

## LESSON 11

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# How to Deal with Temptation

In both the Old and New Testaments, we read that the temptation to sin will always be nearby. Therefore, the apostle Paul exhorts in 1 Corinthians 16:13, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.” Later in the New Testament, the apostle Peter writes, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The devil has schemes to outwit and swindle us out of God’s blessings (Jeremiah 29:11).

The good news is that as Christians we are not at the devil’s mercy. God wants us to be aware of the enemy’s tactics (see 2 Corinthians 2:11). Therefore, God has provided us with His armor. Paul instructs, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11). The armor is fully described as “the belt of truth,” the “breastplate of righteousness,” “the gospel of peace” for our feet, “the shield of faith,” “the helmet of salvation,” the “sword of the Spirit” which is the Word of God, and prayer (Ephesians 6:14–18).

## LESSON OUTLINE

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- What is Temptation?
- Common Areas of Temptation
- The Temptation of Jesus
- How to Resist Temptation
- The Law of Sowing and Reaping

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

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When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Define temptation.*
- 2: *Identify common areas of temptation.*
- 3: *Recount Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.*
- 4: *Explain how to resist temptation.*
- 5: *Discuss the law of sowing and reaping.*

### What is Temptation?

#### **Objective 1:**

*Define temptation.*

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Temptation can be described generally as an enticement to do wrong, to enjoy a forbidden pleasure, to fulfill a desire that is contrary to God's will, even to return to the sins that enslaved us prior to meeting Christ. Before we were born again, it was natural for us to yield to temptation, for we were sinners. Paul writes that we were spiritually dead.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in

those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1–5)

Being a Christian does not exempt us from temptation. Often we go through seasons of tremendous growth in which we gain wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual strength. But beware that temptation still lurks close by. If we are not careful, it can pull us in. While temptation can come at any time, we are more susceptible to it when we are tired, alone, or going through conflict. Temptation can rear its ugly head even while we are involved in ministry. Because we are in a constant battle, Paul warns, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Facing temptation is not the same as falling into sin. Temptation is the experience we have prior to actually engaging in sin. God does not hold us accountable for facing temptation unless we willingly place ourselves in situations that can compromise our integrity. While we certainly can avoid some temptation, we cannot evade all of it. Even our Lord and Savior Jesus faced it head-on when He lived on earth. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

You, like all Christians throughout the ages, will have to make important choices and put God first in all areas of your life. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24).

## Common Areas of Temptation

### *Objective 2:*

*Identify common areas of temptation.*

The Bible tells us that there are three main areas of temptation: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. The apostle John writes, “For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16 NKJV). Let us talk about these three areas of temptation.

### Lust of the Flesh

In this case, the flesh refers to the physical body and its appetites. It is our flesh that lets us know we are hungry, thirsty, or tired. Our flesh is also affected by our sinful nature and may crave gratification in areas that are off-limits to Christians. These areas include immoral sexual pleasure, pornography, drunkenness, gluttony, wild parties, drugs, and so on.

Not even the apostle Paul, a man of unflinching integrity and purity, had confidence in his own flesh. He wrote in Romans 7:18, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” Jesus warned us that our flesh would be weak when it comes to temptations. Matthew 26:41 records, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

You will find at times that there is a battle between the desires of your flesh and your spirit's desire to please God. Your spirit is that unseen part of you that is in relationship with God. Your body's wants need to submit to your spirit just as your spirit must submit to the control of God's Holy Spirit.

In Galatians chapter five, Paul provides two lists—“the acts of the sinful nature” and “the fruit of the Spirit.” There is nothing in the acts of the sinful nature that we should want, for these things will alienate us from the

presence of God. Such behaviors are “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies” (Galatians 5:19–21).

Now the honorable behaviors of the fruit of the Spirit are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). Our goal should always be to live by the Spirit.

