



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

7350 Granbury Rd.

Fort Worth, TX 76123

Resisting Temptation

Lesson #1

Reference

Lesson #27

Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines temptation as "an enticement or invitation to sin, with the implied promise of greater good to be derived from following the way of disobedience." Resisting temptation begins with knowing that Satan is the supreme "tempter" (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5) who has been tempting mankind since our Creator placed His first two children in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3; 1 John 3:8). Ultimately, however, we know that Satan's power over Christians has been effectively destroyed as the war has already been won through our Savior's death and resurrection which conquered the power of sin and death forever. Nonetheless, Satan still prowls the earth looking to drive a wedge between God and His children, and his

temptations are unfortunately a daily part of our lives (1 Peter 5:8). Yet with the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of God's Word to help us, we will find ourselves effectively resisting temptations.

The apostle Paul encourages us with these words: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Indeed, every one of us faces temptations of some kind; even Jesus was not immune as He was "tempted in every way, just as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). Although Satan may be the dark force ultimately behind the tempting, it is our fallen and corrupted human nature that allows these temptations to take root and causes us to act on them, thereby "giving birth to sin" (James 1:15). But it is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to free ourselves from the sin and temptations we struggle with in our daily lives. Thus, if we have the Spirit of Christ residing in our hearts, we already have what it takes to resist the flaming arrows the devil sends our way. As Paul told the Galatians, "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

The Word of God has always been our best defense against Satan's temptations, and the better we know His Word, the easier it will be to claim victory over our daily struggles. The psalmist tells us, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). When Christ was tempted by Satan in the desert, the first thing He did was to quote Scripture (Matthew 4:4–10), which eventually caused the devil to leave Him. Indeed, Christians need to be diligent in studying God's Word. "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies" (Psalm 119:97–98).

In addition to God's Word, prayer can help us to resist temptation. The night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed in the Garden of

Gethsemane, and He told Peter to pray “so that you will not fall into temptation” (Mark 14:38). Also, in the “Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus taught us to pray that we would not be led into temptation (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4). Yet, when we do fall into temptation, we know that “God is faithful; He will not let us be tempted beyond what [we] can bear,” and that He will provide us with a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). This is a promise from God, and like Abraham, Christians should be “fully persuaded” that God has the power to do what He has promised (Romans 4:21).

Another way to help us resist temptation is to remember what Jesus Christ did for us. Even though He never committed a sin, He willingly endured the torture of the cross for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). Every sin we’ve ever committed, or will commit, played a part in nailing our Savior to the cross. How we respond to Satan’s worldly allurements is a great indicator as to just how much the love of Jesus Christ occupies our hearts.

Now, even though Christians already have the tools necessary for victory, we need to use our common sense and not place ourselves in situations that prey upon, or stimulate, our weaknesses. We are already bombarded every day with images and messages that tantalize our sinful lusts. We don’t need to make it more difficult than it already is. Even though Christ’s Spirit resides in our hearts, our flesh can be very weak at times (Matthew 26:41). When we know something is or can be sinful, Paul warns us to “flee from it.” Remember, the “tempter” is also the master of rationalization, and there is no limit to the arguments the devil can offer us to justify our sinful behavior.

Armed with God’s Spirit and the truth of His Word, we are well equipped to overcome Satan’s assaults (Ephesians 6). No matter what trials and temptations come our way, God’s Word and Spirit are

infinitely more powerful than any of Satan's schemes. When we walk with the Spirit we can look at temptations as opportunities for us to show God that He is indeed the Master of our lives.

A Worldly View

Temptation is everywhere—in that second slice of pie, that way-too-expensive golf club, that not-quite-legit tax deduction, that smoldering gaze from a sexy person who is not your partner.

We all know how easy it is to give in during a moment of weakness...and how very hard it can be to face the consequences afterward. So, we want to resist—but the advice we commonly hear on just how to do that often isn't realistic.

Here's what will help. Next time you're tempted to do something you're likely to regret, follow these seven practical and insightful suggestions from clinical psychologist Judy Kuriansky, PhD, a Daily Health News regular contributor and adjunct faculty member at Columbia University Teachers College. To hone your self-control...

- **Focus your thoughts on what you should do, not on what you shouldn't do.** This advice stems from the ironic processing theory of cognitive science that says that deliberately trying to suppress certain thoughts can backfire—making unwanted thoughts more prominent. You've probably heard someone playfully say, "Don't think of a pink elephant!" It's a good bet that thoughts of a pink elephant will instantly pop into your head and compete with your other thoughts.

Thinking of a pink elephant when you are not supposed to might be harmless—even entertaining—but what happens when the intrusive thoughts compete with your value system? This is when you must decide what you should think about. This works for nasty habits that

you're tempted to indulge but want to break. Rather than saying to yourself, "No nail-biting!" it's better to say—even if it feels unnatural or untrue at first— "I'm letting my nails grow." Or instead of sighing, "I can't eat sweets," proudly remind yourself that you're into healthy eating. Over time, what you make yourself think about will become the easier course to follow.

