

# Following Christ: Temptations



## Slice F3

### Temptations

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## 1 Memory Verse

### 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

## 2 What is Sin?

Before receiving Jesus as Lord, our moral decisions are governed by law and our conscience. While the law is established by governmental powers, our conscience is governed by our worldview and our self-esteem. On becoming a believer and stepping forward in your new relationship with Jesus, you become aware of the sin in the world around you and of the moral choices you have made in your previous secular life. How does a new believer handle possessing a sinful nature and at the same time desiring a relationship with a holy god? First, let us define sin.

They say that the love of money is the root of all evil, because of the effect covetousness and greed have on a person, but pride is the main cause of sin. Genesis 3 describes the fall of mankind, which occurred over three stages:

- Lust of the eyes.
- Lust of the flesh.
- Pride of life.

Each of these stages is related to pride. Just as Satan desired to impose his will over the will of God, and to take God's place, our sin is that we desire to impose our will in rebellion with God's will for our lives. We all have a nature that seeks to benefit ourselves before others. God, however, sees us as all being equal.

Our inability to live sinless lives is the reason Jesus had to come and die for us and take all our sins upon the cross, past, present, and future. No one is without fault:

### Romans 3:23 (ESV)

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Sin is then best defined as our rebellion, which is rooted in pride, against the divine laws established by God for the good of mankind. God's divine law is the Ten Commandments that He gave to Moses (Exodus 20:2-17 and Deut 5:6-21), but ultimately, they can be brought down to the two commandments Jesus gave us. Jesus said that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light, and this statement is borne out in the fact that He summed the

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Ten Commandments up into just two. These are: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27). So, sin is placing self ahead of others and God.



## 3 Satan our Accuser

The Hebrew term 'satan' is a generic noun meaning 'accuser' or 'adversary.' The fact that we have a fallen nature is not a believer's only problem concerning sin in our lives. We have an adversary who continually seeks to tempt us into sin and rebellion. Just as hell is a real place, the existence of Satan and his fallen angels is also real. Jesus continually confronted the works of Satan in the gospels, casting out demons and freeing those trapped by their sins.

Satan seeks to interfere with your relationship with God through temptations, hoping that he can not only neutralise you as a servant of God, but also bring God's judgment upon you. Jesus was tested three times by Satan, who tried to tempt Jesus into sinning and effectively end Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4). Each test matched the same three temptations placed before Adam and Eve:

- Lust of the eyes - worship Satan and receive all the kingdoms of the world.
- Lust of the flesh - turn stones into bread.
- Pride of life - throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple.

Jesus resisted Satan and He can also help us resist the temptations of the enemy.

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Because God is holy and He demands that His people also be holy (1 Peter 1:14–15), He created us to worship, love, and obey Him. We are covered by the blood of Jesus, so there is no sin judgment for us when we enter heaven, only a judgment of service. Here each believer is rewarded for self-sacrifice in fulfilling God's will for their lives. However, believers are held accountable for our actions on earth, God does not tolerate spoilt children. Each believer is taken through a process of sanctification, where God, over time, moulds them into the image of His Son.

## 4 The Holy Spirit's Power is Greater

Even though we have an adversary who is continuing to look for opportunities to separate us from a relationship with God, God has not left us defenceless. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we are restored in relationship with God and our spirit, which was dead is now made alive (Titus 3:5) and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord would come and go from the saints, empowering them for service but not necessarily remaining with them (Judges 15:14; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Psalm 51:11; Ezekiel 11:5). That is, however, no longer the case now. Jesus said:

### **John 3:6–7 (NIV)**

**6** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. **7** You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

Believers are spiritually alive, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and is continually working to bring us closer to God, making His Word alive and guiding us.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)**

**17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

### **1 John 3:9 (NIV)**

**9** No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we receive the spiritual gifts that He provides (God-given abilities for service) the believer, enabling us to serve the Lord effectively for His glory (1 Corinthians 12:11). Satan understands the power of these gifts and attempts to quell them by tempting the believer to sin.

Learning to overcome the temptations of the world is a walk a believer does not take alone. Through the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, the believer can confront sin and defeat it.

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## 5 What can we do to Stop Sinning?

Unfortunately, many believers come to know the Lord as adults and have, over time, learned worldly habits that cause them to sin. In the book of Job, we read that God places a hedge (a stronghold) of protection around us when we are born, and Satan cannot randomly interfere with our lives (Job 10:1). However, through the bad choices we make with our lives, we open gaps in the hedge through which Satan is then legally able to strike.