### Lust of the eyes

The lust of the eyes refers to our insatiable desire to acquire things. Perhaps you too feel that urge. Giving in to the lust of the eyes can lead to compulsive buying, stealing, debt, unscrupulous methods of earning money, and other serious problems. Moreover, having it all never really satisfies. Only God can make a person fulfilled.

Let us consider a couple of biblical examples of those who gave in to the lust of the eyes. First is the account of Eve taking the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. God had given so much to Adam and Eve but had withheld one thing from them—the fruit of one tree in the middle of the garden. It was a simple test, of course, to see if the first humans would honor and obey God. But one day after the devil convinced her that God was being unfair in withholding the fruit from her, Eve longed for and lusted after the fruit of the forbidden tree. She “saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye” (Genesis 3:6). Eve listened to the serpent and gave in to the lust of the eye. She ate of the fruit, gave to her husband who was with her, and he ate too (Genesis 3:1–19). Thus, that one act of disobedience opened the door to further acts of depravity. It forever changed the nature of humankind by creating a breach in the relationship between God and humanity.

Second, in the book of Joshua is the tragic story of Achan, who yielded to the lust of the eyes. In the conquest of Canaan, God had promised to go before His people, Israel, and give them great victory in dislodging and driving out the Canaanites, who were idolatrous

and corrupt. When Joshua and the armies of Israel went against the first city of Canaan, Jericho, God had warned them not to take any plunder. The city of Jericho was to be a memorial to the power of God. You may recall that God himself caused the famous walls to fall flat without any human weaponry (Joshua 6:20). The heaps of stones that had formerly been the impregnable walls of the city were to serve as a testimony to all who passed it that the God of Israel was great and mighty.

However, in the course of taking Jericho, an Israelite warrior named Achan plundered a silk robe, five pounds of silver, and more than a pound of gold and buried them in his tent. Because Achan gave in to the lust of his eyes and disobeyed God's sacred command to not take plunder, God withdrew His blessing from the Israelites when they next engaged the small town of Ai (Joshua 7). In this next battle, a number of Israelite soldiers lost their lives in combat, and Achan and his entire family perished.

Therefore, it is critical to beware of the lust of the eyes. God is not against your enjoying nice things, but consider whether the object of your desire is necessary, appropriate, wholesome, and pleasing to God. Also, consider whether it is the right time to acquire it.

### Pride of life

The pride of life is an arrogant assumption that we can accomplish things without the help of God or without obeying His commandments. In the ancient Greek world a few hundreds years before Christ, people believed the gods lived on Mount Olympus and were ruled by Zeus. The Greeks invented a complex, though terribly misguided, mythology about their gods, complete with family histories and amazing stories. It seems that their gods were not all good or all powerful; in fact, ancient Greek stories occasionally portray people who are able to outwit the gods. This was an attempt to demonstrate the humans' intelligence, ability, and sufficiency.

In contrast to the ancient Greeks, the Jews believed that man was created in the image of God and that God

was the ultimate authority. His ways and thoughts were higher than human ways and thoughts. He was able to perform mighty deeds that man could not, and He was eternal and infinite. Read through the Old Testament, and you will see how the ancient Hebrew prophets constantly pointed out these truths.

In our world today, many people arrogantly assume that they do not need God. They believe that they are capable of taking care of themselves. But Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Our enemy, the devil, stands as a prime example of the menace of pride. He was created to serve as a glorious angel near God’s throne. He apparently guarded the presence of God. Many scholars believe that Isaiah records Lucifer’s choice to place himself above God: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (14:13–14).

Lucifer fell into sin through pride and lost his place in heaven. His eventual fate in the lake of fire was sealed for eternity. Revelation 20:10 foretells, “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” Sadly, the same fate awaits all who succumb to the pride of life and do not repent. If we attempt to put ourselves above God, we fall into the same trap as Lucifer and the one third of the angelic beings that followed him.

