

Sermon: How to Handle Temptation

Texts: Luke 4:1-13, cf. Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-17

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May 3, 2009

Introduction: Have you ever noticed that many times right after a great moment in your life, things have went badly? Spiritually I have seen it in Jesus' life. I have also seen it played out time and time again in today's world. Just when life appears to be going very well, it all falls apart.

Illus. After receiving the Pulitzer Prize, Kevin Carter wrote to his parents in Johannesburg saying, "I swear I got the most applause of anybody. I can't wait to show you the trophy. It is the most precious thing, and the highest acknowledgment of my work I could receive."

Two months after receiving the prestigious award, at age 33, Carter committed suicide. In his suicide note he said: "The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist."

We need to understand how Satan tempts us to do things that are destructive. Mr. Carter was attracted to all the things that can certainly disappoint:

- 1. job (security)**
- 2. self-esteem (based on performance)**

The question is what are you worth when you retire?

- 3. human relationships**

His best friend was killed.

His live-in girl friend rejected him.

- 4. illegal drugs**

There is a lot of pain in this world. Life can be filled with disappointment at times. But Jesus has the answer to temptation because he has been there, done that. He knows what it is like to be tempted and overcome temptation.

Luke 4:1-13 (NIV) ¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” ⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’” ⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” ⁹The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

The word translated “tempt” (*peirazo*) in our text means, to test, to try, or to prove. It can be used in a positive sense as it is in [Job 23:10](#) where Job, who was in the middle of all his trials said: “When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” Or it may be used in a negative sense like it is here in our text this morning where the devil is tempting Jesus to do evil. Man was created to worship and serve God. Temptation is an enticement to sin, to worship and serve the creature and creation rather than the Creator.

Illus. It is like a lure in fishing. It is not real, and it is going to cause a great deal of pain or death.

Money looks like security and happiness.

But, Money can be a trap ([I Timothy 6:9](#)). The word trap means something that delivers danger or death suddenly and unexpectedly.

Sex might look like love.

Power might look like you don’t need others.

Illegal drugs promise euphoria or a better frame of mind, but don’t tell you about the upcoming crash or addiction.

The Apostle John reminded the early Church:

I John 2:15-17 (NIV) ¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We should always realize: No one is immune to the temptations of the Evil One (Satan, the Devil).

I. Temptation Comes to Everyone.

A. Temptation has two sources.

1. Internal - i.e., what we desire or want in the flesh

Jesus tells his disciples:

Matthew 26:41 (NIV) ⁴¹“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

2. External - i.e., what others want for us - like the Devil or those aligned with him.

The Scriptures are full of very honest accounts of God’s people being tempted.

Adam and Eve in the garden - everything was perfect until they started regarding themselves more highly than God.

Abraham and Lot - Abraham lied to protect himself with little regard for his wife. Lot let greed get him in trouble. He almost lost his life; his wife did perish.

Samson and Delilah - The false tears and the nagging of his wife persuaded Samson to do the wrong thing ([Judges 14-16](#)).

King Saul did things his way instead of God's and lost his kingdom ([I Samuel 13](#)).

Bathsheba - She was very beautiful, so much so that David committed adultery with her and had her husband killed, and then tried to cover it up ([II Samuel 11](#)).

Spouses may ask us to desert God as in the case of Job ([Job 2:9](#)).

No one is immune, even those who are very happy when they receive Christ.

B. Christians are vulnerable.

[Luke 8:13 \(NIV\)](#) ¹³Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

Right after their baptism, new Christians are especially vulnerable, but so are those who are mature in the faith. Listen to what Paul says about restoring someone who has sinned.

[Galatians 6:1 \(NIV\)](#) ¹Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Being tempted is not exactly the problem, it is the idea of overconfidence, thinking you are not able to fall into sin.

Candidates for the eldership are warned in Paul's letter to Timothy ([I Timothy 3:7](#)) that they must "have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (pride).

II. Temptation Is Tailored to the Person.

One three-year-old's explanation for being in the kitchen atop a chair, eating cookies: "I just climbed up to smell them and my tooth got caught." (Greene)

What may be tempting to you may not interest me in the least and vice versa. Canned creamed peas is a favorite of my brother-in-law's. You would really have to hurt me to get me to eat them, pecan pie not so much of a problem - but still a temptation.

More seriously, the wilderness temptations of Jesus are a type of the same temptations we face everyday. No, we can't turn stones into bread, but just like Jesus we are tempted:

A. To put the physical ahead of the spiritual

There was an understanding that the coming Messiah would provide food for the hungry, release the captive politically. There would be no more hunger, poverty sickness or oppression in the new kingdom. There is always the danger of trying to please ourselves or others rather than doing what God has in mind.

