

Tips For Resisting Temptation

By Doug Batchelor

An Amazing Fact

A teenager in Virginia was shocked to find a two-headed turtle behind her home. She caught the poor creature and watched as the two freakish heads did a tug-of-war over a piece of food she gave them—or it! According to scientists, two-headedness can occur in all animals, but the lifespan is typically short. The reason is that each head tends to work independently of the other, controlling its own side of the body, and therefore creating disunity, confusion, and frustration. Unless one head takes primary control, the creature will soon die from starvation and indecision.

Introduction - Fundamental Truths

Since the entrance of sin into the world, a war has been raging in every human heart between the spirit and the flesh. Every person desiring to serve God feels the battle between these two opposing masters. And Satan is always exploiting our physical and emotional desires to sever our relationship with the Lord. "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2 NKJV). The Bible begins with the serpent tempting Adam and Eve and follows with the world's deterioration. The New Testament begins with Satan tempting Jesus and follows with the world's salvation. When humanity fell after that first subtle temptation in the garden, it lost the pure loving motives with which it had been originally created. Selfishness took its place, and the result has been devastating: death, disease, war, crime, pain—the list goes on.

God has called us to holiness. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15, 16). But without supernatural aid, men and women are powerless to resist the evil desires and motives of the carnal heart.

Yet God will never ask us to do anything that we are incapable of doing without His help. He has not abandoned His rebellious creation, and He made complete and final provision for its restoration. The purpose of His plan of salvation is to restore within you and me the image of Christ, so that we might be called the sons of God. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

Many believe it is a sin to be tempted. This is not true. The Bible declares, "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, so it can't possibly be a sin to be tempted. Rather, it is a sin to give into temptation. Shakespeare wrote, "Tis one thing to be tempted, Another thing to fall." Christians must not allow the carnal nature to dictate what they do; they must allow the Spirit to direct their path and not the flesh.

If we truly want to follow Jesus, we can choose to resist those actions and thoughts that we know are contrary to His will. Thankfully, through Jesus, God has provided everything we need to successfully resist evil and be overcomers. So we might naturally ask ourselves, "Since I am a follower of Christ, what did Jesus do to resist temptation?" For one thing, He quoted the Bible. Knowledge of His Word makes for the first and best defense against temptation. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). Second, we need to pray! Even Jesus turned to prayer to resist temptation. "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38). I could easily expound on

just these two basic points, prayer and the Word, to develop an entire book about fighting temptation. But instead, I want to use these fundamental truths as a foundation to highlight 12 practical keys to resist and overcome temptation. I also want to give you some Bible passages that you might recite, as Jesus did, when you are tempted. I believe this basic biblical ammunition, along with regular and sincere devotions, will mark your path with more consistent victory.

Remember the Reward

"It's easier to endure the darkness when you believe in the approaching day."

I am certain that one reason people are so easily overcome by temptation is that they lose sight of their eternal perspective. If an angel appeared to you right now in all his brilliant glory and said, "Repent! Jesus is coming soon," would it be easier for you to resist temptation—at least for the rest of the day? Sure, because your faith would be strengthened that your reward was real and near.

Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Moses was in line to rule Egypt during the zenith of its power and wealth. That position of influence would be a terrible temptation for anyone. But Moses looked to God's eternal reward and was able to resist the devil's temporary earthly treasure.

Don't forget the glory God has in store for you. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). It is so much easier to resist temptation if you believe you are really saved. If you mistakenly think you can work your way into being saved, you will actually erode your ability to resist. But when you believe you are saved, it's a lot easier to behave like a son of God.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). It's easy to resist a jellybean when you know you are on your way to a feast!

Believe in the Badness of Sin

You also must remember how bad sin is—with or without a reward. Paul says "That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Romans 7:13). You need to truly know that sin is very ghastly, and if you need a reminder, go back about 2,000 years ago to Calvary and see what sin did to Jesus. As Christians, we can't embrace sin because it is filthy, ugly, and deadly. Sin caused the death of our beloved Jesus.

The Bible says, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1 NKJV). We need go beyond the basic emotion of loving God. Like Job, a part of loving God is hating evil. God wants us to hate sin because He hates it. "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104).

Don't be deceived when the devil tries to portray sin as something desirable and attractive. He's a genius at making something filthy and crooked look clean and harmless. But don't be misled, because that pretty picture will end up

killing you. You need to come to the place where you love God so much that you would rather die than deliberately sin and grieve Him.

"Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay."

Don't Love Money

I could write out a long list of individual temptations, but I've chosen to include money specifically because next to pride, it's the big one. But the money I'm writing about isn't so much about dollar bills as it is about the trap of materialism and power. I believe Christians should work hard, earning and saving and giving as much as they can. Yet there is a constant danger that money could become our god.

"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" (1 Timothy 6:9 NKJV). I've seen people make such foolish choices, like gambling away their savings, because they want to get rich quick. They keep yanking the slot-machine lever because the devil tells them that maybe if they drop in just one more quarter, they'll hit it big. Not to mention that they're throwing money away when it could be used for saving souls.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Serving God and your desire for money is impossible. Money is a power, and not all power is bad. Money can be a power to do good or evil—a double-edge sword. We pray in our churches that the Lord will bless our needs financially, but we don't want to become slaves to loving money. If your heart is with your money, it can't be with God. God has asked us to be prepared to leave our full nets, tax booth, and houses filled with possessions without looking back. "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

Get Ready to Flee

Few speed records are broken when people run from temptation. Generally, they crawl away from temptation hoping it catches up with them. Sometimes temptation comes through a door we deliberately leave open. Suppose that you accidentally spilled kerosene all over your clothes and somebody nearby lit a match. Where would you go? As far away as you could and as fast as possible! That should be the attitude of a Christian toward temptation. Paul said, "Flee fornication" and "flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14). So flee from sin, and don't leave a forwarding address.

Don't miss this: When you run from temptation, you head toward God. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:7). When you know something is sinful, don't engage or banter with the devil, because he is the master of rationalization—that's how Eve fell!

It breaks my heart when Christians try to justify their sins. There is no limit to the arguments with which the devil can supply you. As soon as you know something is wrong, flee! The bravest man runs from temptation; the fool flirts with it.

You also don't want to wait until you get so old that all those desires of youth fade away and you deceive yourself into thinking you have gained the victory. "And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home" (Ecclesiastes 12:5 NKJV). Your heart may still be corrupt. Flee now, actively. You must commit yourself to God while you can still experience His

renovating grace in your life. Jesus' power is sufficient even for our hot-blooded youth. Remember when Joseph was tempted, he fled from Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:12).

John Dryden said, "Better to shun the bait than struggle in the snare."

Don't Follow the Crowd

A common reason Christians easily fall into temptation is the reasoning, "Everybody's doing it, so it must be okay." That's the devil's favorite "lemming logic." It's also why Peter denied Jesus. Just a few hours before betraying Jesus, Peter vowed, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matthew 26:35 NKJV). And when Peter made that statement surrounded by his friends, he was very sincere. But when Jesus was taken into the judgment hall, it was no longer popular to be with Christ. Peter gathered with Christ's mockers around a campfire, and the longer he stayed, the easier it was to act and talk like Christ's enemies.

By letting the crowd measure our values, we become like the crowd. And the Bible says the crowd is usually wrong. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7:13). Christians have to think for themselves. They must resist peer pressure—they have to be different. If a billion people believe a lie, it's still a lie.

In the end-times, there's going to be two very religious groups—one with the mark of the beast, the other with the seal of God. The former group will be the larger. Just because a large group of people is being religious, it does not mean it's God's group. Generally, the Bible's great men and women are the ones standing for right when everyone else is bowing down.

Also keep in mind another reason to not follow the crowd is because the crowd is watching. While you don't want to follow the crowd, you should live a life the crowd can look at. People are more impressed, and many have been converted, when they have seen Christians maintain their faith under pressure. One weak compromising act might spoil an entire lifetime of witness.

Plan to Stay Busy

Hanging behind the check-out register in a Cincinnati candle shop is a large sign that reads: "There is a very good reason for this sign being here and you standing in front of it reading it. It is here to keep you busy. We realize how annoying it can be just standing around doing nothing, trying to find someone to help you. So, we have this sign here for you to read, and hope that by the time you finish reading it one of our salespeople will have found you."

A little later it adds, "P.S. If not, please read this sign again."

Most people hate to be idle because God created us for activity. You've heard the expression, "Idleness is the devil's workshop." That's not a direct Bible quote, but Ezekiel 16:49, 50 comes close. "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters ... therefore I took them away as I saw good."

