

Temptation

by J. Edwin Orr

Temptation is not a sin, but a test of faith that produces steadfastness and strengthens Christian character.

Duration: 55:24

Scripture: James 1:2

Topics: "Temptation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being vigilant against temptation. He compares temptation to a fire that can quickly spread if not contained. The speaker quotes scripture to explain how desire leads to sin, and sin ultimately leads to death. He uses personal anecdotes and stories to illustrate the need for self-control and the dangers of giving in to temptation. The sermon concludes with the reminder that self is the private enemy and Satan is the public enemy, and that every temptation to commit evil begins in the imagination.

Transcript

I would like this morning to deal with a practical problem. I served in World War II as a chaplain with the 13th United States Air Force. I remember once a pilot, a Christian airman, came to me and he said, I wish you'd pray for me.

I'm going through a lot of temptation and it really makes me feel miserable. He was quite taken aback when I said, cheer up, you ought to feel happy. Happy? He said.

What is there to be happy about in temptation? He said, I thought temptation was a sin. So I told him quite bluntly, no, you're quite wrong. In the epistle of James it says, content nothing but joy.

When you fall into different temptations. I'm going to read that passage to you so that you'll get the context. In chapter one, in the epistle of James, right at the back of the Bible.

Content all joy, my brethren, when you fall into different temptations. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in

all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.

Down to verse 12. Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, I'm being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he's lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

That's the background of the passage. So I said to the airman, count it nothing but joy when you fall into different temptations. He asked me, well isn't it a sin? I said, listen, it says, the Lord Jesus Christ was tempted in all points, like as we are, and yet without sin.

That shows you that to be tempted is not a sin. I like the old hymn that we used to sing, yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin. To yield to temptation is a sin, but temptation itself is not sin.

Well, said this Christian airman, I wonder why Christians have to go through temptation anyway. Wouldn't we be better Christians if we weren't distracted in such a way? Distracted from the right thing? Is there some kind of purpose in temptation? I said, let's look at the verse. The testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Now in the King James Version it says, patience. The Greek word is upeminos, but it means staying power. Stake out ability.

Steadfastness. A man who can say no to temptation is actually stronger than the man who has not been tempted. A man who can say no to lying is stronger than the man who has never been tempted to lie.

A man who can say no to impurity is stronger than the boy that doesn't know the facts of life. I went on to tell this friend of mine my family experience. My father died of tuberculosis.

He died when I was ten. I never knew him when he wasn't a sick man. He had broken his leg when he was a boy.

It brought about hip joint disease, tuberculosis of the bone. Finally he had tuberculosis of the lungs. My older brother, who took his place as the breadwinner of the family, developed tuberculosis also.

He was six foot tall, he was quite a sportsman, played for Ireland against England and Scotland. But somehow or other he contracted pleurisy and developed TB. I never contracted tuberculosis as far as I know, but I had what was called a predisposition towards it, meaning that there was someone in my family and some people thought that I would catch it too.

But my mother saw that I took plenty of cod liver oil and malt and so forth, all sorts of concoctions. However in the providence of God I started out at the age of 21 to become an evangelist. I started out on a bicycle.

I had 65 cents in my pocket. I had nothing but the plainest food. I had plenty of fresh air and plenty of good exercise.

And it must have done something to me. I cycled against rain and sun, fog, snow, wind, frost. The result was when I took an examination for a commission in the United States Air Force, the doctor told me my

health was perfect, except for a little bit of myopia in my eyesight.

I did want to get into the Air Force, but my sight wasn't too good. 2200 in the left eye, 2400 in the right eye. You're supposed to have 20-20 in the Air Force.

The doctor said, read that chart. So I started with a big E and went right down to the bottom line. He got suspicious.

He said, read it backwards. I read it all the way backwards. Then I told him I learned it backwards as well as forwards.

So he said, well you seem to be determined to get into the Air Force. I don't see why a chaplain should have perfect eyesight, so he said, I'm going to pass you. You'll have to wear steel-rimmed glasses in combat, otherwise you're in.

I said, doctor, how do you account for my good health, considering my family history, tuberculosis? Well, he said, you were exposed to the disease while you were a boy. No doubt when your father was dying, you were exposed to it, and you developed a resistance. He said, in fact, you're stronger than the average healthy man in this respect.

A farmer could get a bad chill and develop pleurisy and then go into consumption. He said, that's not likely to happen to you. So I told my friend, the sergeant, it's the same way regarding temptation.

If you're exposed to evil, if you're exposed to temptation and you resist it, you're stronger than if you'd never been tempted in the first place. That sort of shook him. He said, well, are you trying to tell me there's some kind of purpose behind temptation? I said yes.

