

Growing in Christ

Lesson 2: Temptation

Notes for the leader: This is the second in a series of lessons about "Growing in Christ." This lesson focuses on a problem every one of us has to face every day -- dealing with temptation.

Introduction

The first lesson in this series focused on the important step of faith that you must take to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church and his Kingdom. Jesus promised that if we sincerely commit ourselves to following him, he will forgive our sins. He also promised that He will be with each one of us forever, wherever we go and whatever happens to us. (*Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5*)

Jesus did **not** promise that if you choose to follow him, all your problems will disappear. In fact, he warned his disciples that many of them were going suffer, and some of them would even die, because they followed him. (*John 15:20*)

The apostle James wrote about the trials and temptations that will come into our lives, even after we become followers of Christ:

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James talks about keeping an **attitude of joy**, even when we face **trials**, because we know that through these trials, God is building up our faith, and that we're learning to "hang in there" and trust him (that's what **perseverance** means). God works in our lives through these experiences to help us become "**mature and complete, not lacking anything.**"

God doesn't send us trials to punish us. Rather **He allows us to go through trials** that come upon us as part of our lives in a sinful world -- and often because of our own actions. James says that He has a **purpose** in doing this: **to build up our faith** and to **help us grow spiritually**. For most of us, **spiritual growth seems to come mostly from what we learn during the hard times in our lives**, not the easy times. This seems to be a fact of spiritual life.

So, what about **temptation**? Is temptation some kind of test that God puts us through to see if we pass or fail? Let's see what James says about this.

James 1:13-15

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Where does James say that **temptation** comes from?

He says **temptation starts inside of you**, and it will grow and lead you into sin, unless you seek God's help to deal with it. Sometimes we talk about other people tempting us, **but there's no way that anyone can tempt you with something you don't already want!** If you don't want it, then dealing with it is easy, and it's not really a temptation!

So, how can we deal with temptation? Let's look at **one of the most important promises in all of scripture.**

1 Corinthians 10:13

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.

What is Paul telling us in this verse?

First, he's saying that **everybody faces temptation**, all our lives. Temptation may take different forms for different people, but we all face it. My greatest temptation may not bother you at all, and your temptation may be no problem for me. But we **all** have to deal with temptation of some kind.

Second, he's reminding us **that God is faithful**. He knows us, he understands us, he loves us, and he will stick with us if we put our faith and trust in him.

Third, he's telling us that **God has promised that he won't let us face temptation that's too strong for us**, and that **He will always make sure that there's a way out** of whatever temptation comes to us. This promise is so important that **everyone should memorize this verse**, so that it will come to your mind whenever temptation "seizes" you.

Since all of us face temptation every day, this is an area where we all have plenty of experience. And that's what our discussion questions are about.

***Notes for the leader:** Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.*

Follow-up Discussion

Notes for the leader: *The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.*

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. What are the best ways you have found for dealing with temptation?

Prayer -- call for God's help right away!

Fleeing -- get away from the source or place of temptation as fast as you can.

Seeking help from other Christians, who can pray with us, and perhaps share how they have dealt with similar temptations.

Reciting scripture, as Jesus did when he was tempted by Satan.

Focusing our minds on other thoughts -- perhaps a hymn or a praise song.

2. How can we prepare ourselves for temptation before it comes?

Stay away from anywhere we know temptation is likely to be! (We are rarely seized by a new temptation -- for most of us, it's usually the same temptations, over and over!)

Learn the scriptures. They will not come into our minds when we are facing temptation unless we put them there first, by reading them, understanding them, and memorizing them.

Turn to mature Christians for help. Talk to them. Pray with them.

Seek help from Christian support groups of people who are dealing with the same kinds of temptations that you are. We can often learn a lot from each other.

3. If we find we have failed, and given in to temptation, what should we do?

Repent, confess, ask God for forgiveness. Let's read 1 John 1:9 ...

1 John 1:9 - 2:6

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

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Let's close with the wonderful benediction from the book of Jude:

Jude 24-25

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy --

to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Notes for the leader: *Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!*

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Dealing with Temptation *(1 Corinthians 10:13)*

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)

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Take-home Thoughts About ...

Dealing with Temptation

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (James 1:13-14)

God doesn't tempt us, but he allows us to go through trials and temptations in order to **strengthen us spiritually**. For most of us, **spiritual growth** comes from what we learn during **hard times**, not easy times!

Where does **temptation** come from? James says that it **starts inside of me**, and it will grow and **lead me into sin, unless I seek God's help** to deal with it. There's no way that anyone can tempt me with something I don't already want!

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Our responsibility is to **look for the way out that God has promised to provide**.

We can deal with temptation by **praying for God's help**; by **asking mature Christians to pray** with us; by **quoting scripture we have memorized**, as Jesus did when he was tempted personally by Satan himself. (See Matthew 4:1-11.)

We should learn to **stay away from people and places where we know we'll face temptation**. And if we find ourselves suddenly facing temptation, we should **get away from it as fast as we can**.

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