

Understanding Your Temptation!

Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, said three requisites go into the making of a true minister of the gospel. These three things also apply to any overcoming Christian: prayer, meditation - and temptation.

It was said that Luther could speak to people's consciences more quickly than any man of his day. His preaching was so piercing, he seemed to read directly into people's hearts and minds.

When someone once asked Luther the secret of his ministry, he replied that it was understanding and having victory over his temptations. Luther called temptation "the shop of experience" - and he believed his ability to probe so deeply into men's hearts was the result of having learned through his own temptations.

It is true - the holiest of God's people understand what it's like to endure hideous, overwhelming temptations. In fact, probably a majority reading this message are in combat right now with a trying temptation that came when least expected!

The Bible clearly says we are not to be ignorant of Satan's devices. And I believe that if we're willing, the Holy Spirit will help us understand God's purposes behind our temptations. He wants to give us what I call "the keys to unlocking the mystery of the temptations of the righteous."

Consider these three keys:

1. The Most Important Key to Understanding Your Temptation Is Knowing Where It Comes From.

Does your temptation originate with God, the devil - or your own flesh?

Your immediate reaction is probably, "That's easy - temptation

always comes from the devil, because the Bible says,

"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

JAM 1:13

Yet Scripture also gives us this very clear statement:

"Then Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil"

MATT 4:1

God's Spirit actually led Jesus into the combat zone!

The truth is, both God and Satan have a part and plan in every temptation that befalls us. Satan's design in tempting us is always to destroy, ruin and kill.

But for those of us who love the Lord and are called by Him, God uses all of it to further a grand, eternal purpose of His own. The Lord allows your temptation - but He does not cause it!

This is illustrated in two biblical passages that seem to contradict each other:

"The Lord...moved David against them (Israel) to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."

2.SAM 24:1

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel."

1.CHR 21:1

Both of these verses describe the same occasion. Yet one says God moved David against Israel - and the other says Satan moved David!

The fact is, both God and Satan were involved. You see, Satan saw an opportunity to destroy David and wipe out Israel. But God had another purpose in mind: He saw a cleansing possible. He saw

salvation for David through the devastation of his pride!

So God used Satan as His rod to chastise disobedient Israel. He struck judgment to save His people - exposing pride, idolatry and apostasy. And if you know the history, God's plan worked! He let the enemy tempt David so far, but then He moved in and brought deliverance - and David and Israel were saved in the process.

The end result was not the downfall of David - but repentance, greater humility and a stronger church in Israel. And you can rest assured: If Satan is coming against you, he has to have God's permission to do it. That's because even though he has a destructive purpose in tempting you, God has His own purpose - an eternal purpose - in allowing it!

2. If God Is Allowing a Powerful Temptation in Your Life, You can Be Sure He is After Something!

God may be using temptation to get at a long-standing lust or besetting sin that has a stronghold in you. The Bible says every person is tempted *"when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* (JAM 1:14).

And that is what God is after - the remains of that lust! He will keep allowing it to pop up year after year, until finally you say, "Why do I have to keep going through this same battle?"

When sudden temptation strikes - unwanted, unexpected, out of nowhere - God's intent is to show you your weakness. Up to this time you've always been vulnerable,

because you've never set up a guard at your weak point. And because God wants to help you become strong there, He gives Satan permission to test you again in that same area - until your guard is set up. You will continue to be tempted until the last roots of that are destroyed!

God doesn't allow temptation because He wants us to feel dirty and unworthy, a victim of satanic whim. No - He invites us to say, "Lord, I know You have a hand in this. Help me to put up my guard against this sin and deal with it righteously. I know my weakness - and I don't want to have to be tempted any further!"

3. Every Temptation of the Righteous Comes During Two Special Works of God in Our Lives.

The most severe temptations strike during two unique occasions in our walk with the Lord: (1) immediately after we receive blessings and deliverance from God's hand, and (2) just prior to God's opening a new and greater door of service for us for His glory.

