

Chapter 8 – Responding to Temptation

God gave us free will, when we make good decisions, it is a good thing. But we can also make bad decisions. When it comes to responding to a temptation, there is a godly way and an ungodly way.

First, you must honestly ask yourself, Do I really want to resist the temptation? Sometimes people aren't quite sure they want to resist temptations—at least not all temptations, all the time, and in all circumstances. It is always a choice. God does not force us to do what is right.

James 4:7 tells us that if we submit (NASB) or humble (NLT) ourselves to God and resist the devil then the devil will flee. The power to resist temptations comes from our submission to God. As Christians, we submitted ourselves to God when we made a decision to accept Jesus as Savior and make a firm commitment to follow Jesus as the Lord. We cannot lose our salvation but our relationship with Christ can waver and we need to make that commitment day by day.

It is a commitment that we are called by God to make with “steadfastness” and “faithfulness.” (see Hebrews 10:23 and James 1:12) It is a commitment of the total self—spirit, mind, emotions, and body. Part of the route to salvation requires obedience on our part.

“To make a commitment to Christ is to make a decision to do what Jesus commanded us to do and to pursue with the whole heart, mind, and soul, the pure, wholesome, godly, and holy life that He lived. Jesus commanded us to be “perfect”—which means to be whole. He commanded us to love one another. He commanded us to be diligent in keeping His teachings. He commanded us to be His witnesses at all times in all places. He commanded us to walk boldly by faith and to trust God to meet our needs, regardless of what those needs might be. Jesus gave all of Himself to us, and in return, Jesus requires all of us. That's what it means to take up our cross daily and follow Him.” (Stanley)

Included in our total commitment to Christ are a total desire and a commitment not to sin. Our pursuit is for righteousness. Things that are righteous are pleasing to God. Does this mean that every Christian lives a sin-free life? No. As long as we continue to live in fleshly bodies, we will continue to sin.

We will sin from time to time in thought, word, and deed, but our desire as genuine Christians must be to follow the Lord closely so that we don't sin, and if we do sin what do we do? (See 1 John 1:9) We are to confess our sins to God.

When we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Instead of just accepting that we sin, we need to move forward with an even stronger determination not to sin.

STRIPPING AWAY ALL EXCUSES

Charles Stanley believes that most people who give in to temptation offer one of five excuses.

EXCUSE #1 SOMEBODY MADE ME DO IT

Genesis 3:12. What does Adam say? “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate”. To err is human but to find someone to blame it on, is even more human.

Read Proverbs 1:10–16. *10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. 11 If they say, “Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; 12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; 13 We will find all kinds of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; 14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,” 15 My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, 16 For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.”*

What excuses do you see in these verses? “Everybody is doing it” and “Nobody will ever know”.

God is omniscient. He knows when we have sinned. He is waiting for us to make it right by confessing the sin. Read Genesis 3:8-11. *8 They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” 11 And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”*

Did God know what had happened in the Garden that morning? Yes and He knows when we sin.

EXCUSE #2 GOD MADE ME DO IT

The person who offers this excuse believes, in essence, “God allowed it the temptation to happen, so God sent this temptation.” James 1:13–18 tells us, *“13 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. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”*

James is telling us that God will never tempt someone to sin.

A temptation is a desire instilled into the heart and mind of a person prompting him to do something that is not good. God never leads a person to use an ungodly method for a godly goal.

EXCUSE #3: GOD KNOWS I'M WEAK

When we use this excuse then we blame God for his inability to say no to it. Then we are at our weakest, we must become most dependent on God. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “*13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and 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, so that you will be able to endure it.*” God will help us resist, or He will make a way out of the temptation for us!

Each of us has the power of choice when it comes to a temptation. We must turn to the Lord and cry out, “Help me!” and He will supply the power, even true willpower. Philippians 4:13 tells us that we “*can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*” and 4:19 says, “*my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*” God will give us strength and supply our needs.

Psalms 50:15 tell us that if you “*call upon the name of the Lord and He will help you.*”

EXCUSE #4: THIS IS DIFFERENT

“The person who uses this excuse believes that he is being tempted in some unusual way; therefore, the normal rules and commandments of the Bible don’t apply to him. He believes he is justified because the temptation “came out of the blue” or “was unlike anything I’ve ever experienced before.” (Stanley)

Sometimes people will say, “I don’t know anybody else who has ever faced this.” Or they say, “It didn’t seem like a sin at the time. The person told me that what I was doing was permissible and even desirable in God’s eyes.”

