

10 Temptation

How do you get a Master's Degree? *My temptations have been my Masters in Divinity.*—Luther
Everybody gets tempted. One of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer addresses this. In fact, it implies that God has something to do with allowing temptation. Look at it this way, temptation is the chance to do well. There are 9 listed Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 but fruit doesn't grow overnight. It ripens slowly. God ripens the fruit by putting us in situations where we might behave exactly the opposite way. He might teach love by teaming you with a very unlovable person. And when you defeat temptations, you become more like Jesus.

We often talk about temptations coming from outside of us, but Jesus taught that it arises from within your mind. *"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."* Mark 7:21-23. It is not a sin to be tempted—Jesus was also—but it is when you give in. In the temptation of Jesus (Luke 4) we see 4 things that happen to most of us which Satan eggs on. First comes a desire, like Jesus being hungry. Then Satan tries to induce doubt about right and wrong—such as, maybe God didn't really mean something as sin. Next are half truths or lies about what God says. Think of the serpent in Genesis telling Eve she would live forever if she ate the fruit. Finally, disobedience, entices us to commit the sin. Jesus conquered this by not giving in, turning the tables on Satan by correctly quoting God's Word and walking away.

We can expand on this, since it is such a struggle for us. First, recognize your weakness and know that you will have to ask God for help. When temptation strikes refocus on something else. Nowhere in scriptures are we told to resist temptation but to *"resist the devil."* James 4:7. Refocus because resisting a thought doesn't work. There's a comedian who laughs at our folly. He came onstage drinking a drink with rocks in the glass—it's 'on the rocks'. Then he says, "Try not to think about rocks." We laugh; we can't resist. The battle for sin is in your mind. Whatever gets your attention will get you. The advertizing industry knows this well. Once Temptation gets your attention, it goes after your emotions. When you see very rich people living large, do you envy them or hate them having what you don't? Whether you do depends on your well-ingrained patterns of thought. The way not to think such things is to have God reprogram your mind. Keep your mind on His Word. It's called the Principle of Replacement. *"Fix your thoughts on Jesus."* *"Fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise..."* *"Leading every thought captive to Jesus Christ."* Heb. 3:1, Phil 4:8 & 2 Cor. 10:5. This is a slow process, sometimes personally frustrating to the point of tears. A second technique is to share your struggle with a godly friend you can trust.(Eccl. 4:9-10) Real Christian fellowship helps the lonely walk you struggle with and sins that won't give up within you. Pride is the reason we hide our faults. Someone said, "what you can't talk about is probably out of control in your life already." Humble yourself to God and then go to war. *"Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."* Eph.6:17. Paul's analogy is particularly adept and divinely inspired. Assurance of your salvation is truly a helmet protecting your thoughts, emotions and will. The Word is a comfort and weapon, what Jesus used to counter-attack Satan. (Didn't we talk about how important it is to memorize scripture and claim it in your life?)Satan knows all our weaknesses and can argue us under a table, but He can't touch God.

The benefits of wars won against temptation are huge but never over. They make you close to God, Whom you depend on. You might not see change but people who haven't seen you for

awhile might comment. Battles won can lead to newfound spirituality and spiritual gifts you didn't know you possessed. But while we look for quick growth, God has the goal of strong growth. We are slow learners with much to unlearn. We are afraid to face the truth about ourselves and take time to grow. There was a Grand Canyon between you and God. Jesus is the bridge and while you are here on earth, he's building you.

You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. (Luther on temptation.) To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. (Luther on talking to God)