling underappreciated,

“You need to promote yourself more.”

“You need to speak up for yourself.”

He may cause you to compare yourself to someone else and think,

“The boss is playing favorites.”

“I deserved that promotion.”

The devil will say to the undervalued wife, “You know, there are men who would certainly appreciate you more than your husband appreciates you. In fact . . .”

The devil's lie is always, “You need this. You deserve it. You should take steps to have what you need and deserve.”

Many people think that if they believe that God wants me to have something, then why wait on Him. They work very quickly to get what they know God has in store for them NOW. They don't wait for God's perfect timing.

Consider what Rebekah and her son, Jacob did to get Esau's birthright. God's plan was to give the birthright to Jacob without any scheming or trickery. But they did not trust God but took it into their own hands. It would have happened in God's perfect timing but they made sure it happened. They gave God a little help. Have you seen people do this?

TEMPTATIONS COME TO EVERYONE

Nobody is beyond temptation. Nobody is immune to it or shielded from it. Nobody can live a life without facing temptation. Jesus was tempted.

Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden at the time the devil tempted them. They were in a perfect environment, and they were absolutely sinless initially. They were able to speak face to face with God.

THE DEVIL HAS A STRATEGY

The devil has a specific strategy. He doesn't operate in a haphazard way. Satan's foremost strategy is revealed in his temptations of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He revealed to them just how subtle he can be in his manipulation and temptation, and also how devastating the consequences can be when a human being gives in to his temptations.

STRATEGIC MOVE #1: A FOCUS ON NEEDS

Satan directs us to a specific need or desire in our lives. Each of us has a unique set of needs and desires, and some needs and desires are stronger than others. The devil focuses on our strongest need and desire. Some people question, "Is the devil omniscient—does he know all things about me?" No, his knowledge is limited. He observes the way you live!

First, the devil tells you that you have a need that God can't meet. Eve did not need anything in the Garden of Eden. God supplied all her needs. She even got to speak to Him directly.

Second, the devil tells you that he is can meet your need. The devil never claims that he can meet your need fully for the rest of your life without any negative consequences. He doesn't tell you the full truth about his capability of meeting your need.

The devil told Eve (Genesis 3:4-5): "*You will not certainly die,*" "*For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" The devil didn't tell Eve: Because of Eve fell for Satan's temptation all mankind will for thousands of years will be affected by your decision to eat of the forbidden fruit. Your relationship with Adam will be changed. Your relationship with God will be destroyed. The devil won't tell you the full consequences of the sin he entices you to commit.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR NEEDINESS

Every person has four basic physical needs: food, water, air, and physical security.

Every person has four basic emotional needs: human love and acceptance, feelings of competency, praise or recognition that lead to feelings of worthiness, and purpose or usefulness.

Every person has four basic spiritual needs:

God's unconditional love, God's forgiveness of sins, the assurance of everlasting life, and an awareness of God's abiding presence that gives hope for the future and confidence that God is always in control.

John 3:16-17 tell us that God can meet all our spiritual needs. Jesus says, "16 *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*" Through Jesus' work on the cross we have eternal life and salvation.

Jeremiah 29:11 tell us about God's assurance. God's plans are to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "*For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'*"

God can meet your emotional needs. This is one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit in your life. He also does this by sending people into your life who can wrap their arms around you and love you, encourage you, build you up, applaud you, and help you discover your unique gifts and ways in which to use them for the greatest good—now and in eternity. In John's Gospel, chapters 14 through 17, Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that He would be with them and abide with them, and that they would be in Him and be comforted by the Holy Spirit in their lives. KJV calls Him the Comforter.

God gives us encouragement in Deuteronomy 31:6. It says, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.*"

STRATEGIC MOVE #2: AN UNGODLY MEANS TO A GODLY END

Satan comes to you at your moment of greatest need with an urgent message that you can and should use an ungodly method or means to achieve a godly result. Satan's temptations always have a sense of urgency about them.

Read Matthew 7:7-12. "7 *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! 12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

Satan gets us to question whether God will meet a need. God will meet this need. He will do it in His way, in His timing, and He will do it in a way that is entirely for our eternal good without any negative consequences!

“Psychologists for years have advocated that people HALT. They know that if a person gets too hungry (H), too angry (A), too lonely (L), or too tired (T), he is in danger of emotional imbalance or continued depression. Before these negative situations can arise, make sure that you meet these physical and emotional needs to the best of your ability.” (Stanley)

Take care of your physical body—eat and drink what is healthful. Get sufficient rest and relaxation. Work and spend your physical resources wisely to provide for yourself the adequate shelter and clothing you need.

Take care of your soul—your mind and emotions. Make friends and sustain those friendships. What does Philippians 4:8 tell us that we should focus on? *“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.*

ENDS DON'T JUSTIFY MEANS

The devil's temptation nearly always presents an ungodly method to achieve a godly result. The truth of God is that the means are just as important as the end results and goals.