This hedge of protection even applied to Jerusalem and the nation of Judah, (Ezekiel 22:30) and helps us understand the consequences of rebellious choices. 'And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.'

So, because of the worldly, sinful choices that a person makes, when they come to know the Lord, they have gaps in their hedge that need to be closed. It is, therefore, important for a believer to have strategies to know how to close the gaps in their protective hedge and how to prevent them from being opened again.

### **5.1 Strategy 1 - Seal the Gap**

Recognising sinful behaviour and putting a stop to it is extremely important for the new believer. Some sins are difficult to overcome as they provided worldly pleasure and have become habits. In situations like this, the person needs to repair the gap from the inside, repenting of the sin and ending the behaviour that is causing the habit. Then that believer needs to ask people to stand in the gap for them in prayer. In doing so, these believers block Satan's entry into the person's life and enable the individual to deal with their habit without continual attacks.

An important exercise for new believers is to identify the sins of their past life that can remain an open door for Satan, enabling him to effectively stunt their spiritual growth. Once this is done, they must start putting strategies in place to end the sin. Different sins need different approaches and methods so for particularly addictive sins, counselling by an elder may be needed. Then the believer must approach mature believers who can be trusted to daily stand in the gap for them while they repair their hedge. Any person who agrees to stand in the gap for another believer must understand that it is not a once-off prayer, but rather a long-term commitment.

### **5.2 Strategy 2 - Trust in God**

Each person is called by God, He has a plan and purpose for our lives. He is there to help and guide you on the path He has set out for your life, He will never leave you, He is your strength and your shield:

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## **Psalm 28:7 (ESV)**

**7** The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

Believers become part of the family of God; we are His children and can trust in the protection of a loving Father:

## **1 John 4:4 (NIV)**

**4** You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

The Bible clearly indicates that Satan is a defeated foe and that we have victory in Jesus. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross and now has all authority (Matthew 28:18), which means that Satan has none. We can, therefore, trust in Jesus to help us no, matter what the circumstance.

When you pray, pray against Satan, demons and evil, using the authority we have in the powerful name of Jesus (Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:25–26; Luke 4:18; 1 Cor. 2:6–9).

## **5.3 Strategy 3 - Humility**

God hates pride; this is one of the most repeated facts in Scripture. Daniel, one of the wisest men of the Old Covenant, wrote two chapters in his book that warn of the dangers of pride (Dan 4 & 5). To overcome sin in our lives, we must start on a foundation of humility. When we approach the throne of grace, we do so recognising that nothing we did earned us that right. So, for us to believe that we can stand against sin in our own strength is to court failure. Each believer needs to repeat the words given to us by the Lord Jesus 'lead (me), not into temptation, but deliver (me) from the evil one' (Matthew 6:13). It is God who does the deliverance, not the believer.

## **5.4 Strategy 4 - Resist**

There are people with amazing testimonies of how they were delivered on the spot from an addiction. These testimonies are a wonderful example of the grace of God but in most cases, God wants us to work through our temptations to build character and become mature Christians. Deliverance is a gift of grace, but maturity through trial is also a gift of grace that, in the long run, is more valuable. Disciplining our will is an important part of the victory over sin. Learning to say 'No' to temptation because you value your relationship with God, is an extremely important lesson to learn.

## **James 4:7 (ESV)**

**7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

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Whatever you do, do not think that you will be able to control your sin and not allow it to quench your spiritual life. That is a surefire way of starting on a downward slide into a rebellious life. Keep fighting, keep resisting, you will win in the end.

## **5.5 Strategy 5 - Flee**

To stress that a believer must stand firm and resist temptation and then, in the next breath, advise them to flee temptation seems contradictory. But scripture firmly advises believers to:

### **1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV)**

**18** Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

### **2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV)**

**22** Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The explanation is that by avoiding temptation, you negate the need to resist temptation. There are triggers to temptation; some of which could be:

- Visual cues - such as watching movies with adult content that inflame lust.
- Proximity - going to a restaurant at a casino for a gambling addict.
- Situational - going to parties where drugs are available for an addict.
- Aroma cues - the aroma of food from a restaurant, bakery or café for the glutton.
- Acquaintances - avoid old acquaintances who involved you in sinful activities.

Each believer must identify their weaknesses and the 'triggers' that start the domino process to sin, then ensure that they avoid those 'triggers.' If you believe you have no weakness, then your main weakness is pride.

