

Decide Now How You Will Respond!

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There was a man who was overweight, and he decided he had to lose some pounds. And so he very diligently followed a very strict diet. He even took a new route to work so that he could avoid his favorite bakery where he loved the products they produced. However, one day he showed up at work with a big coffee cake, and his coworkers began to mock him. And he said that he could explain.

"You see, I accidentally drove past my favorite bakery today and I saw all these delicious coffee cakes in the display case. So I prayed. I prayed to God and said, 'If You really think I should have this delicious coffee cake, have an open parking spot right in front of the bakery.' And soon enough there was one on my 8th time around."

The story was from Reddit r/jokes, if I am going to credit anything, and it demonstrates how strong temptation can be, even with the slightest things in life, and how easy it is to reason out of the guilt.

We continually face tests of our character. Often these tests start as subtle temptations that trigger our desires in everyday life. When Satan puts these temptations in front of us, they are designed to entice us in areas of our weaknesses and to do damage to our integrity. But sometimes temptations arise that stem from our own desires, and these too are formed out of areas in which we have weaknesses.

Now, for one person it may be food, for another alcohol, another sex. A temptation may appeal to the mouth, the ears, eyes, nose in form of dessert, music, beauty, or scent. It may appeal to our senses of touch and feel. The sources of temptation are numerous, especially in today's society with its abundance of entertainment and social media.

The words tempt and temptation have a sinister connotation in present day, a usage that has not always been attached to them. Now, initially the words were of neutral content, with the sense of putting to the proof, the testing of character or quality. Accordingly, God is tested by Israel's distrust of Him, as if the people were actually challenging Him to demonstrate His perfection. Abraham was tempted by being called to offer up Isaac, and Jesus was tempted to a spectacular Messiahship. No evil is implied in the subject of these temptations.

Temptation, therefore, in the scriptural sense, has possibilities of holiness as well as of sin, because as all experience shows, it is one thing to be tempted, another thing to fail and fall. We do not usually think of it this way, but we may rejoice in being tempted, since in temptation, by conquering it, we may achieve a greater spiritual maturity. We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that because we may become more virtuous through temptation, by God's grace as a tool, that all temptation is equally innocent and virtuous. It is obvious in the case of Jesus that His resistance to temptation was under God's influence through His Spirit. Jesus did not seek temptation, nor did He fear it.

It is not guaranteed that we will escape entirely such pounding of faith, but by obedience and faith, temptation is resisted and good character is built. But the trials that try our faith through hardship and affliction and trouble are much tougher to deal with than the trials of temptation.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

That is all positive. The biblical idea of temptation is not mainly about seduction, as it is often seen today, but is about testing us.

Please turn to I Peter 1, verse 6. This can be done for a good reason, like proving our character, or for a bad purpose, like exposing our faults or tricking us into doing wrong. Tempt in the Bible is synonymous with test in this non-restrictive general sense. Now here in I Peter 1 we are going to read verses 6 through 9, which you are very familiar with.

I Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

The root meaning of temptation is that it tests us, with our response determining our identity, our uniqueness, our distinctiveness from the world and within the Family of God. And the ingredients that converge in a full-fledged temptation are fixed. The two principal actors are a tempter, whose main trait is subtlety, and a victim of temptation, who is often gullible or weak-willed.

The action consists of three main elements. The first, a process of manipulation by which the tempter allures the victim to do a forbidden or wrong thing. And two, the process by which the victim deals with the allurements, usually first resisting but then gradually succumbing. And then three, the final closure, where the intended victim either thwarts the tempter or gives in to the wrong action.

So God has inspired the Bible to contain many temptations that end in victory for the tempter. This reveals the true nature of people and how easily they give in to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Now Satan is referred to as the tempter in I Thessalonians 3:5, and Paul was concerned that the tempter had tempted the Thessalonian believers, and so he has written this down and we have it for us today. Satan is the great author of persecution.

In a time of persecution or of trial of any kind, he tries to tempt us to turn from the truth and to abandon God's way of life. In persecution, we are tempted to abandon our loyalty and dedication to God to avoid suffering.