Then he said, well, there must be somebody responsible for it, then. Is God responsible for temptation? I saw what he was thinking. In other words, it is tempting to say, well, God's responsible, it's his fault.

No, no. Scripture is very clear about this. God doesn't tempt us.

It makes it very clear in the scripture. Now, I explained to my friend, the airman, there are two distinct purposes in temptation. The purpose of the evil one is to make us to fall into sin.

But the purpose of God in his permissive will is to allow us to be strengthened in Christian character. Now, how would you illustrate permissive will? Well, I could illustrate it very simply from my experience in the war. I saw pretty rough things in World War II.

I hate war. But you couldn't say that God plans war. God permits evil.

It says very simply, let no man say when he is tempted, I'm being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. God is not the author of temptation. Now, you'll find that the scripture explains that the devil, Satan, is the author of temptation.

It was Satan who tempted our first parents. It was Satan who tempted King David. It was Satan who tempted the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And as far as an external source is concerned, Satan is the author of temptation. But don't get a wrong impression. Some people picture the devil as a wicked-looking creature with horns and hoofs and a tail.

You know, if somebody wants to draw a little sketch of the devil, they always end up with the same sort of evil-looking creature. Some people think the devil is trying to make good men into drunkards and good women into prostitutes. But that's far from the case.

I knew of a man who neither drank nor smoked nor gambled. He was a vegetarian. He didn't even eat meat.

He was very strict in a lot of his personal habits. I had the chance of meeting him. In fact, someone wanted to arrange an appointment, but something came up that the thing fell through.

He didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't gamble, didn't eat meat. His name was Adolf Hitler. He was more useful to the devil without being drunk.

The devil doesn't mind if you're respectable. In fact, the worst enemies of the gospel are not drunkards and harlots. Sometimes they are sort of an advertisement in reverse for a good life.

When you see them, you think, well, that doesn't appeal to me. The devil has more use for respectable men and women who have been seduced into refined sin. Some people congratulate themselves that they're not such terrible sinners.

All they mean is that their sins are not vulgar. They're refined. Satan doesn't mind how trivial the sin is so long as he breaks that person's fellowship with God.

Some people, of course, don't believe in a personal Satan. Things are different today than they were when I was growing up. Fifty years ago, sixty years ago, people had to sort of defend their belief in a personal devil.

Nowadays we've got Satan worship, and we know there's a personification of evil. But I remember growing up on Ireland, a lot of people didn't believe in the devil. I remember hearing two little boys talking about it.

One said, I don't believe in the devil. The other little boy said, well, I do. If you don't believe in the devil, who is the devil anyway? The other little boy, the first one, said, well, I think it's just like Santa Claus.

It's your father. But although we recognize that the devil is the author of temptation, we mustn't forget that he's not the only author, not the sole author. Here's what it says in the passage I read to you.

Every man is tempted when he's drawn away by his own desire and enticed. We are fallen creatures by nature, and the devil gets a beachhead in our souls because of our own desires. How could I illustrate this? I was born in Ireland, of an American father and a British mother, and I didn't come to this country until I was twenty-three years of age.

But I liked it here. I think I could say from the mountains to the prairies to the oceans, flecked with foam, God bless America, my home sweet home. I'm an American by choice.

I chose to come here, to live here. But I might as well be frank. There's some things about America I don't like.

One is this habit of putting mayonnaise on everything. I don't like mayonnaise. I have seen people take good bread and spread mayonnaise on it.

Butter, margarine, I can see those things, but mayonnaise. I used to camp up at Forest Home in the summer, that Christian conference center that was started by Henrietta Mears. And I've seen a woman there in the kitchen, hard-boiled eggs, and they'd scoop the yolk out and mix it with mayonnaise and put it back in again.

They call those deviled eggs. Now if I should go to your house for lunch, and you brought me a bowl of mayonnaise as a temptation, it's no temptation to me. I don't like it.

The same way, remember that your temptations come along the lines of your own desires. If, for example, you like the good things of life, you may be tempted to steal or to embezzle. But if you are the affectionate type, your temptations will come along certain lines.

For instance, the hospital patient who has a social disease finds himself there because he has enjoyed sexual indulgence too much. It's along the lines of his desires. You can take similar illustrations.

I remember once writing to a couple back home from New Guinea during the war. They'd written to me as chaplain to find out how did our son die. I hadn't the heart to tell them he was murdered by his tent mate.

His tent mate got drunk on some concoction and murdered his best pal. I wrote back and said your son lost his life in a tragic accident, but I'm not free to tell you the circumstances. Had to leave it at that.

But the fellow who murdered him was addicted to drink, because he liked it. Therefore, I think every Christian should remember that private enemy number one is self, and public enemy number one is Satan. And Satan can't progress very far without human cooperation.