God may have blessed you greatly, and then told you, "I'm going to use you - I'm going to open a door no man can shut! Perhaps He has shown you He's about to do something very unique in your life, in the areas of revelation, usefulness and effectiveness. Beloved, if that's so, then be alert - because it is usually then that the devil moves in!

True! But Satan has had 6,000 years to study God's ways! He has seen over the centuries how God uses those who turn to Him with all their hearts: Abraham, Jacob, Peter. And now, when he sees you praying and hungering for God, he knows what that means: anointing, power - and the shaking of his kingdom! He says, "That person is set on God - he's going to be greatly used. I've got to get to him before it happens!"

You may wonder, "How does the devil know God is about to use me? He can't read thoughts - he doesn't know the future."

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The Most Vicious Temptations Are Hurlled Against Those Who Already Have Their Hand on the Door of a New Mandate From Heaven.

A powerful illustration of this is recorded in Psalm 40. This is a fascinating account of how a flood of awesome temptations moved in on David immediately after one of his greatest victories. Listen to David's boast in the Lord:

"(The Lord) brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my going. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." PSA 40:1-3

David is testifying to a great victory in his life! He has been brought up out of a pit by God - and he is living right and being blessed above measure. Others see what God has done for him, and it is cause for praising the Lord:

"I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.... Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward." verses 10:5

Then David says,

"Mine ears hast thou opened.... I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." verses 6:8

David is saying something awesome here: "Oh Lord, I see what You've laid out ahead of me! Your plans for me are so marvelous. You have Your hand on me - You want to use me!"

These are the words of a man who is enjoying one of the greatest victories of his life. God has just delivered David. And now He has revealed to him that the whole kingdom is about to be brought under him. Indeed, David was about to enter into his most effective period!

Yet look at what follows immediately in this same Psalm:

"For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me." verse 12

David was not lusting, slothful or out of God's will at this point. No - he was praying, preaching, witnessing and hungering for God's Word. Yet suddenly, at the moment when these two great works of God occurred in his life, David was drowning in a river of unexpected trails and temptations! The "innumerable evils" that took hold of him were a flood of grievous temptations: past failures, old lusts, the things that had caused him to sin. They all came rushing back!

How many of God's most precious saints have cried out as David did, "God, some evil has a stranglehold on me! I'm overwhelmed by evil thoughts - I'm too ashamed to look up! I'll never be holy. I feel like such a failure!"

Right now, you may be going through a temptation you don't understand. You hate it, you despise it - but suddenly, there it is, and you don't know where it came from. You say to yourself, "I've set my heart to love the Lord. I'm not out carousing or looking for sin. Why is this temptation coming up again?"

First of all, you must understand that it is no sin to be tempted. But the devil will paint you with a brush of unworthiness! He'll say, "Aha! You thought that was all over, dead and gone. But look at yourself - it's popped up again in your heart!"

You'll think, "I've made no progress at all, through I've sat under a holy message. How can I still be battling something like this?" Yet the truth is, the more righteous you are, the more shame you feel when you go through these temptations - because you no longer want to grieve a holy God!

Throughout history, great men of God have testified that as they sat in the pulpit about to preach, the devil put blasphemous thoughts in their minds - and they had to battle through it! I was in a meeting once with one of the greatest men of God I've ever known - a prophet, near seventy years of age. The

Lord's presence was strong that night, when suddenly this man came to me and said, "Quick David, lay hands on me. I'm under satanic attack! I'm enduring temptations I haven't experienced since I was a young man!"

I was flabbergasted. I'd thought he was one of the holiest men I'd ever met - and yet here he was, weeping and under attack, right in the middle of a move of the Holy Spirit!

I see now that God had kept him on the shelf until that last remain was pulled out. God had allowed it, to show him the one thing that had held him back from His best.

Jesus and Paul Experienced Great Temptation at These Same Two Occasions.

Jesus Himself is our best example of understanding and winning over temptation. Christ had just been baptized in water, and the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him as a dove. Then a voice spoke from heaven - acknowledging Him to the world as God's own Son.