Please turn over to Job 1 and verse 6. Now in afflictions of other kinds, Satan often tempts the sufferer to murmur and complain, to accuse God of harshness or partiality, and even vent anger, giving a false witness that God does not support His people in our time of temptation and trial and testing. We have to be very careful where our anger is directed, because even if our anger is directed at the air, it is ultimately directed at God for us not being satisfied with the way He is working with us.

Satan attacked Job's character as being hypocritical and not real because of God's protection and blessings, but the real attack was on God. Job 1, and we are going to read verses 6 through 12.

Job 1:6-12 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? [I am sure there was a little bit of a sneer in that.] Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand against him and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

So God described Job as a unique servant. He said there was no one like him, and Job was a pure and devout man who became even stronger as a result of the testing that he went through. The accuser, the tempter, insinuated that Job's allegiance was hypocritical. So Satan argued that if only God would remove the protective hedge He had placed around Job, this devout servant would probably curse God to His face. But Satan did not say probably, he said he would. He was determined to make that happen.

When Job did not falter in his loyalty to God, Satan attacked his health, but really the attack was on God's sovereignty. From this conversation, we learn a great deal about Satan and his deceptions and his temptings.

First, the thing that we learn about Satan is that he is accountable to God. All angelic beings, good and evil, are compelled to give account to God (verse 6 there). The second, his thoughts are open to God. Also in verse 6, God knew Satan was intent on attacking Job. And number three, Satan can be in only one place at a time (verses 6 and 7). His demons aid him in his work, but as a created being, he is limited.

Four, Satan cannot see into our minds or foretell the future (you will find that in verses 9 through 11). If he could, he would have known that Job would not break under pressure. And the fifth, because Satan can do nothing without God's permission (there in verse 12), God's people can overcome his attacks through God's power. And then six, God puts limitations on what Satan can do. (We see that example in verse 12 and also verse 6 of chapter 2.)

Satan's response to the Lord's question in verse 7 tells us that Satan is real and active on the earth. These things we know about Satan, and knowing this about Satan should cause us to remain close to the One who is greater than Satan, God Himself.

The next chapter, Job 2, verses 1 through 3.

Job 2:1-3 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. [Satan just does not give up, does he?] And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incite Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

Now Satan had a cause or a reason for doing it. It was to discredit God, and God was accomplishing His cause and/or purpose. In Job 1:9, Satan used the same term "for nothing" to accuse Job of having an ulterior purpose for serving God. The accuser said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" And then God uses the same term here in verse 3 where He says, "You incite Me against him to destroy him without cause." Well, the term "for nothing" and the term "without cause" have the same basic meaning.

So God threw it back in his face, in one sense, his own accusation. God taunted the accuser with the counter-accusation that Satan himself is the one who wants to see injustice done. Without cause means there was no immediate sinfulness in Job that called for punishment.

Continuing on in Job 2, we will read down through verses 4 through 10.

Job 2:4-10 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face." And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he [that is, Job] took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

That is a truly amazing thing that Job accomplished there. He must have been an extremely faithful and righteous and loyal man. But even still, God put him, or allowed him to be put, through those tests to show how strong he was and to show God's sovereignty Himself, because God is the One who empowers us. Satan wasted his time, and that is exactly what we should do to Satan—waste his time as we resist temptation.

The attack was directed at God through Job, and the only way to prove the accuser false was by testing Job. So Satan was granted limited but progressively increased access to Job: first to his possessions, then his family, and finally to his health. But through everything, the primary purpose of Job's suffering, unknown to him, was for him to be a faithful witness of God's saving power. And we have to always remember that in the trials that we are put through, no matter how bad they are, they are going to end in good.

In every moment of temptation, affliction, and trial, as well as during prosperity, we recognize that the tempter is not far away. We must remain vigilant against his deception, because although his primary ultimate goal is to challenge God's sovereignty, he sees our weakness as an open door to achieve it.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil [that is, the tempter] and he will flee from you.

That is a guarantee from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and our God and Father of Jesus. We must stand firm and oppose Satan in whatever way he comes at us, whether through allurements, flattering promises, worldly attractions, temptation, or threats. He moves like a roaring lion searching for whom he may devour. He secures his victories through cunning and deception and threats rather than truth and courage.