When I preached to soldiers, I used to startle them by telling them that every temptation to commit evil begins without exception in the imagination. They thought that was too much of a generalization. But we'd sit down and talk about it.

We had plenty of time sometimes around a campfire. We find it's true. Stealing begins with covetousness.

If you don't covet, you're not guilty of stealing. I well remember going to Norway during the middle of winter for meetings. It's a very snowy country in winter, like Minnesota.

And I found I was always bothered about wearing galoshes. In California, we don't use galoshes. I don't see a single person here with galoshes.

But in Minnesota, in the middle of winter, just as in Norway in the middle of winter, everyone wears galoshes, for very obvious reasons. But because I wasn't used to it, I was always leaving my galoshes behind in meetings. Then my wife and I would have to drive back, and did anybody see my galoshes? I remember vividly on one occasion we had a clergy and ministers.

The Bishop of Oslo chaired the meeting. I was the guest of a Salvation Army officer, stayed with him, and at the end of the meeting there were four of us shaking hands with the ministers as they came out. The Bishop shook hands with everyone, that was expected.

I shook hands with everyone, I was the speaker. The Salvation Army officer shook hands with those who greeted him. But this fourth man looked everybody up and down and then shook hands with them.

So when we were driving back, I said to my friend the Salvation Army officer, who was that fellow who was shaking hands with everyone? Not the Bishop, the other fellow. Oh, he said he was a reporter. I said, do reporters shake hands with everyone? Well, he said it was different with him.

He said he told me that some minister had stolen his galoshes, and he was determined to find out who did it. So I laughed, I said, well he didn't apparently find out. No, he said he was baffled, couldn't find out who had his galoshes.

He said he was going to write an article in the paper about it. So we both laughed about it. Then a thought struck me, I said, by the way, would you look behind my seat? He said, what, nothing there? I said, nothing? I was a little relieved.

He said, nothing but an old pair of galoshes. I said, whose galoshes am I wearing? I sent them back to the man, but he had already written an article, My Favorite Galoshes. And he told how he had gone to minister's meeting and all the rest of it.

But I didn't feel convicted. I hadn't stolen. I'd taken them all right, but I hadn't stolen them.

There was no intent in my heart. You see, before you steal, you must carve it. It's in your imagination.

Before you lie, you must have an intent to deceive. You might say, have you any relations over in the old country? I've got a brother living in London, in Beckenham. He said, I'm going over, I'll look him up, I'll phone him and tell him I was talking to you.

Supposing you find out he's moved to Dublin. Did I tell a lie? No. Well, what I said wasn't true.

But I didn't intend to deceive. I said what I thought was true. So that you cannot lie without an intent to deceive.

And you cannot commit adultery without lust. It always begins in the imagination. Why? Because the imagination is often stronger than the will.

Psychologists tell us that. And the devil has been studying human psychology for thousands of years. That's why he tries to get an entrance to our imagination.

Now, during the Depression, none of you remember that, of course, that goes back fifty years or more. A couple of young fellows in my home city wanted to have a vacation. In Ireland, there's no point of the country more than a hundred miles from the sea.

So a lot of people go to the shore to relax and enjoy themselves. But when they went down, they found the hotels were too expensive. Even the boarding houses were out of their reach.

So they walked out into the country. They found a farm. They went up to the farm and said, we see you've got a little cottage down there.

Is it for rent? Well, he said, the old folks used to live there, but they're dead and gone now. Nobody uses it. But it's supposed to be all right in the middle of summer.

You can have it for very little. So they rented this little cottage. But the windows had become jammed, probably through dampness, and the chimney was blocked.

They didn't want to leave the door open because of mosquitoes. So the room got a little stuffy. During the night, one young fellow lying next to the wall dreamed he was suffocating.

It was so vivid that he wakened up and said, open the window quick, Jimmy, I'm choking. The other fellow was dreaming, but not about the same thing, of course. So he got out in the darkness.

He wasn't sure where he was, what direction to go, but he put out his hands. Then he saw a little reflection of glass, and he staggered over until his hands touched the cold thing. He fumbled with it.

The man shouted at him, why don't you open that window? He said, I can't get this latch undone. He said, pull it, man, pull it. He gave a wrench, and the glass broke.

Now you see what you made me do. The other fellow said, I'll pay for it. So thinking they had taken care of their problem, they both went sound asleep until they awakened at daybreak.

Then they discovered they had broken the glass of the bookcase, not the window. But why did they go to sleep again? Imagination. Imagination will do that to you.

The devil knows that. If he can get you thinking about something that's not right, he's scored a point. If he can get you coveting something, you say, well I know it's wrong to steal.

But if he can get you to think about it, I wish I could do it, he has weakened your will. I remember a young fellow at college whom I counseled, having been tempted deliberately by a girl, but he said to me, honest, nothing happened. I said, what do you mean nothing happened? You can't get it out of your mind, man.