At this moment Jesus was honored and blessed in a way no man ever has been. His wonderful ministry lay just ahead, for which He had prepared those many long years. Yet no sooner were the words spoken,

"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." MK 1:11

Then the very next verse says,

"And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness." verse 12

And so it was with the apostle Paul as well. He was visited by Christ on the road to Damascus and heard the voice of God. He was miraculously delivered from the dark pit of spiritual blindness and the miry clay of Pharisaism. He was healed of physical blindness.

And what a revelation he received! Paul was told he was being prepared as a vessel of honor, to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. It would be a ministry of suffering - and yet one of greatness beyond anything a man could be told!

Again, we see these two solemn occasions meet in a godly man's life: great blessing and deliverance, and a glorious revelation of future usefulness. Yet that's when Paul says "a messenger of Satan" came

to buffet him - just after the revelation, and just before the most effective time of his life!

I have found this to be so in my life as well. I have experienced years at a time free from any major temptation - enjoying peace, growth and blessings beyond measure. Then God will say to my heart, "I have something even more wonderful for you, David - revelation, joy and victory beyond anything you've ever known!"

Suddenly, with no act on my part, I find myself smack in the middle of a raging trail! I cry out, "Oh God, where did this come from? I've been walking right, I've been praying. I hate my old ways! But now - it's the same old battle! Lord, this is too much!"

Are you presently going through a heartbreaking struggle with temptation? Stop, take heart - and take inventory!

Has God been saying something to you about greater usefulness? about taking you deeper? Has he talked to you about blessing your family, using you to win souls, or leading you into some new field of endeavor? You may be on the threshold of a glorious new walk with Him!

Of course, many Christians are mightily tempted when they are led away by their own lusts, and God uses trials to bring those to the surface. Yet many believers are tempted not because they're looking to lust - but because the devil knows they are about to do damage to his kingdom. And he wants to get to them before that happens!

How Can Saints Win Over a Flood of Temptation? How Do We Get the Victory?

In 1667 a doctor named Richard Gilpin wrote a book entitled *Demonologia Sacra*, in which he suggested ways to win over temptations. His outline is the best I have yet discovered. Let me summarize it in four points:

1. Resist the devil, and never run or retreat in fear.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." JAM 4:7

Christians usually quote only the last half of this verse - but it is

contingent only on the first part! The most important thing is to submit to God - and that means submitting to the temptation He has allowed!

Jesus submitted to being tempted in the wilderness because He knew His Father had a hand in it. And knowing this gave Him resolve and comfort that He was not alone on the battlefield.

But many Christians who are assaulted great temptations begin to belittle themselves. They grow discouraged and depressed - and soon they give up, saying their faith doesn't work. They don't realize that the very reason they are being tempted is because they are making progress!

The Lord has commanded us to set ourselves to fight:

"Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." 1.COR 16:13

2. Don't ever talk to your tempter.

Never dispute with the devil or his powers! This is where many saints fail. They argue with themselves about their temptation, whether some good might come out of it. Instead, they should be quickly quenching the flame, denying the devil an opportunity to inject deceiving arguments!

A young man once came to me who was involved in sexual sin with his unsaved girlfriend. He told me he had heard strong preaching, and God had spoken to him, "Break it immediately! Stop it, once and for all!"

Yet instead of quickly obeying God, the young man allowed Satan to drop arguments into his mind. The devil said, "But you're responsible for her soul - she'll go to hell unless you stay with her. Don't cut her off completely. Call her, encourage her - be available when she hurts!"

It was a recipe for disaster! The young man was holding a conversation with demonic thoughts! He was arguing - talking to the devil!

Satan cannot read your mind or thoughts - he's not omniscient. But he can read your actions! He hears your phone conversations, watches where your feet take you, and sees you in places you don't belong. That's how he knows so much about you - because your actions

blab it out! And he records your weaknesses in his ledger of temptations.