Now please turn over to Genesis 3, verse 1. You know where I am going with this, you are very familiar with the first great temptation. The most well-known example of temptation in the Bible is the one that happened before Adam and Eve's initial act of disobedience. Despite its brevity, it encompasses all key elements of a successful temptation by the tempter. We will read verses 1 through 6.

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the

midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [That was pretty clear, and she understood God's instructions.] Then the serpent said to the woman, "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." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

So the tempter's subtlety lay in his approach, which emphasized God's prohibition of the forbidden tree by asking an incredulous question in verse 1, contradicting God's predicted punishment for disobeying the law in verse 4, and providing the woman a reason for desiring the forbidden fruit in verse 5.

In the process of Eve's gradual weakening, she amplified the original prohibition beyond what God said, when in verse 3 he said, nor shall you touch it. And she produced three impeccable reasons in verse 6 for eating the forbidden fruit as she contemplated the possibility of doing so. She knew it was wrong, but she reasoned her way out of it.

Even Adam's succumbing to the temptation is recorded with a matter-of-factness that makes us cringe. Verse 6 says, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. The simplistic way this is stated suggests their casualness toward temptation, desire, and sin. And this was the first Laodicean type of action. The Laodicean attitude is ho-hum toward temptation.

The New Testament counterpart of this Old Testament temptation illustration, typical for the New Testament and a balance to the temptation of Eve and Adam, is Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-12. Christ, the second Adam, undid what the first Adam did, thwarting Satan. Now in II Timothy 1:7, Paul explains part of the reason Jesus Christ was able to resist Satan's temptations:

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

That is what we have to resist temptation with. Jesus fought all His battles and won because He had a full measure of God's Spirit, and He was able to resist every temptation because He saw that giving in would be a rejection of God's sovereignty. Satan three times tried to tempt Jesus into sinning against God, disqualifying Him as the Savior of the world. But Jesus rejected Satan's lures, and thus qualified to replace Satan as the ruler of the world at Jesus' second coming.

But please turn over with me to II Corinthians 10:3. The confrontation between Jesus and Satan was a total success for Jesus. He had fasted and prayed and was filled with the knowledge of the Scriptures and was well-armed for the enticements and attractions that were placed before Him. Jesus knew the enemy was not only Satan but also the fleshly desires of His own body. In Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, God inspired Paul to write in,

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Just as Christ needed the spiritual presence of the Father to help Him with His struggles, we need His help to recognize every wrong thought before it leads us into sin. He can and will help us resist temptation if we remain spiritually close to Him.

On Satan's temptation of Christ, the usual elements are present, including a subtle tempter who can quote Scripture to serve his purpose. In this back-and-forth encounter, the intended victim consistently thwarts the tempter, and the test ends with Satan slinking away in defeat. This had a positive ending because Jesus stayed close to God and always remembered God's sovereignty.

How can a sinless person be tempted? We cannot be drawn to an object unless the object seems desirable to us. Examine each temptation of Christ.

In every instance, the appeal was a genuine call to a completely innocent instinct or desire.

In the first temptation it was to hunger. In the second it was to faith. In the third it was to power as a means of establishing righteousness. In each case, Jesus felt the tug and pull of His human instinct. And we know how insistent the hunger demand is on the Day of Atonement.

Christ had fasted for 40 days when this happened, and yet He was able to resist, having God's Spirit. But when Jesus understood that fulfilling these desires was wrong in those situations, He immediately declined the request. He demonstrated that He could overcome the tempter and resist temptation. It was not that He was physically not able to sin, but that He is so pure that He was not able to sin. Titus 1:15 says,

Titus 1:15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.

So the defiled and the unbelieving have little or no resistance against temptation. But we do, having God's Holy Spirit.

Now please turn over to I John 3, verse 1. Christ had a clear goal which helped Him resist temptation. If we share that same goal and hope to be like Him when He appears, we will also stay committed to avoiding sin, and we must strive to be like Him in purity and righteousness. It is the pure in heart who will see God. Here we are going to read verses 1 through 3.