- **Identify your needs.** Temptations are driven by needs, many of which are healthy. It's just that many times, the need driving the temptation will not be met by acting on the temptation—leaving you no better (and perhaps much worse) off.

What to do: It's almost impossible to stop doing something or squelch a craving when it's fueled by a deep desire or fulfilling a pressing need. What you must do, then, is figure out what the actual need is...what you are missing that is making you feel unsatisfied. Once you come to terms about that, you can figure out how to satisfy that need in a healthier way. For example, you might be tempted to drink to entertain yourself when you're bored or lonesome...but it isn't really the alcohol you want—it's an end to feeling bored or lonely! So, what you really need is a more resourceful solution. Instead of sitting alone and drinking, phone a friend for a chat and make a plan for a social event...join a club...take a class...make some new friends.

- **Make a balance sheet.** Behavior is always a matter of conditioning whereby we weigh the positives (the turn-on or rewards) against the negatives (the turn-off or disincentives). Giving in to temptation, such as having an affair, can be very exciting, but the costs (to your marriage, your reputation, etc.) can be huge. Dr. Kuriansky suggests that you examine what those costs are just as if you owned a business and were examining your profits versus loss. You don't need an Excel spreadsheet to figure it out. Take a piece of paper and make

two columns. In one column, list how giving in to your yen serves and satisfies you. In the other column, list how giving in sabotages you. The comparison of the lists will help you make the wisest choice about whether to indulge or resist.

- **Avoid self-defeating self-talk.** It's common to tell ourselves we've been "good" or "bad" based on our behavior—I'm good because I didn't eat that those French fries or I'm bad for buying that putter I couldn't afford. Problem is, such sweeping labels not only don't stop bad behavior, they also erode self-esteem...and when you feel like you're worthless, it's even harder to resist temptations that you think might make you feel better. So instead of condemning yourself and what you do with generalized good/bad labels, keep your inner dialogue focused on the specific activity in question and put a positive, resourceful spin on it for yourself—Resisting those fries helped me reach my diet goal today or Tomorrow I'll exchange the putter for a less expensive one. This is a much more constructive way to frame your self-image than just labeling yourself good or bad...strong or weak...successful or unsuccessful.

- **Know and avoid triggers.** In behavior therapy, clients are taught that, if they want to stop a certain behavior, they have to avoid situations that encourage, stimulate or facilitate it. This could mean taking another route home instead of the one that goes by the bakery you can't resist visiting...or ignoring the text messages of that heavy-drinking friend whose prime reason for reaching out is to invite you to tie one on with him or her. The key here is that what's not in your face or at your fingertips is less likely to capture your attention.

- **Engage a friend's help.** The reverse of avoiding triggers for unwanted behaviors is to fill your life with people who support your resolution to stop making damaging decisions. So, clue in your friends

about your goals and enlist their aid. For example, if you really do need a new outfit but also know that you are always tempted to shop-til-you-drop, go shopping with a friend who can be trusted to keep a pact to remind you of your goal. The same holds true for any temptation—enlist an honest and discrete friend to keep you to your word and help you navigate the change strategy you've committed to.

One caution: Make sure that your helpful friend really has what it takes to be helpful. If he or she resorts to using labeling language that Dr. Kuriansky just advised you not to use (like "You're an overspender"), that just won't cut it. In fact, this kind of talk may only make you feel discouraged, angry or rebellious. As part of your pact, coach your friend, requesting that he or she simply state—and restate as many times as necessary—what you've said you want to do ("Remember, you asked me to remind you that you want to..."). This strategy puts the responsibility and decision making back on you rather than turning your friend into a judge.

- **Permit some indulgence.** Research shows that deprivation ("I shouldn't/can't/won't...") risks fueling the urge to do what you are trying to avoid and sets you up for frustration, defiance, rebellion and even obsession. So, unless your bad decisions have tended to be truly dangerous, instead of going cold turkey, gradually near your goal by indulging just a little bit or in an alternative way, as a step in the right direction. Choose a diet soda instead of that sugary stuff before training yourself to drink, maybe, sparkling water...or buy only two of the same T-shirt in different colors rather than giving in to your usual habit of buying the shirt in its rainbow of eight available colors. It's OK to give in a little bit to that devil on your shoulder...ultimately, if you follow through on the strategies above, he will get bored and jump off for good.

Application/Activity

We are going to pick one temptation that we are comfortable sharing with the group. We will team up into teams of two and be each other's accountability partner for the week. We will then employ several of the above listed techniques to try and conquer that temptation for the week. This will help each of us identify the method or methods that actually work for us.