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah wasn't simply perversion and sexual immorality. The valley of Sodom was lush with vegetation and abundant with food. Life was easy for her inhabitants. Lot moved there because it offered him a life of

leisure. But when a person doesn't have anything to do, chances are the devil will help the carnal heart to concoct something evil. "Idleness is the parent of all vice."

Sin begins in the human mind, which is designed to concentrate mainly on one thing at a time. If we stay busy, especially focused on doing something good like witnessing or helping the poor, we don't have time to think about evil. E. G. White said, "Strength to resist evil is best gained through aggressive service." One of the ways to stay out of trouble is to be aggressively involved in serving Jesus. After the fall, when God told Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," it was intended to be a blessing for man to stay busy and out of trouble (Genesis 3:19). But an idle person tempts the devil to tempt him.

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15,16 NKJV). An Italian Proverb adds, "He that labors is tempted by one devil; he that is idle, by a thousand."

Have a Plan!

We often stumble into sin because when we see temptation coming, we just wait like a deer caught in the headlights to see what might happen when it arrives. But it's better to be prepared in advance. Proverbs 22:3 advises, "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (NKJV). A wise man surveys the road for potential trouble. If he spots a band of robbers, he thinks, "I'd better hide or change routes because I don't want to be robbed!" But the fool says, "Wow. I think there are bandits down the road. I wonder what's going to happen when they get here."

Christians will often do that with temptation. We say, "I wonder if I'll be tempted if I watch this program, read this magazine, or drink this stuff." I think it was Ben Franklin who said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." And Jesus said, "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). If you have an area of temptation you know will drag you down, take whatever advance measures of prevention you can, no matter how desperate, to keep from being overcome.

If you are trying to quit smoking, then avoid friends who smoke or places where you are more prone to be tempted. In the very least, plot a way of escape. If your temptation is overeating, make an advance decision to place an appropriate amount of food on your plate and plan to stop when it's gone. Millions nibble their way into sin because they don't think ahead. This leads me to the next point very well.

Know Thyself

Alex was trying to save all the pennies he could to buy a new baseball bat, but he had a real struggle. One night as he said his prayers, he fervently requested, "O Lord, please help me save my money for a baseball bat. And, God, don't let the ice cream man come down this street!"

A Spanish proverb instructs, "Be not a baker if your head be of butter."

When someone joins Alcoholics Anonymous, he or she is first supposed to admit to being an alcoholic. This admission can represent a tremendous breakthrough, because the person recognizes their weakness. Likewise, it's one of the first steps in becoming a Christian, to admit that we are a "sin-a-holic."

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The Bible says that we must not trust in our own strength. We must be very cautious when we begin to think we have a handle on a certain temptation and say, "It won't bother me anymore. I'm strong enough. I've got the victory!" That's when we are especially in a position to fall. Some Christians are even proud of the areas they have overcome, but they're only setting themselves up for the devil to knock them down. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus warned Peter: "This night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times" (Mark 14:30). But Peter boasted, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Mark 14:31). Jesus was warning Peter that he didn't really know how weak he really was.

Even when you're helping somebody else overcome weakness, you need to pray with him or her, but also recognize that you're in danger of making the same mistake. When a rescuer is pulling a person from rushing water, they have to be careful that they don't get pulled in too. So we must always be vigilant to recognize our weakness. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Watch out for temptation—the more you see of it the better it looks!

Overcome Evil with Good

We sometimes leave ourselves wide open to compromise when we fail to fill the vacuum left by forsaken bad habits. I have known people to gain victory over one addiction only to replace it with another because they did not find a positive substitute to fill the vacancy.

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Luke 11:24-26).

If you are struggling with an eating disorder or food addiction, you can't simply give up eating. The secret is to learn to "eat what is good" (Isaiah 55:2 NKJV). "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). If you have a problem nibbling chocolate through the day, buy some grapes or almonds. Have you even thrown away those cigarettes? Get a box of toothpicks or some sunflower seeds (but not chocolates).

If someone has insulted or cruelly used you, do not retaliate with evil but kindness. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink" (Romans 12:20 NKJV). Overcome evil with good. When a hawk is attacked by kingbirds, it does not make a counterattack, but soars higher and higher in ever widening circles until the tormentors leave it alone.

Care for Your Health

Temptation often comes not at our strongest moments, but during our weakest. When we are at the limits of our strength, patience, love, and health, we are tempted to be un-Christian. Beware; Jesus' temptation began after 40 days of fasting. He was tired and hungry. When Peter denied Jesus, he was also very tired.