I John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The term "purifies himself" means the same thing as "makes himself holy." Now we who are under the influence of this hope of being like the Savior put

forth effort in struggling against sin and in overcoming our human nature, which is necessary to make us pure. To succeed in resisting temptation, we rely on divine aid, but our effort is fundamentally linked to this success. The hope of becoming like Christ and of being permitted to dwell with Him will motivate us to make sincere efforts to become holy.

The apostle John suggests that those who possess this hope pursue the same purity and holiness and will ultimately attain it. John's statement, just as He is pure, has tremendous ramifications for you and I. "Just as" means the same kind of purity, to the same degree. That is, such a hope tends to make us holy now, though we may be imperfect. God has set us apart, and He is sanctifying us.

The ultimate effect is to make us perfectly holy as spirit beings in the Kingdom of God. And in this life, we do not attain the same perfect purity as Christ, who is a spirit being and completely holy.

II Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

So through Christ's life, we see how amazing God is and understand what He is truly like. As we learn more, God's Spirit helps us grow. Becoming morally Christ-like is a gradual process, and it is called in Scripture sanctification. The more we follow Him closely, the more we will become like Him.

I Peter 1:15 As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

That is why it is so important that we nip it in the bud at temptation, before it becomes desire. A faithful Christian does not habitually and willfully sin. However, we acknowledge that we sometimes do sin, not as a way of life, but out of fleshly weakness. So we know people cannot attain a state of sinless perfection on earth.

John's statement in verse 3 proves three things. 1) it proves that the tendency or the influence of this hope is to make us pure. 2) it proves that as we value it, we will strive to become as holy as Christ. And 3) it proves that this goal of purity will be accomplished. God will be the One who accomplishes it through us, but we have our part to play.

Jesus has genuine sympathy toward us in our quest for purity. It is not those who fall at the first attack that feel the full weight of temptation, but those who, like Christ, resist it over many years until the very end. And only the victors can help the vanquished. Only they who have endured the terrible assault and still stand firm can stand with Christ and provide help for those who have fallen.

But what are some common areas of temptation? In Christ's resistance to full-fledged temptations by an aggressive tempter who orchestrated the temptation, we can see where the typical pattern is for the victim to be tempted by circumstances or inner desires rather than an external agent of temptation.

Sexual temptation exemplifies this kind of lure. It does not seem that Bathsheba needed to deliberately attract David. Her nude beauty alone was enough to ignite his inner temptation, especially given his sexual excitement. It might be, in this case, that she knew exactly what she was doing and was therefore an external agent of temptation. We do not know that for sure, but we know human nature. In this incident, David might have been tempted by both an internal desire within himself and by Bathsheba as an external influence.

Please turn with me to I Corinthians 7, verse 1. An antidote to such behavior is a faithful marriage. Paul advises the Corinthian brethren, as they live in a sexually promiscuous society, about this temptation. Paul's principles of marriage are designed to counter sexual immorality. We are going to read verses 1 through 5.

I Corinthians 7:1-5 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the

husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

So obviously Satan exploits areas where we do lack self-control. And apparently, of course, looking at the world, this is the greatest temptation of people, although there are many others, like power and money and so on.

Giving in to temptation shows a lack of self-control, a surrender of our guard and morals. And what most people in this day and age do not realize is that even sexual immorality outside of marriage or before marriage, which is fornication, is a sin and must be repented of. And it is too common everywhere.

The person who allows the sinfulness of the world to ensnare him, and who allows himself to be caught in the non-Christian activities of society, has one fundamental problem: he degenerates for lack of self-discipline. He dies for lack of self-control.

Please turn with me to Deuteronomy 30, verse 19. Everybody has the power to choose. In this great conflict between good and evil, human choice exists and is, in fact, the universal human test. We are going to read verses 19 and 20.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live, that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.

No one is forced to succumb to a temptation. People *choose* to do so. Temptations that are successfully resisted, such as David's refusal to put an end to the king who tormented him, show that people have a choice when confronting temptation.

In contrast, society labels weakness of character and lack of self-discipline as diseases, and doctors prescribe drugs and cut and slice people to treat the effect instead of the cause. Most of the time, the reason is that they gave in to temptation.