## **5.6 Strategy 6 - God's Word**

A believer stands on God's word, not on their feelings and emotions. There is no place in a Christian walk for feeling sorry for yourself and throwing pity parties. Believers are children of the Most High God, so we must act like it. Believers must have confidence that God is in control of their lives so whatever happens to them must, therefore, be part of God's plan for them.

One of Satan's tactics is to plant doubt in our minds, to make us question what God is doing in our lives. To counter these attacks, Christians need to be able to declare scripture over their lives, as a statement of their confidence in God. An example would be:

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## **Proverbs 3:5–6 (ESV)**

**5** Trust (I will) in the LORD with all your (my) heart, and do not lean on your (my) own understanding.

**6** In all your (my) ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your (my) paths.

Studying God’s word is an important part of dealing with sin in our lives. The narratives give examples of the cost of sin in people’s lives and also examples of Godly men and women whose behaviour we should emulate. God’s word gives detailed instructions of what is right and what is wrong and assures us of God’s support in doing right. Jesus said:

## **John 8:31–32 (ESV)**

**31** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Remember that when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He quoted scripture, each time saying, ‘It is written...’ (Luke 4:1-13). The importance of reading your Bible and memorising scripture cannot be overemphasised.

## **Psalms 119:11 (ESV)**

**11** I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

## **5.7 Strategy 7 - Prayer**

The temptation in the wilderness was not the only temptation Jesus faced. When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper, He was facing arrest, severe persecution, and death. Just over the Mount of Olives was the town of Bethany, a mere two kilometres away. Jesus, if He had wanted to, could have found safety there in the home of Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus dealt with this temptation through prayer: ‘Not my will, but Thine be done.’ Jesus knew that the only way He could deal with the hardships facing Him was through humble submission to His heavenly Father, through the power of the indwelling Spirit. Jesus is the ultimate example to us all.

The apostle Matthew immediately draws a stark contrast between Jesus and the disciples. While Jesus has been in deep and earnest prayer, the disciples are asleep. The advice Jesus gave the disciples was:

## **Matthew 26:41 (ESV)**

**41** Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus knew well what faced the disciples in the future and the steep learning curve that faced them. So, He gave them the advice that would aid them to cope in a fallen world, and that was to watch and pray continuously.



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The key to prayer during temptation is where our focus is. When faced with temptation, our minds dwell on the temptation, when we turn to God in prayer then God has our focus and attention, weakening the temptation.

## **5.8 Strategy 8 - Fear God**

The fear of God in Scripture is best defined as true reverence for a holy, mighty God. God loves us deeply and is greatly concerned about our well-being. However, He is also the Lord of our lives and demands to be treated as such. With all that Job suffered through His trial and testing, He received no explanation from God for it, except that it was part of God's plan and purpose for his life. The valuable lesson Job learned was submitting to the supreme authority of God.

When a believer can develop a true reverence for God, their love for Him trumps any desire to sin.

## **6 What if you do Fall into Temptation?**

Every believer is human and fallible, God understands that and continually works in our lives to strengthen and mature us, He is the potter, and we are the clay. When a believer sins, God does not give up on them, God loves each believer despite their failings and is patient with all His children supporting and guiding them. The Apostle John wrote:

### **1 John 2:1–2 (NIV)**

**1** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2** He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The death of Jesus on the cross atoned for all believer's sins, past, present and future. We have the confidence that, despite our failures and inadequacies, God is faithful to forgive us our trespasses.

## **7 Repentance, Confession, and Forgiveness**

There are three steps a believer must take when seeking forgiveness from God and seeking to restore their relationship with Him:

**Repentance:** A recognition of wrongdoing, with remorse and a desire to correct the errant behaviour. The act of repentance requires humility.

**Confession:** True repentance requires an admission of guilt and involves telling God of the nature of the sin committed. Confession is an outright admission of guilt, there are no excuses or blame-sharing.

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## **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**

**9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will **forgive** us our sins and **purify** us from all unrighteousness.

The act of confession brings the concealed sin into the light of day, where God can remove it and purify it.

## **1 John 1:7 (NIV)**

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

**Receiving Forgiveness:** When a believer is truly sorry, repents of their sins, and confesses them before God, He is faithful to forgive them:

## **1 John 1:7 (NIV)**

**7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Note that there are two parts to forgiveness, the act by God of removing the blame and declaring the person innocent and cleansing the believer who is washed pure by the blood of Jesus. When God looks down on us, He sees us through the lens that is the blood of Jesus and perceives us to be dressed in illuminated white, unstained by sin.