Our ability to resist basic temptations might be greatly influenced by everything from regular exercise, or lack of, to body hormones. Often when we are sick or when our reserves are drained, we react in negative ways. Most marital arguments occur at the end of the day when one or both spouses are tired and hungry. Get enough sleep and eat good food at regular times. One of my favorite authors also advises, "By the indulgence of perverted appetite, man loses his power to resist temptation." Excessive sweets can give you a temporary rush only to be followed by feelings of depression and irritability.

You may not always be able to avoid fatigue or hunger, but if a soldier is passing through a minefield, he is much more careful where he steps. Avoid sensitive discussions or demanding tasks during these volatile times. Jesus said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). But that does not mean we should not try to do everything in our power to improve our health and as a result improve our moral resolve. A good night's rest, a little exercise, and nutritious breakfast can make you feel like you're ready to take on Goliath.

Recognize Your Escape

When boarding a plane, I make a mental note of emergency exit locations. I'm not paranoid, just prudent. For me, the very best means for overcoming temptation is recognizing that God has provided a way of escape for every one of us. Remember this passage: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Now that's some very good news. We don't have to rely on our shaky faith; we can rely on God because He is faithful!

Now when you are tempted, you can say, "God is measuring what He allows the devil to bring against me, and I'm able to handle it with His grace." You never have to say, "I can't bear to resist the devil any longer." By saying that, you'd be calling God a liar!

The Egyptians pursued the children of Israel from behind, and as they fled they also found that mountains were on both sides and river lay in front of them. It seemed like a very hopeless situation. But God had promised that He would be faithful, and He provided a way of escape. The Bible is full of stories like these that seemed hopeless, but God was faithful. And He'll use even dramatic rescue attempts to help you. When it looked like there was no food to feed the crowd following Jesus, God was faithful to bring food even out of heaven for the followers.

So every time you think, "I don't see any way out," remember these stories and make up your mind to trust God and watch for His way of escape. Even with the most devilish temptation at your doorstep, say, "I'm going to trust God. I'm going to do the right thing." God will make an escape for you.

Surviving a Fall

In 1944 over Germany, Flight Sergeant Alkemade jumped from his blazing bomber and fell headlong 18,000 feet. He survived without a scratch because his fall was broken by snow covered fir trees on a slope.

I've saved for last what I believe to be the most important key to overcoming temptation. You already know that Jesus is able to keep you from falling (Jude 1:24). But if you do fall, don't stay down.

If you are in Christ, you have the greatest power to resist wrong. To abide in Him is to abide in His Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Noah, Enoch, and Abraham walked with God. And you can do the same today by getting on your knees and petition for strength. God will send every angel in heaven to save you from sin, rather than let a trusting child fall when pleading for His help. But we must choose to follow Jesus, rather than the lies of the devil. God has made us free moral agents, and the devil cannot make us sin.

By God's grace, you and I can resist every temptation through His Spirit. But remember that if you do fall, don't give up. Many people who fall down, stay down. They say, "Oh well. I'm lost now; I may as well surrender to every other temptation." God can help you recover lost territory, and He will save you from future temptations. You might need to spend three days sorrowing and searching just like Joseph and Mary when they lost Jesus, but He will be waiting for you in His Father's house.

The devil may dishearten you with his wicked whisperings saying, "I know you! I tempted you, and you did it! You're no good. You call yourself a Christian, but you're just a hypocrite. In fact, you aren't even saved!" But I believe the Christian life is progressive. The Bible promises, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). If you sin, and we all do, don't give up. If the devil tricks you, and you fall down, don't stay down. Don't let your past failures be an excuse for future compromise. God can help you overcome everything. You just take it one day and one step at a time.

Steps in One

Summarizing all these steps is actually very easy. The most precious way to overcome any temptation has to be because you love God. You know that sin hurts God, and when tempted you need to say out loud, "I can't do that because I love God."

Erwin W. Lutzer said, "Our response to temptation is an accurate barometer of our love for God." The more you love Jesus, the less the attractions of the devil will hold sway over you. Remember how much Jesus loves you by remembering the cross when you are tempted, and then return that love by resisting the evil before you.

We're all tempted, but the Lord has promised that we can be overcomers through the "exceeding great and precious promises" found in the Scriptures. Jesus will teach us how to overcome. The devil could not make Jesus sin, nor can he make us. Give great thanks to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). Ask Him for overcoming power, and joyfully dive into the pages of His Word.