I was going to go off-script and mention something going on in the world, but I will not. This nation has 3 million people who are so distorted that they cannot function, and they are killing people. I will not say any more than that, because you know who I am talking about.

God is not the cause of temptation; He is the solution to it. Thankfully, we have access to His help if we choose to use it. Eventually the overwhelming evidence of God's working behind the scenes will be manifested, showing that He does not cause His children to be tempted, nor does He allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

I Corinthians 10:12-13 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

God allows temptation as a way of purifying us. In contrast, Satan uses it to defile us. God controls the temptations of His saints, and He will provide a way out, not to avoid temptation but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it. This is testing as permitted by God.

The most significant number of self-tempted characters in the Bible is of those who find the appeals of materialism irresistible and who accordingly succumb to greed. Lot was tempted to choose the material prosperity represented by the well-watered Jordan Valley at the price of spiritual compromise.

The list of biblical characters tempted by greed for money and goods includes people like Achan, who lusted after and stole the accursed things, which referred to clothing, cattle, and other loot that God commanded Israel to destroy when they conquered Jericho, to the rich young ruler, who went away sorrowful because he had great possessions when Jesus told him that the cost of being a disciple would be to sell all that he had and give to the poor; the prosperous farmer of Jesus' parable, who succumbed to the temptation to lay up treasure for himself instead of being rich toward God; and then maybe the worst one of all, Judas, in his betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Please turn with me to I Timothy 6, verse 9. Now, given people's willingness to fall for the lure of materialistic greed, it is no surprise that Paul warned that some in the church had become so greedy that they strayed from the faith. Members who do not tithe properly on their increase are part of this group.

I Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

So there are unique dangers involved in the love of money, and most of us are well aware of what they are. But William Barclay, in his commentary, expresses the dangers in five points.

1. The desire for money tends to be an insatiable thirst. There is a Roman proverbial saying that wealth is like sea water. So far from quenching a man's thirst, it intensifies it. The more he gets, the more he wants.
2. The desire for wealth is founded on an illusion. It is founded on the desire for security, but wealth cannot buy security. It cannot buy health nor real love, and it cannot preserve from sorrow and death. Security founded on material things is doomed to failure.

3. The desire for money tends to make a man selfish. If the desire for wealth drives him, it is nothing to him that someone has to lose so that he may gain. The desire for wealth fixes a man's thoughts upon himself, and others become merely means or obstacles in the path to his enrichment. True, that need not happen, but it often does.

4. Although the desire for wealth is based on the desire for security, it ends in nothing but anxiety. The more a man has to keep, the more he has to lose, and the tendency is for him to be haunted by the risk of loss.

5. The love of money may easily lead a man into wrong ways of getting it, and therefore, in the end, into pain and remorse that is true even physically. So he may push his body too hard in his drive to succeed, risking his health. He might realize too late the damage he has caused to others and feel burdened with remorse.

Now ambition can also tempt the controllers who are greedy for power and leadership. For example, King Saul was tempted to keep his position by staying popular with his followers when they wanted to spare the best of the spoils instead of following God's command. Absalom, pleased with his high ranking in popularity polls, was tempted to rebel against his father and seize the throne for himself. And then King Herod Agrippa the First was tempted by arrogance caused by excessive pride when he put on his royal robes and accepted the claim of the people that he was a god and not a man.

The allure of a ruler's pride peaks in Ezekiel's account of the king of Tyre's self-temptation and downfall in chapters 27 and 28 of Ezekiel, where the imagery depicts Satan's original temptation and fall.

Sometimes even the instinct for self-preservation can tempt someone to do something wrong. Peter's denial of Jesus, where, despite his good intentions, Peter's impulse to save himself caused him to deny his loyalty to Jesus three times.

False worship also entices people. The temptation of idolatry is a major issue in Old Testament history. The New Testament equivalent is apostasy, which is falling away from God's truth into various forms of false doctrine and a corrupt lifestyle.