1 Cor. 10:12 (NLT) says “*If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.*” In other words, don’t ever think that you are beyond the rules of the Bible, or that you have the ability in yourself to determine right and wrong apart from God’s Word. Don’t ever think that you are beyond being tempted or tricked into doing what is evil.

We have read 1 Corinthians 10:13 a number of times throughout this study. There is nothing new regarding temptation today or when Jesus walked this earth. God will give you a way out when you are tempted. You don’t have to give in.

EXCUSE #5: I’VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, SO I MIGHT AS WELL DO IT

One of the devil’s lies is that if you think a sinful thought and it is the same as committing a sinful deed, you might as well do it. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:21-23 and 27-28 that “*21 You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, . . . 27 “You have heard*

that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The person who lusts is entertaining adultery and hatred can become murder in his heart. The people to whom Jesus was speaking believed that it didn't matter what a person thought or felt. It only mattered what a person did. Remember what we said a few weeks ago, it all starts with a thought. The thought may lead to worse things.

No person can keep from thinking a negative, wrong, or sinful thought from time to time. Thoughts come. The good thoughts should stick and take root. The negative, wrong, and sinful thoughts need to be released immediately.

LEARN HOW TO RESIST

Resisting temptation is a learning process. It is not as easy as we think.

Part of the reason for attending a church is to be with like minded believers but we also attend to be encouraged to stay on the straight and narrow. One way to help you resist temptation is to go to someone you know who is also tempted in that area and has successfully responded in resisting the temptation and refusing to yield to it.

We also have Jesus as an example.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. Considering that Jesus was fully human. He fasted for 40 days so he was in a weakened state and hungry. Also Jesus was perfect in His humanity in ways we aren't. We are born with a sin nature. Jesus was not.

More was at stake between Jesus and Satan than you and I versus Satan. If Jesus fell for Satan's tricks and temptations, then the salvation of the world would never have happened. Jesus HAD to be a perfect sacrifice.

The devil began his temptations with the word 'if'. He attempted to cast doubt who Jesus was and His relationship with God, the Father.

The devil attempts to call into question our relationship with God and your gifts and who you are in Christ Jesus. He attempts to call into question the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in and through your life.

THE DEVIL PRESENTS WHAT SEEMS REASONABLE

Satan first attacks Jesus' physical need. (Matthew 4:3) He attacks His hunger. I can barely skip one meal, let alone 120 meals.

So what would have been wrong with Jesus doing what Satan had suggested?
God does not do what the devil entices or tells Him to do!

THE DEVIL OFFERS QUESTIONABLE METHODS

Read Matthew 4:6. The devil then appealed to Jesus' need to have a following.

“This temptation presented a questionable methodology. The devil was appealing to Jesus to accomplish His purpose on the earth through certain means that would be quick, flamboyant, and irrefutable. It was not God's way for providing atonement for the sins of the whole world. God's methodology required the death of Jesus on the cross.” (Stanley)

When the devil issued this temptation to Jesus, he threw in a couple of Bible verses to try to convince Jesus that it really was a good method for Jesus to use. The devil was quoting Psalm 91:11–12 .

In the last chapter, I used the example of Jacob and Rebekah stealing Esau's birthright. It was going to happen, they just helped it along. Today we might say, “They can't afford the home on just one salary.” The devil says, “Move in together. You're going to get married anyway.”

The goals are godly. There's certainly nothing ungodly about marriage. There's nothing ungodly about owning a home. But the method is all wrong in light of God's Word!

THE DEVIL NEVER PRESENTS THE RIGHT TIMETABLE

Matthew 4:8 says, *8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.*” How was Satan wrong? The devil did not have the authority to give all the kingdoms to Jesus, not eternally. The devil was attempting to keep Jesus from doing the one thing that would secure the kingdoms of the earth for Jesus—which was the sacrifice of His blood and death on the cross. He was trying to trip up Jesus on timing. The devil will come to you with temptations that seem reasonable.

