

***Question: Lately I have been facing a strong temptation toward a behavior that I know is wrong.***

***How can I overcome this temptation?***

Christians should never be naïve and careless about the power of any temptation to sin. The scriptures warn that our “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). However, believers in Christ have also been told: “No 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” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

With this in mind, each one of us must accept personal responsibility for what happens to us by maintaining a degree of self-control, resisting the devil, standing firm in the faith and taking the way out that God provides (1 Peter 5:8-9). James explained: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

Since Jesus himself was “tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Each person needs to commit his or her life to Jesus in faith and pray for him to help with the specific temptation that is being faced. We should also learn from the account of Jesus’ temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

When tempted in the wilderness, Jesus did not willingly go into a place of unnecessary temptation. He went into the wilderness only when driven by the Holy Spirit to face Satan for our sakes (Mark 1:12). Our temptations may be inevitable; but when possible, we should avoid willfully placing ourselves in situations we know will tempt us. The New Testament teaches us to “flee from” sexual immorality, idolatry, the love of money and the “the evil desires of youth” (2 Timothy 2:22; 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14). Stay away from any source of temptation whenever possible.

In addition, Jesus used the word of God to deal with Satan’s temptations. He answered Satan: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew

4:4). Satan also used the Bible to tempt the Lord, but the knowledge of God's word helped Jesus resist Satan's attacks. When temptation comes, we should fill our hearts with thoughts of the Lord and allow his message of hope to push out evil thoughts of sinful behaviors.

Jesus also understood Satan's ability to deceive. For Jesus to use his powers as Satan proposed was not evil in itself. However, had Jesus done as Satan proposed, he would have bypassed God's plan to save the world. Humility and trust in God's way will keep us safe from such temptations. The apostle Paul warned that we should not be surprised by Satan for he "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). We should not allow ourselves to be seduced through impure motives to accomplish even good things in wrong ways.

Even when we have succeeded in overcoming a momentary temptation, we should never assume that our spiritual warfare is over with one victory. After the temptation in the wilderness, the devil only left Jesus "until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Satan never gives up easily. But throughout his ministry, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated that his power was greater than the power of the devil and his demons. To give into temptation can lead to death (James 1:15); but if we follow Jesus, we can also overcome by his power both now and forever.

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