Please turn with me to Psalm 10, verse 3. In the book of Psalms, wicked oppressors are often depicted as being tempted to believe that God either does not see what they do or will not intervene. Here in Psalm 10, we are going to read verses 3, 4, and 8 through 15.

Psalm 10:3-4 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desires; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord. The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

Psalm 10:8-15 He sits in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places he murders the innocent; his eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to catch the poor; he catches the poor when he draws them into his net. So he crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength. He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see." Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble. Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account." But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; seek out his wickedness until You find none.

So they claim that God has forgotten, that God will not hold him accountable for his evil deeds, and that no trouble will come his way. The psalmist asks with amazement why or how the wicked dare to revile God and imagine that God does not see evil. And he answers this question, calming his feelings of disturbance and anxiety at the presence of evil. After all, God does see their evil deeds and will take care of the ramifications in the judgment.

Turn to the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs continually illustrates the dangers of an ungodly life, and we gather from the text that the young person in the book faces a nearly continuous series of temptations. Let me list them quickly for you, in the way of a summary.

These are the continuous series of temptations this young person faced: He aligned himself with the violent. He ignored his father's advice. He selected

folly over wisdom. He succumbed to the sexual appeal of loose women. He was lazy rather than hardworking. He grabbed ill-gotten gain. He engaged in dishonest business practices. He was quick-tempered and quarrelsome. He became a glutton and a drunk.

A lot of times we can predict the route—very often, if not every time, we can predict the direction the young man is going to take, or a young woman, by whether they are doing some of these things or not. Because if they are doing them, and they do not turn themselves around, then they are going to continue this for the rest of their life. And so what they end up having is a miserable life, to say the least.

The constant theme of Proverbs is choose this, not that, as demonstrated by its frequent use of adversative and hostile parallelism. For example,

Proverbs 14:17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Resisting temptation is about choosing wisdom over foolishness. So every time we give in to temptation, we are showing ourselves in that area to be foolish.

From the many examples of temptation in the Bible, we can understand how it works. Temptation exists primarily because the moral and spiritual world involves an ongoing great battle between good and evil.

Please turn with me to James chapter 1. The enemy is within, as the epistle of James makes clear. Temptation is often the enticement of a person to sin by offering some seeming advantage. And the sources of temptation are Satan, the world, and human nature. We encounter them everywhere, in all situations, places, and at all times.

And the most accurate description of the internal process of temptation is provided by James, in a section of Scripture that you are very familiar with. You might even have some of it memorized. James says in verse 14, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." James, the apostle, the pastor of the Jerusalem headquarters church, provides insight into the process of sin, beginning with temptation.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Temptation here is from the Greek noun *peirasmos*, which can refer to trials or tests with a beneficial purpose or effect, or can refer to trials or tests designed to lead to wrongdoing. It depends on the person being tempted. Temptation itself is not a sin; it must be accepted before it can lead to sin. Temptation is a precursor to sin. It indicates that the potential for sin is nearby.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Jesus was tempted as we are, but He stayed sinless, and God cannot be tempted successfully. In Him there is no hint of corruption that temptation may appeal to. Temptation does not come from God. God tests and approves us as we endure temptation.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

So temptation is a desire or urge to think or do something that goes against God's law and statutes and principles, and we are pulled away from truth and virtue. We are drawn away from God's standard of righteousness. Desire, in this context, is a force of attraction in the wrong direction. We long for it, crave it, covet it, and want it.

Desire is something that can be nourished or stifled. We can control and even eliminate it if we deal with it immediately. However, we can allow our thoughts to follow certain paths or steps, to lead to specific places, or our eyes to linger on certain things, thereby stimulating desire. If we encourage desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence: desire becomes action, either of the mind or of the body.

An example from Upjoke.com shows that when desire becomes action, it can have unintended consequences. An old man and a young man work together in an office. The old man always has a jar of peanuts on his desk, and the young man really loved peanuts. One day, while the old man was away from his desk, the young man yields to temptation and scarfs down over half of the contents of the jar. When the old man returns, the young man feels guilty and confesses to his crime.

"Don't worry, son, I never eat the peanuts anyway," the old man replies. "Since I lost my teeth, all I can do is gum the chocolate off the M&Ms." Unintended consequences.