“The devil will come to you with temptations that are totally wrong when it comes to timing. He will tell you that he can give you something that he truly cannot give you. The devil's timing is never the right timing. The devil's claim to being able to do something eternally good is never a valid claim!” (Stanley)

HOW JESUS RESPONDED TO TEMPTATION

Jesus is our role model. The way He responded to temptation is the way we are to respond to it. He quoted the Word of God to the devil. If this method was good enough to be used by Jesus, it's a method that is good enough for any of us to use.

In verses 3-4 Satan says, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread,” Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

In verses 6-7 Satan says “throw yourself down”, angels will save you and Jesus replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. The devil's methods never produce anything that is eternally beneficial.

In verses 8-9 Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus answers with Deuteronomy 6:13. He reminds Satan that only God has the authority to give Jesus these things. The devil should be worshipping Jesus and serving Him.

THE PATTERN OF OUR RESPONSE

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness gives us the pattern of response we are to use when the devil tempts us. There is no substitute for replying to the devil's temptations with a verbal spoken-aloud quote of the Word of God. Eve entered into a conversation with the devil and yielded to temptation. Jesus replied with a command from Scripture and did not yield to temptation.

There is no substitute for knowing the Word of God. The less you know, the more susceptible you are to the devil's temptations. It is vitally important that you read, study, and memorize the Word of God so you have verses of Scripture already planted in your heart and mind when temptations arise. If you have done this, the Holy Spirit can bring those verses to your memory quickly

Second, Jesus stood on the promises of God that God would meet all of His needs as a human being. You need to know those promises and stand on them as well.

Third, Jesus was 100 percent committed and resolved in His heart and mind that He would choose to do things God's methods to achieve God's goals—and to act in God's timing.

DISTANCING YOURSELF FROM THE TEMPTER

How does Jesus finally get Satan to leave? (Matt. 4:10). He said "Away with you" and Satan left. Jesus, in effect, distanced Himself from the tempter.

Consider what happened in the life of Joseph when Potiphar's wife "cast longing eyes on Joseph" and said to him, "Lie with me." (See Genesis 39:7.) What was Joseph's response to the situation? (Genesis 39:12) He "fled and ran outside"

There may be times when a temptation comes to you through another person and there's no time to quote Scripture to that person. You must respond in that moment by fleeing. Walk away.

THE BEST TIME TO SAY NO TO A TEMPTATION

The best time to say no to a temptation is immediately. Don't ignore God's warnings!

Samson ignored God's warnings. Samson had a weakness for Philistine women. (Read Judges 14:1-3) He chose to ignore warnings from the Word of God or the advice of his parents.

What was the result of this desire of Samson's in his chosen bride being given to someone else? It resulted in the death of thirty men of Ashkelon, and ultimately his chosen bride's death.

Did Samson learn from this experience? No.

Read Judges 16:1-2. Samson next turned to a harlot in Gaza, also a Philistine area. The Philistines got word that he was with the harlot, and Samson narrowly missed being killed.

Did Samson learn from this experience with the harlot in Gaza? No.

Samson next turned to a Philistine woman named Delilah. She repeatedly tricked Samson. Samson's life is a picture of what happens when we willfully choose to ignore God's warnings.

Proverbs 11:14 says, *"Where there is no guidance the people fall but in abundance of counselors there is victory."*

Proverbs 15:22 says, *"Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory."*

and Proverbs 24:6 says, *"For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory."*

What do these proverbs say? It is good to seek the counsel of others.

What are possible sources that can help us do what is right? The Holy Spirit, Bible, our parents or loved ones, friends, pastor . . .

"Don't dismiss what God commands in His Word. His commandments are intended to safeguard you from evil. Don't dismiss what godly parents counsel you to do. Their wise counsel is for your protection. Don't dismiss or discount the ways in which God has spared you from evil in the past. Recognize His loving hand at work in your life, sparing you from evil and its consequences. Don't think you are above the attempts of the enemy to trip you up or entice you. Don't think that you can outmaneuver the devil or outsmart those in whom the devil operates. He is crafty, wily, manipulative, and subtle beyond human measure." (Stanley)

If you fail to heed God's repeated warnings, you are likely to find yourself enslaved by the very forces that you thought you could control or conquer.

God's warnings are there. He never fails to warn His people about the consequences associated with evil. He always holds out the wonderful promises associated with obedience. Listen to what God speaks to you in the Bible, through godly people, and through your own prior experiences.