Illus. Oh, preacher, if you could help me and my family we'll come to your church. Some people belong to the church for what they can get out of it. Some people don't realize that it is the Word of God that really satisfies hunger. Those who don't understand that truth - are starving themselves to death. (Jesus' response was "not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.")

Jesus had to make a choice of methods. Was he going to attract men to himself or God? There is no future in developing a following. Those who want to be first in the Kingdom - Jesus said would be last.

Not many of us would be very tempted to throw ourselves down from a height of 450 feet like what is portrayed in the third temptation. Eight foot step ladders make me nervous. But we might be tempted by the Devil to:

B. Doubt God's Power

The devil wanted Jesus to test God, but miracles, signs and wonders bring as much skepticism as they ever do faith. People didn't believe even after the resurrection ([Luke 16:31](#)). A miracle in healing will bring skeptics as well as other sick and infirmed to services, yet neither will be there for worship and praise.

1. The skeptic will come to find a rational reason for miracles or to convince others his view was correct.
2. The sick will come to "get" rather than to "give."

Why do we come to corporate worship?
Is it to get something or give worship to God?

And there is always the “easy way out.” Haven’t we all been tempted to take shortcuts or to do what people expect rather than what God wants and to:

C. Seek wealth, power or fame

Running after things that don’t last and are not important is one of the sickest jokes the devil has.

Illus. “Money is an article that may be used as a universal provider of everything-except happiness.” Money will buy:

A bed, but not sleep.

Books, but not brains.

Food, but not an appetite.

A house, but not a home.

Medicine, but not happiness.

Finery, but not beauty.

A crucifix (jewelled cross about your neck),
but not a Savior.

But there IS hope!!

III. Temptation Can Be Overcome.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

I Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) ¹³No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Temptation can be overcome simply by being about God’s business and living holy lives relying on God for strength.

Here are some things you might do:

A. Pray

Pray that the Holy Spirit will purify your heart and mind - then listen. The key to prayer being effective is whether it is ritual or from your heart. It is whether you are ready to submit to God’s perfect will and whether you are in a right relationship with Him.

Just like Jesus we need to:

B. Know God's Word

Just like Jesus we should always consult and respond to temptation with the Word of God. Satan will attack us much like he did Jesus. When tempted, Jesus quoted from the Old Testament scriptures. When tempted to:

1. gratify selfish desires - Jesus reminded Satan that God supplies needs.

Deuteronomy 8:3 (NIV) ³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

2. doubt God's power - Jesus reminded Satan that God alone deserves our worship. He quoted: **Deuteronomy 6:13 (NIV)** ¹³Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

C. Try fasting

Jesus fasted so he could concentrate on spiritual issues. The practice of fasting can reveal things about ourselves such as: short tempers, selfishness, inability to delay gratification, and so on. A simple way of beginning a fast would be not to eat from lunch to lunch. During the 24 hour period drink plenty of water or you may wish to drink some fruit juice (provided no medical problems).

Illus. Fasting has been done historically in advance of ordination typically or other important times.

I want to suggest:

D. Two disciplines for "taming the tongue."

What we say many times reveals what is really in our hearts. That is why Jesus said it is not what goes into a person's mouth but what comes out that makes them unclean (**Matthew 15:11**). James, the brother of Jesus, provides a lengthy discourse on the dangers of the tongue in his N. T. letter. I dare you:

1. Go a day without saying anything negative.

Psalm 141:3 (NIV) ³Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

You need to be honest, but don't be critical or mean. Be positive instead of negative.

2. Go a day without saying anything dishonest. Jesus said Nathaniel was a man without guile (John 1:47 - KJV) or nothing false (NIV). Don't try to manipulate people with flattery.

Conclusion: Even the more spiritual people among us should be careful (**Galatians 6:1**). All of us are tempted, but the key is to tap into the power of God through the experience and presence of His Spirit.

Hebrews 2:18 (NIV) ¹⁸Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

In days full of pressure and stress it is difficult to win the battle against our adversary, the Devil. We are tempted by the things of the flesh and by the spiritual army that belongs to the Evil One. We need to be careful that we do not fall. We need to be in prayer for ourselves, but also for each other.

We need to have an urgent concern for those who are not saved.

We need to love the lost enough to share the gospel with them.

This is an easy world in which to become lost with so many tempting things.

But there is only: ONE WHO SATISFIES; ONE WHO SAVES; ONE WHO LOVES AND FORGIVES and that is God - through His Son Jesus Christ. He convicts us of a need for Him in our lives.

The only important choice in life is whom will you follow and serve!

Today as we offer a time of decision I invite you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. The temptation will be to put it off – BUT DELAY IS DEADLY. Do not reject Jesus one more day.

Repent of your sins and claim Him as your Savior right now in front of these witnesses

Do it TODAY!