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Series: FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM!

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Overcoming Temptation

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, a Chicago-area woman came home from work on Thursday, April 14, 1983, at 6 p.m. When she walked into her apartment, she immediately became suspicious, because she smelled gasoline fumes. She thought maybe someone had been working there, so she called the landlady and the janitor. They said they had not let anyone in that day. With the gasoline fumes still strong, she called the police and fire department. The fire department came and inspected her apartment, but found nothing and left.

Finally, at 10:30 she prepared to go to bed. In her bedroom, she noticed something unusual. There was a strange electrical cord running to her bed and a bulge in the center of the mattress. She again called the police. When the fire department arrived and took the mattress off of the box spring, they found three one-gallon containers filled with gasoline, which were sitting on top of a hot plate connected to a timer that was set to go off at 3 a.m.

Wow! Really subtle! For that woman to be killed by that crude trap, she would have had to be completely oblivious to everything around her.

This is just like Satan. Satan sometimes sets traps for us that are just as obvious. And sometimes he can deceive us. When he tries to tempt us, we need to be careful not to become a fool. Like the woman, we should notice the lumpy mattress and be careful not to lie down on it and be killed. The Bible tells us to be alert and resist temptation. Jesus demonstrated this in Matthew 4:1-11.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'

Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

Before we go further, I want to make one thing very clear. Temptation in itself is not sin. Jesus experienced temptation, as we just saw in Matthew, chapter 4. But, yielding to temptation is sin.

Now, I have three important lessons we can learn from Jesus that will help us to overcome temptation and resist it.

First, **depend on God**. That is exactly what Jesus did. Three times the devil tempted Jesus. How did Jesus respond to each temptation? He answered with Scripture! Jesus knew the Word of God. Jesus knew what God had written. That knowledge helped Jesus remain strong and resist temptation.

Depend on God. Read the Bible. Watch the ASL Bible. Put it inside you. Psalm 119:11 says, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* When you are tempted, knowing God's Word will give you the strength to resist temptation. You cannot do it alone. But you can resist when God's Word is in you.

I have a story by Chuck Swindoll, a famous writer. He said many of us fall into temptation and sin, because we make plans to go ahead and fall into sin. He told one funny story to illustrate this.

A father told his son, "Don't swim in that canal."

The son answered, "O.K., Dad." But that evening he came home carrying a wet bathing suit.

When he saw the wet suit, the father asked him, "Where did you go?"

The boy answered, "Swimming in the canal."

The father said, "Didn't I tell you not to swim there?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy.

"So why did you go swimming?" the father asked.

"Well, Dad," he explained, "I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the temptation to go swimming."

The father questioned, "Why did you take your bathing suit with you?"

He replied, "So I'd be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted."

That describes many of us. We expect to sin and are excited by the prospect of falling. We need to do the opposite. Read God's Word. Think and act like Jesus. Romans 13:14 says, *"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."*

Second, **watch out for traps!** Did you notice when the devil tempted Jesus? It was after Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. Jesus was hungry. Jesus was alone in the desert.

The devil tempts us when we are alone, weak or hungry. We need to be alert. We need to watch out for the devil's traps.

Men who trap animals in Africa for zoos in America say that one of the hardest animals to catch is the ring-tailed monkey. But for the Zulu tribe in Africa, it is simple. They know how to capture that monkey. It is easy for them, because they know the animal and its weaknesses. They trap the monkey using a melon. The monkey loves the seeds of this melon. Knowing this, the Zulus simply cut a hole in the melon, just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand into. The monkey will stick his hand in, grab as many seeds as he can, then start to withdraw it. But he can't get his hand out, because his fist is now larger than the hole. The monkey will pull and tug, screech and fight the melon for hours. Meanwhile, the Zulus sneak up and nab him. Why? Because the monkey refuses to let go of the seeds so he can remove his hand, and he is captured.

It is the same with us. One big trap is pornography! Paul Kendall of Kendall Family Network shares that, for many years, it was difficult to find images of nude women and men engaged in sexual acts, and people were embarrassed to see them. But today this has changed. It is easy to find magazines to buy, and we can look at the images on our personal computer screens through the Internet. Today in the U.S., revenue from pornography exceeds the earnings of ABC, CBS and NBC television networks combined! And he noticed that the largest group spending money on pornography is 12 to 17-year-old males and females. Many people have fallen into this trap, including Christians. Be careful. Be alert. Watch out for this trap!

Third, **resist and flee.** Remember the story of Jesus. Jesus depended on God. Even though He was hungry, He watched out for temptation. This helped Him to remain strong and resist temptation.

Here's a story written by Barry McGee in the *Denver Post*. It is interesting. It is about a woman named Lexy Lowler. Like many sheep ranchers in the West, she had tried just about everything to stop crafty coyotes from killing her sheep. She had used odor sprays, electric fences and "scare-coyote" machines. She had slept with her lambs during the summer and had placed battery-operated radios near them. Sometimes she caught the coyotes. But in one year alone, she lost 50 sheep.

She didn't know what to do and was frustrated. Then she discovered the llama, a funny-looking animal that was not afraid of anything. When the llama saw something, it would walk straight toward it. So she bought a llama and put it in with the flock. When a coyote approached, the llama would come right up to it. This would frighten the coyote, and it would run away.

The devil is like the coyote. It is important for the Christian to be like a llama. James 4:7 says, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" Like the llama, when we see the devil approaching and ready to attack, we should face the temptation, resist, and force the devil to flee.

Now think about yourself. Where are you the most tempted to sin? Avoid going to these places. What things do you have that cause you to sin? Eliminate them from your life. Who are you usually with when you sin? Avoid them and associate with people who will support you.

I have a computer at work and at home. How do I deal with the temptation of pornography? How do I resist? I set up my computer at work so that my assistant can see my screen as she goes back and forth. At home, the computer is set up so my wife and children can see what I am doing on my computer. That helps me resist this temptation.

Now, in conclusion, many people assume that temptation is a bad thing and wonder why God allows us to be tempted. Have you ever wondered how anything good can come out of temptation? Why does God allow Satan to attack our faith, and tempt us? We can be encouraged by one story from the world of football (by the way, I love football!).

Running back Rashaan Salaam won the Heisman trophy in 1995 for his outstanding rushing career in college. But in his rookie year with the Chicago Bears, the pros noticed one weakness in Salaam's game—he was prone to fumble. Although he led the Bears in rushing during his rookie season, he fumbled the ball nine times.

The coaches devised a practice drill to try to correct the problem. They tied a long strap around the football. As Rashaan ran with the ball clutched against his chest, another Bear player ran behind him, yanking on the other end of the strap to try to cause him to fumble. Rashaan had to squeeze the ball with all his might to keep from losing it.

In many ways, that is what temptation does to us. The more the devil tries to yank away our faith, the more important it is for us to hold on even tighter to our faith. God allows

temptation so that we will cling more fiercely and closely to Him. That is beautiful! First Corinthians 10:13 says, *“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.”*



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