Many temptations originate from within us. Our wrong desires lure us. We are drawn or attracted when we are offered hope of reward or pleasure, such as food or drink or entertainment. Our hope is to be like Jesus Christ, and that should replace our desire for physical pleasure.

The verbs drawn away and enticed in verse 14 are taken from the activities of fishing and hunting, and the word entice usually describes the drawing of fish out of their original retreat. We are allured as fish are with bait, and we call the bait on the end of the fishing line a lure.

James describes our desire, first, as capturing our attention and convincing us to pursue the wrong thing, and second, as tempting us with bait to give in to the lure. He changes his description from a snare to conception and birth in verse 15.

James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Now notice the reference in verse 15 to the growth of a person from fetus to adult—from complete innocence to corruption by the world.

I am going to give you another example from Upjoke.com that shows the reasoning of a child toward temptation. I saw a sweet little girl in the park selling cupcakes, so I purchased one. As I savored its flavor, I asked her, "Don't you ever get tempted to take one of them?" She looked at me in

shock. "No! That would be stealing! I only licked them and put them right back."

The thoughts of a child.

First, temptation comes, and desire, like a mother, conceives and gives birth to sin. Then sin, the child of desire, develops till it is full-grown and ready to produce offspring. When sin is full-grown, it becomes a way of life and gives birth to death, and sin brings forth death.

Just a question for you: are there any temptations that are regular in your life? Because they have to be dealt with. You are familiar with what Paul says in,

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

And this is the same meaning as sin brings forth death. Brings forth death in verse 15 is an animal phrase for birth, and it means that sin spawns death. Conquered by desire, man becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of a beast.

A summary of James 1:13-15 reveals that temptation initiates the process leading to sin, which ultimately results in death. In verse 13, it tells us that God does not tempt us. Verse 14 says that we are drawn away by our desires and enticed by Satan and the world. Verse 15 concludes that desire gives birth to sin; therefore, sin brings forth death. So the process is: temptation leads to desire, desire leads to sin, and sin results in death.

Temptation also often comes through deception.

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

One more of these Upjoke.com things which shows how easy it is to deceive ourselves. Two friends are talking here. A young woman says, "I found a wallet packed with money down by the church." Her friend says, "Well, did you give it back?" The young woman: "Not yet. I'm still trying to decide if it's a temptation from the Devil or the answer to a prayer."

That is the way people reason, is it not? It is simple to blame others or justify even our evil thoughts and wrong actions.

Some excuses that are common, I think, to human nature is that: It is the other person's fault. I could not help it. Everybody is doing it. It was just a mistake. Nobody is perfect. The Devil made me do it. I was pressured into it. I did not know it was wrong.

Please turn with me to Matthew 26, verse 41. A person who makes excuses tries to shift blame from himself onto someone or something else. A Christian, however, accepts responsibility for his wrongdoings, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness. In Matthew 26, Jesus warned the disciples about temptation as He went to pray in Gethsemane with them before His crucifixion.

Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into [or yield to the pressure of] temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

So Jesus warns us to watch and pray, to avoid giving in to temptation caused by carelessness or disobedience. In every situation, God offers a way out. The temptation of itself is not sin. It must be entered into or accepted before it results in sin. And God wants us to resist temptation and provides us with the help to do so, and He understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

So Jesus was tempted just like we are, because He is similar to us in His humanity. Temptation is not a sin, because Christ was tempted as we are, yet remains sinless. So though He did not sin, life was still difficult for Him. His sinlessness was preserved as He achieved victory after victory in the ongoing fight with temptation.

Temptation only becomes sin when and as the suggestion of evil is accepted and yielded to. God allows temptation as a way of purifying us, but Satan uses it to entice us into sin, attempting to defile us. As it helped to purify

Christ, so also it helps to cleanse us. Our spiritual maturity grows when we face and resist and overcome temptation.

And when we are tempted, God will assist. He will provide a way out—not to avoid temptation, but to face it successfully and remain strong under it. And this is testing as allowed and controlled by God.