## The Temptation of Jesus

### *Objective 3:*

*Recount Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness.*

As we pointed out earlier, the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way. This does not mean that He dealt with specific modern issues such as

internet pornography, X-rated movies, and credit card identity theft because such things did not exist at that time. However, Jesus, being fully human, dealt with the temptations common to all people. Therefore, He knows what we go through when tempted. Yet, He never succumbed to any temptation. He remained sinless.

Scripture offers numerous examples of those who were successful in overcoming temptation, but the preeminent illustration of resisting temptation is that of Jesus in the wilderness. This temptation occurred at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, just after He was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Satan himself came to tempt Jesus. Take a few minutes right now and read Matthew 4:1–11. In this passage, we see that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness for a forty-day fast. Afterward, the devil arrived and tempted Jesus in all three areas we discussed earlier—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life. In each area of temptation, Jesus overcame the devil by using the Word of God.

The first temptation Satan brings to Christ is to have Him turn stones into bread. Bear in mind that Jesus is famished after having gone so many days without eating. The idea of bread is probably very appealing to His flesh, but any request from Satan must be ignored. This temptation falls under the category of the lust of the flesh. In dealing with this temptation, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” Later, Jesus tells His disciples, “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’” (John 4:34).

In the next temptation, Satan dares Jesus to throw himself down from the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and let God's angels rescue Him from death. By performing this feat, Jesus could achieve immediate public attention and fame as the Messiah. The problem is that this act would be showy, dramatic, and

inappropriate. Satan perhaps hoped that Jesus would view it as a shortcut to popularity, avoiding the trials that would come His way over the next three years. But Jesus knew that it is best to follow the Father's plan and timetable. Thus, the Lord quotes Deuteronomy 6:16: "Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah." This temptation falls under the category of the pride of life, for it sought to make Jesus show off His power in a way not glorifying to God the Father.

The third and final temptation in the wilderness falls under the category of the lust of the eyes. The devil takes Jesus to a mountain and shows Him the splendor of the kingdoms of the world. Satan offers Jesus all that an ambitious person could want—riches, comfort, influence, and power. Satan knows that Jesus is destined to be the King of Kings and Ruler of the world—but only after great suffering. So he offers Jesus a shortcut to becoming the King. There is a catch, however. The devil wants Jesus to bow before him and worship him. Jesus instead rebukes the enemy by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13: "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name." In each of the three temptations, Jesus quotes from God's Word in the Old Testament and resists the enemy's onslaughts.

## How to Resist Temptation

### *Objective 4:*

*Explain how to resist temptation.*

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### Use the Word of God

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In the previous section, we learned that Jesus overcame each of Satan's temptations by using God's Word. This approach to dealing with temptation is critical for us, too. We have access to Scripture and can use it in our battles with temptation. The Scriptures contain divine commands, promises, truths, and principles that we can memorize and use in bringing our flesh into conformity with God's will. We can also

use Scripture if under demonic attack. The enemy will eventually flee as we diligently stand on God's Word.

Jesus could have easily dismissed the devil with a brief command, but He chose to deal with Satan by using a tactic available to us all—quoting Scripture. This is one of the reasons why it is wise to memorize portions of the Bible so that you have a ready defense in the day of trouble.

### Look for the way of escape

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote, "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). God will always provide a way of escape.

Modern fighter jets have a way of escape for a pilot who feels that it is too dangerous to remain inside the plane. The pilot sits in an ejection seat that, in an emergency, is propelled out of the aircraft by a small rocket motor. Once clear of the aircraft, the ejection seat deploys a parachute and descends safely to earth. Many thousands of pilots have been saved by using this way of escape. However, it should be noted that the ride is not comfortable! The pilot who ejects experiences tremendous strain as the G forces pull at his or her body. Still, this discomfort is better than a crash and burn scenario.

When facing temptation, always look for the way out. God's way of escape for you may be changing the subject in an ungodly conversation, leaving a room where people may be watching something improper on the television, hanging out with godly friends rather than with a group of people who are scheming to do wrong, canceling your subscription to cable, satellite TV or certain magazines, or simply saying "No!" when confronted by temptation. You always have a choice! Doing the right thing may not be comfortable; it may

even be temporarily unpleasant. However, this is better than crashing spiritually and morally.