## **8 Temptation is not Sin**

Believers live in a fallen world, so sinful thoughts will continually enter a believer's mind, but that is not sinning; dwelling on, and nurturing of the sinful thought is. A bald man walked into an enclosure at a bird sanctuary, and much to the amusement of those with him, the birds kept landing on his head. The man could not help that, but he could stop the birds from building a nest on his head.

A believer should remember that Jesus was confronted by temptation, but that does not mean that he sinned. He recognised the temptations for what they were - sin - and immediately rejected them.

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## 9 What about the Sins of the fathers?



A very important and much-neglected aspect regarding sin in our lives is the generational curse referred to as 'sins of the fathers.' God repeatedly warns of accountability for sin extending to the third and fourth generations; examples are:

### **Exodus 20:5 (ESV)**

**5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

### **Numbers 14:18 (ESV)**

**18** 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

### **Deuteronomy 5:9–10 (ESV)**

**9** You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, **10** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

### **Jeremiah 32:17–18 (ESV)**

**17** 'Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. **18** You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts,

Whenever a scripture is repeated three times or more in the Bible, it must be considered doctrine. God is warning of the reality of generational sin that because of the rebellion of a father, a child will be born with a hole already in their hedge of protection. A hole through which Satan can legally interfere with that child's life. An example would be a

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man who has continually delved into the occult throughout his life and later finds out his five-year-old daughter is clairvoyant as she is displaying mediumistic abilities. There is no escaping it, sin has consequences, and the severity of sin in our lives is seen in the intergenerational consequences.

Some may see this as a severe judgment, with children being held accountable for past generations' sins. The Lord is warning of the severity of sin, and the accountability is balanced by the forgiveness God provides. While the judgment for the sin committed by the father extends to the third and fourth generation, God's mercy and grace extend to a thousand generations (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 7:9).

## 10 Breaking Generational Curses

The process is the same as that covered earlier - repentance and confession result in forgiveness. When a believer enters the covenant of grace, we attain unmerited favour, Jesus bore **all** our sins, including the generational sins, when He died for us on the cross. The prayer that is prayed to break generational sin recognises the sins of the rebellion of the past generation and renounces them, laying them at the feet of Jesus and receiving God's forgiveness. There is a strong possibility that a person may not know of the sins committed by their ancestors - a person does not always know what their ancestors had been up to. In this case a general prayer may be said asking the Lord, who knows all things, to forgive the generational sins and to break the link, thus freeing the believer. This prayer of repentance should be followed by a prayer that asks the Lord to reveal any sin that needs specific attention. For example, links to a secret society, such as Freemasonry, that involves the occult and death oaths.

A covering prayer may be said for the whole family, where the expectation is that there will be group repentance and an end to the generational curses within the family.

## 11 It is a Long Journey on a Narrow Path

Anyone who tells you that religion is a crutch for the weak has not read the Bible and knows next to nothing about true Christianity. Jesus said:

### **John 16:33 (ESV)**

**33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

A believer must develop an eternal mindset, this life determines our life in eternity. The more we seek to serve God now, the greater our eternal rewards will be. Jesus pointed out that a life spent on worldly gain, earns treasures that are corruptible and will quickly fade away, but treasures in heaven will never pass away or suffer corrosion. Why expend great effort building barns to store your wealth in when tomorrow you will die? A life spent in service to God will result in great rewards in eternity.

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## 12 Practically

- Daily, as part of your morning prayer, confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, if your conscience is convicting you. Receive your forgiveness and cleansing from all unrighteousness and walk free in Christ.
- Remember that temptation is from the enemy and is designed to break your relationship with God, so break bad habits and resist temptation.
- Remember that God loves you and that when you repent and confess your sins, He is faithful to forgive you.
- Pray a prayer with a prayer partner or elder to break generational sin (curses) over your life. In doing so, recognise any of the rebellion, if you can, of your past generations and renounce them, laying them at the feet of Jesus.
- Commit your service into the hands of the Lord and ask for His protection over your life.

## 13 Proclamation

'I recognise that through the redemptive work of Jesus, I am now able to say, 'I am the righteousness of God'. So, I will not yield to the temptations of the enemy. I will stand firm on the Rock that is my Saviour and commit to reflecting His Light to the world.'

## 14 Prayer

'Lord Jesus, thank you for the great salvation you provided for me. I ask forgiveness for my weakness and failings; I seek the strength that is provided by the Holy Spirit to resist the enemy. May I daily put on the armour of God, with the shield of faith before me, that will deflect the arrows fired at me by the enemy. Reveal to me those areas of my life that are a barrier to my relationship with You and may my walk with You be a honouring loving sacrifice'.