The goal of life is linked to trial, temptation, and testing. God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle. He desires us to endure temptation and receive the crown of life. And the most effective way to prevent sin is to catch every wrong thought before it occurs. God will help us resist the temptations that lead to sin if we stay close to Him spiritually and do our part to resist.

Now please turn over to Proverbs 7, verse 21. Now the stakes involved in temptation are high, almost monumental. The biblical imagery linked to giving in to temptation is powerful and destructive, and often the outcome of giving in is literal or figurative death. The picture in Proverbs 7:21-27 is an appropriate summary.

Proverbs 7:21-27 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield; with her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would cost his life. Now therefore, listen to me, my children; and pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways [her can also be the world and all of its enticements], do not stray into her paths; for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to the grave [or hell, depending on the translation you have], descending to the chambers of death.

So people often struggle to accept that friends and acquaintances may be leading them astray. Young people seek acceptance, so they tend to avoid confronting or criticizing a friend's wrong plans or actions, and they just go along. Many people are unaware of how their friend's actions might cause trouble.

While we should accept others, we also need to remain cautious about human behavior, and when we feel ourselves being subtly or strongly influenced, we must be especially careful. Despite all the external circumstances and agents that intrude into a person's mind and prompt them toward evil, they do not cause anyone to give in to temptation. They provide an opportunity for moral choice: choose this, not that.

So our heart, meaning our feelings of love and desire, largely determines how we live, since we always make time for what we enjoy. Solomon advises us to guard our hearts diligently, ensuring we focus on desires that lead us on the right path.

Now flip a few pages over to Proverbs 4, verse 23. Set boundaries for your desires. Do not pursue everything you notice. Focus straight ahead. Keep your eyes on the goal and avoid getting sidetracked by distractions and detours that lead to temptation. The antidote, therefore, is to guard one's inner heart and mind. Here we are going to read verses 23 through 27.

Proverbs 4:23-27 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.

So this instruction for righteousness involves the parts of the body that are involved in expression or action. First, the heart, that is, the mind, must be guarded diligently because it is the wellspring of life. The heart is at the center of life's activities; it guides a person's path.

Temptations can only be resisted and conquered if we take the right course of action. Temptation is an invitation to sin, offering the promise of a greater benefit through disobedience. Our minds should be conditioned to promote obedience and goodness.

For a final scripture, please turn to II Peter 2, verse 6. Jesus Christ teaches us to resist temptation regardless of its source. He promises purity and holiness

to those who do it. He also instructs us to pray for diligence in deliverance from exposure to temptation and from giving into it. And God will not allow us to face temptation beyond our Spirit-given ability to resist.

And just as God rescued Lot from Sodom, He can also save us from the temptations we face in a wicked world. Lot was not sinless, but he trusted God and was spared when Sodom was destroyed. Here in II Peter 2, we are going to read verses 6 through 9.

II Peter 2:6-9 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked [are we not that way, looking at the world today?] (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

So temptation is used as a form of testing or proving, and the context is the covenant relationship of mutual love and faithfulness between God and His people. God tested Israel to demonstrate the true nature of her faithfulness to Him. His purpose is not to induce us to sin, but to confirm our faith.

As in the case of Job, Satan can serve God's positive purpose even though Satan's negative purpose was to test God's sovereignty. Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was God's testing of Adam and Eve's faith, and Satan's attack again on God's sovereignty. In the temptation of Jesus, Satan tried to entice Jesus to forsake God's sovereignty and His commitment to God's way of life. Jesus, however, proved to be a loyal Son.

Jesus did not test His Father as did ancient Israel, because He lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. And having resisted, Satan tempted himself. Christ understands and aids us when we are tested. An essential part of our honest and faithful witness to God's sovereignty and His way of life is how effectively we resist temptation.

One final warning before ending: when temptation hits, it is too late, almost usually, to seek advice. Once one's desire is fully awakened, people do not want guidance, they want fulfillment and satisfaction. So the best time to understand the risks and foolishness of pursuing forbidden sex, or anything else that is harmful, is long before temptation appears. Resistance becomes easier if the decision is made in advance. Do not wait to see what unfolds. Prepare for temptation by deciding now how you will respond when it arises.