### Flee temptation

There are times when we must face temptations head on, and there are other times when we need to remove ourselves physically from the enticement. Paul advises Timothy, “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” (2 Timothy 2:22). Think about what it means to flee. Animals flee from predators that desire to eat them. People flee from natural disasters and other types of peril. The one who flees does not worry about his or her reputation or prestige. He or she does not worry about being called a coward. Flight is a proper response to certain kinds of danger. Do not be embarrassed to flee from strong temptation.

In Genesis is the account of Joseph. His older brothers sell him into slavery, and he ends up serving Potiphar, a powerful official in Egypt. Joseph demonstrates integrity and diligence in all he does, so Potiphar promotes him to the highest position a servant could have. Joseph is managing Potiphar’s household. Things are going very well for Joseph when Potiphar’s unscrupulous wife attempts to seduce Joseph. But Joseph resists her advances.

Potiphar’s wife tries day after day to lure Joseph into bed with her, but he continually rejects her. Not one to give up easily, the woman attempts to ensnare Joseph when only she and he are at home. This time Joseph flees the scene and leaves the house. His behavior honors God though it infuriates Potiphar’s wife. In revenge, she falsely accuses Joseph of attempted rape, and Joseph is imprisoned. But God never forgot what Joseph did, and in due time, Joseph is released from prison and is promoted to the second highest position in all of Egypt (see Genesis 39–41).

Joseph's success demonstrates that you do not need to be ashamed of fleeing from temptation. So get used to the idea because you will probably have to flee temptation many times in your life.

### Keep your mind focused

The human mind is an amazing part of who and what we are. It is more than the physical organ we call our brain. The mind includes consciousness, memories, logical thought, and desires. Did you know you can train your mind just as you can train your body physically? Athletes learn to focus their training on the parts of their bodies coming under high demand. They work at building muscle memory and strength as they seek to increase endurance.

The mind can be taught to focus on things that please God. It takes diligent work to educate and coach the mind to focus on godly things, but the rewards are great. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." As you focus your thinking properly, your mind will undergo transformation and renewal. Many temptations that used to plague you will vanish.

### Pray

When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He gave them a model prayer (see Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4). In this prayer, Jesus includes a very important petition: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). This petition does not imply that God is the source of temptation. Instead, the request is for God to lead the one praying away from temptation. Praying to God when you face temptation gets His immediate attention. God really wants you to be victorious over anything that would harm you spiritually and lead you astray.

## Rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength

No one can force us to sin, nor can anyone force us to make right choices. We have free will. However, God has given us His Spirit to guide us into all truth. If we follow His leadership, we will avoid the snares of this world and of the enemy. If we have a desire to stay pure, the Spirit will also provide supernatural strength to help us resist temptation.

The apostle Paul warns, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). We are to be continually filled with and led by the Spirit. Essentially, in the same way that being drunk with wine leads to debauchery or wicked behavior, being filled with the Spirit leads to righteous living. Thus, through the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to deny our old nature. The closer we get to God, the more we will desire to obey Him and the more sensitive we may become to temptation.

## The Law of Sowing and Reaping

### *Objective 5:*

*Discuss the law of sowing and reaping.*

You may have heard of the spiritual law of sowing and reaping. It is very similar to the natural law of sowing and reaping. When farmers plant seeds, they do so with the expectation of enjoying the harvest or reaping. Furthermore, when they sow corn seed, they do not get tomatoes; they get corn. They reap what they sow!

In Galatians 6:7–8, Paul tells the Galatians, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Before you were a Christian, you sowed bad seed, yielding constantly to temptation. What were the results? You got into trouble; people turned against you; you experienced emptiness, guilt and sorrow; and you

were spiritually lost. Coming to Christ broke that cycle. God forgave your sins and gave you a new life. Now, you are able to sow good seed, thinking and doing those things that please God. The result or the reaping is joy, peace, good relationships, and eternal life.