If a man knows his weakness is pornography, he can be walking down the street praising the Lord. But the devil watches where his feet go - and he sets up a temptation right on the edge of demonic territory! This man may be praying in his head - but soon his feet are conferring with the devil!

The devil will tell him, "Go ahead - God can't be that harsh. He will forgive you - because He commands you to forgive 490 times!"

Dear saint, that is no time to talk - it's the time to run! Turn around - shut off the demonic conversation! The most effective way to talk to the devil isn't with your mouth, but with your feet!

3. Put a sudden stop to any possibility of giving in to your temptations.

The time to stop the temptation is at the first impulse. That's when you need to state a quick, emphatic NO! "No, devil! No, flesh!" Line up on God's side against your sin immediately. Nothing sends the devil fleeing more quickly than a sudden, final "No!" at the first attack.

Paul said to put to death the deeds of the flesh (ROM 8:13). No matter what the cost or what you have to give up, have the funeral now! You may answer, "But it's too hard - I can't let my temptations go." Yes, letting it go will hurt. But whatever it is, you've got to let it die - with no hope of resurrection! Lay it down, say no - and do it speedily and finally, with no turning back.

I know a minister in his mid-sixties who used to travel extensively. Once, on a trip to Europe, he met a young lady who was really on fire for God - by his definition. The Holy Ghost warned him: "It's a trap - get out now! Don't ever see her again, don't even talk to her. Put an end to it!"

But the minister reasoned, "She understands my ministry better than anybody. Surely it's okay just to talk." Sure enough, eventually this man left his wife and married the young lady. He knew it was wrong from the first, but he had flirted with the idea of marrying a younger woman - and before he knew it, was ensnared.

This man could have maintained his integrity and spent the end of his days in a blaze of God's glory. But because he neglected to say a sudden, final "No!" against temptation, he lost it all!

4. Repel all temptations with activated Scriptures.

The devil laughs at our arguments - they mean nothing to him. There is only one thing that puts terror in his soul, and that is the Word of God in the heart of a Christian - believed and activated!

We cannot win our battles by bare human resolve, or by mouthing Scripture verses. That's because the force and power are not in the words, but in the authority God has invested in them. To have power over the devil, the Word of God must come out of a believing heart and trusting lips. David said,

"By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."

PSA 17:4

He also boasted,

"I kept myself from mine iniquity."

18:23

How did he guard himself from sin?

"For I have kept the ways of the Lord... and I did not put away his statutes from me."

18:21

Luther testified, "I have suffered many great passions and vehement. But as soon as I laid hold of any place in Scripture, and stayed myself upon it as upon an anchor, straightway my temptations did vanish away - which without the Word had been impossible for me to endure, much less to overcome."

Answer Your Temptation With Contrary Commands!

If your temptation is toward adultery or fornication, cry out,

"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"

EX 20:14

If it is covetousness of any kind, cry out,

"Thou shalt not covet!"

verse 17

If it is the lust of the flesh, cry out,

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die!"

ROM 8:13

If it is a longstanding lust that has laid hold upon you, cry out,

"Sin shall not have dominion over you!"

ROM 6:14

Go to the Bible and get some contrary commands! Begin to speak them and believe them. Only faith activates that written Word - and only an activated word sets the devil to chase! You can stand and say, "Devil, I am safe from you and anything you send against me from hell. I don't stand on my record, or any personal holiness - I stand on the written Word of God, as Jesus did."

As the enemy came at me full force recently, one verse leaped out:

"I will go in the ways of the Lord my God."

see PSA 18:21

Suddenly, faith began to well up in my heart. Now I quote this verse every day. When I get up in the morning, I say, "I will go in the way of the Lord my God - and He goes with me!"

If you go in the ways of the Lord your God, He's going to give you great victory. And He wants to encourage you now - that no matter what you're going through, He's bringing you through it completely. You're not going down!

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

HEB 12:6

But He says, those chastenings are only for a season, a short while - and afterward, great joy follows!

Hallelujah - what a promise!

Obey His Word, claim His contrary commands - and enjoy victory over your temptation!

David Wilkerson