Luke 4:2-3 says, *“for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”* Satan attacked Jesus at the end of His fasting with a temptation regarding His immediate need, which was hunger. The devil desires for us to satisfy ourselves and, in so doing, to get off course from God's plan for our lives. If he can make it all about us, then he is winning.

STRATEGIC MOVE #3: AN URGENT OPPORTUNITY

Satan often presents an opportunity for us to meet our need, right now. He wants us to solve the need ourselves without considering God. It is no coincidence that when you feel the hungriest, he brings across your path a commercial or billboard for the most appealing food items. The devil wants you to act immediately before you have any time to think through your decision.

Take the time to ask yourself some very basic questions. You know the answers!

Is this behavior wrong according to the Bible?

What have been the consequences in other peoples lives?

If I yield, how will this affect me?

Am I willing to pay the consequences of yielding?

Will yielding to this temptation satisfy me or stir up an even stronger desire?

Is yielding to this temptation a wise decision or a foolish one?

How can I do this against the God who loves me so much?

“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

Consider Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. (Gen. 39:6c-12). When Potiphar’s wife made advances to Joseph, his response was to consider how good Potiphar had been to him and then he ran. He considered the consequences.

The devil nearly always couples his temptations in a sense of urgency. You think I need it right now. I really, really, really need this.”

“The truth is, we nearly always can wait for minutes, hours, even days before we make a decision related to sin. The devil knows that if we wait until the moment of passion passes, the object is out of sight, and the emotional heat is replaced with a rational cool head, we will not be nearly as prone to give in to his temptation. When you are tempted . . . pause. Wait. Think. Reflect on what you know to do that is right before God.” (Stanley)

AN EXAMPLE OF THE STRATEGY IN OPERATION

Read Genesis 3:1–6. “*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from [a]ny tree of the garden’?” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”*

What were the three great needs in Eve’s life?

She had a physical desire for what tasted good and satisfied her hunger.

She had a desire for beauty.

She had a desire for knowledge to be more like God.

Earlier today, we talked about our physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Every person has the following desires: For pleasure, for things that seem lovely and to learn. The devil tells us that we deserve to have our needs met.

“Many people ultimately define success as having all of their needs met, surrounding themselves with the most beautiful objects that can be purchased—from lovely homes to fancy cars to beautiful clothes and jewelry—and having the best education and training available.” (Stanley)

ANTICIPATING AND AVOIDING SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS

You need to address two main areas of your life.

YOUR CURRENT NEED AND NEED LEVEL

Consider what is the greatest need in your life right now? Don't tell us. Just think about it.

If a person who believes he is being punished unfairly for something he did not do. The more he dwells on the injustice he is feeling, the more he feels compelled to do something about the injustice. The more he dwells on what he might do, the closer he comes to taking action on the idea—he begins to plot and plan ways in which he might take justice into his own hands.

The person falsely concludes, "God doesn't love me. God doesn't care about this pain I'm feeling. God isn't going to do anything to give me the justice I deserve. I need to take care of this myself."

This is why people suddenly seem to go berserk and kill innocent people, They have been dwelling on an unmet need in their lives, and rather than trust God to meet that need, they have been stewing in their pain and brewing up ways in which they might handle the pain of their injustice.

The greater the feelings of need in your life, the more vulnerable you are. People seem to think that if we reach a certain level of spiritual maturity, then we will become immune to temptation. Not so! Never forget that the devil even attacked Jesus, the Son of God, with intense temptation!

What can you do?

Identify the situations and times in which you feel the most vulnerable.

Take action to change those situations and to eliminate those vulnerable times.

YOUR GENERAL "BENT" TOWARD SIN

Every person seems to have a predisposition toward a particular sin or sins. What are the three big categories of sin are described in 1 John 2:16? *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."*

the lust of the flesh - To lust is to crave, to have an intense and insatiable desire for

the lust of the eyes - The lust of the eyes refers to things that we see and just have to have. Covetousness, jealousy, and greed.

the boastful pride of life - The pride of life refers to things that satisfy a person's inner longing for value or esteem. A person who has the pride of life craves awards, fame, rewards, applause, and outward expressions of appreciation more than anything else, including time with family.

Satan entices us to go beyond the boundaries that God has established.

NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE END GAME

Never forget the devil's purposes:

To draw you away from God

To spoil God's purpose for your life

To deny the glory of God in your life

To destroy you in any way he can, including physical health

The devil does his best to get you to obsess on your need or desire. The devil also does his best to keep you in the now moment of your need. He doesn't want you thinking about the past and the ways in which God may have met your need in the past. He doesn't want you thinking about the future and that your need may be met in a legitimate or godly way in the future. He wants you thinking about how to get your need met now, now, now. He tries to keep you in a state of urgency.

The devil's ultimate goal is to get you to sin. And sin separates you from God as well as from other people. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Sin produces death—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.