It is imperative for you as a Christian to reflect on the law of sowing and reaping, especially when you are tempted. If you continue sowing bad seed, you will not avoid the inevitably troubling and painful consequences. Let me illustrate this by pointing out one of the great tragedies in Scripture, King David's sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11). Keep in mind that David was Israel's hero. Up to this point, he had led a virtuous life. He fought courageously in battle, he led the people in worship, and God's favor rested upon him.

The account begins with King David in Jerusalem, looking out over the city from the rooftop. It was night, so he could see into some homes where oil lamps were burning. It was spring, the time of year when ancient kings generally went off to war. In fact, the Israelite army was engaged in battle with the Ammonites. For some reason, David had stayed behind.

From his vantage point on top of the palace, David noticed a beautiful woman bathing, and he lusted after her. Now, David already had numerous wives and concubines, so he could have fled the rooftop to the comfort of one of his wives or members of his harem. Instead, David sought out this lovely female, and learned that she was a married woman named Bathsheba. He sent for her, engaged in sex with her, and dispatched her back to her house. But she became pregnant! David's sinful choice unleashed a series of events that ultimately led him to commit murder to cover up his deed.

Although David eventually repented of his sins and was forgiven, his sin had already unlocked the door for tragedies in his life. He had sown the sins of lust, adultery, and murder and reaped unimaginable sorrow. The Bible tells us the following:

- The baby born to Bathsheba died.

- One of David's sons, Amnon, followed the example of his father's immoral behavior, and he raped his half sister, Tamar. In retaliation, another of David's sons, Absalom, murdered the rapist. As a result, Absalom became estranged from and bitter toward his father.
- Later, Absalom attempted a coup in order to steal the kingdom from his father. This too ended in death, for Absalom was eventually caught and executed by Joab, David's military commander.

The lesson to be learned from this ugly series of tragedies is that we need to be victorious over temptation and avoid sin at all cost. We reap what we sow.

## Conclusion

We need to understand what temptation is and recognize the common areas where it will strike us. Jesus' use of the Word in resisting temptation provides a valuable example for all Christians. Since God has revealed in His Word numerous strategies for overcoming temptation, we must learn and use them.

## SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question and carefully circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- Temptation comes to*
  - only people who are weak.*
  - only people who do not go to church.*
  - all people.*
- God is*
  - the source of all temptation.*
  - just waiting for us to yield to temptation.*
  - never the source of temptation.*
- First Peter 5:8 identifies our enemy as*
  - the devil.*
  - those who do not like us.*
  - leaders of cults.*
- According to Scripture, the three main areas of temptation are*
  - alcohol, drugs, and tobacco*
  - lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life*
  - money, sex, and Internet.*
- The goal of temptation is to*
  - swindle us out of the blessings of God.*
  - show how weak we are.*
  - show how strong we are.*
- Jesus counteracted Satan's temptations by*
  - closing His eyes.*
  - running away.*
  - quoting and applying appropriate Scripture.*
- Yielding to the lust of the flesh is generally*
  - giving in to our sinful nature.*
  - being hungry.*
  - being tired.*
- A practical escape out of temptation and into godly living is to*
  - never leave your home.*
  - shift an ungodly conversation into a wholesome topic.*
  - yield to temptation.*

9. *True of Jesus' experiences on earth is that*
  - a) *Jesus was tempted at the beginning of His ministry.*
  - b) *Jesus yielded to the enemy's temptation.*
  - c) *Jesus was never tempted.*
  
10. *Yielding to temptation can lead to*
  - a) *our own fall from grace.*
  - b) *the destruction of our family.*
  - c) *all of the above*

## ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *c* (11.1)
2. *c* (11.4)
3. *a* (11.1)
4. *b* (11.2)
5. *a* (11.1)
6. *c* (11.3)
7. *a* (11.2)
8. *b* (11.4)
9. *a* (11.3)
10. *c* (11.5)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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