The power of an unfulfilled desire is almost worse than the sin itself. The devil knows this. All the devil wants to do is to get you to think about it.

One of my friends in London, in fact he was publisher of my first books, Fine Christian Man. He had served in World War I, so he wasn't called up for World War II. But he served as a fire watcher during the Blitz.

My mother was in London during the Blitz, so I asked him, what was it like? Oh, he said it was dreadful. The Luftwaffe came and just dropped these incendiary bombs to try to burn London down. I said, what were you supposed to do? He said, well, we were supposed to sit on the roof and wait for the incendiary bombs.

He said, you couldn't go away for a cup of coffee. You had to be there with a bucket of sand to smother it, because water wouldn't put it out. It was so intensely hot, you had to just smother it in the bucket of sand.

And he said, if you weren't there, it would catch hold, and the building would be so engulfed in flames that the firemen would simply isolate it and keep it from spreading to somewhere else. So you had to be watching all the time. You've heard the saying regarding our political liberties, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

You've got to keep watching, because someone's trying to take it away from you all the time. It's the same with temptation. All the devil wants is to get a little fire going, temptation in your soul.

I quoted the scripture to you, when desire has taken hold, it produces sin, and sin when it's full grown produces death. When desire has taken hold, that's the same and sin when it's finished with you produces death. You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in

your hair.

President Edmund of Wheaton College, Billy Graham's college president, used to say, I still remember, it isn't the first look that's sin, it's the second look. And you can remember that. All the devil wants is to get the idea into your mind, he has weakened your will, if you entertain that idea in any way.

Now, it wouldn't be fair to talk about temptation as such a dangerous thing if I didn't tell you how to overcome it. I want to talk about the conquest of temptation. Here's the revised version, translation of James 1.4, let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

You could recognize the nature of temptation, its purpose, its beginnings, but it doesn't mean a thing if your defeat is inevitable. But the apostle Paul tells sin shall not have dominion over you. What does that mean? Sin doesn't need to be your boss, so we are encouraged to hope for victory over temptations as they arise.

I'm going to quote again from the latest revision in 1 Corinthians, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. You don't have special temptations. People excuse themselves by saying, well, that temptation was special.

It's not special. If you're tempted to lie, millions of people have been tempted to lie. If you're tempted to steal, millions of people have been tempted to steal.

If you're tempted to commit adultery, millions of people have been tempted to commit adultery, even temptation to murder. I heard some Christian interviewed on TV recently, and this man said, well, tell the truth, have you ever considered divorce? He said, never. Oh, come on now, you've never considered divorce? He said, never.

Murder, yes, but never divorce. Well, that was being a little facetious, but I don't think we can afford to be facetious with the commonness of murder today. I went over to help Billy Graham in Amsterdam this year, then I spent a week up at Oxford doing some research in the Bodleian Library, and I came away with one fact in my mind.

The total number of gunshot murders in England, Scotland, and Wales, Great Britain, last year was four. In the United States, 9,800. You heard what happened in Edmond, Oklahoma, a couple of days ago.

But no one has been tempted to murder before he hated. Murder begins in rage. But here's the rest of the verse.

No temptation has overtaken you that's not common to man, but God is faithful. He will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation he will also provide a way to escape that you may be able to endure it. When I was growing up in Ireland, I met a converted drunkard who told me that after he was converted, knowing his weakness, he prayed that God would take away the craving for alcohol and give him a chance.

And he said the craving for alcohol left him the day of his conversion. Never wanted to touch the stuff again. But I met another man who said that wasn't the way it was with me.

When he was converted, he asked God to take away the temptation, but God answered him in a different way. The craving remained. He told me how bad it was.

Especially Friday night, coming home with his pay in his pocket. Every time he passed a pub, a tavern, call them public house over there, he felt tempted to go in. Now, the tavern owners in Ireland have a very sneaky habit.

During the day they collect the dregs of drinks. Instead of washing them away, they'll take maybe a little bit of whiskey or a little bit of brandy or whatever, whatever's been left in the glasses, and they'll pour it into a bucket. And then at five o'clock in the evening, they fill it with scalding water, and they swill it over the sidewalk.

So the men coming home will smell the stuff, and if that's their weakness, they go in and have a quick one. Now, you can understand what it was for a man who had a craving for drink, just being converted. He told me what a temptation it was.

But he said, I prayed about it, and he said, the Lord helped me and I helped the Lord. So I said, how did you help the Lord? Well, he said, it was the smell of the stuff that bothered me. So he said, I kept a clothes peg in my pocket, and every time I came to a pub, he said, I put it on my nose.

Why was it that in one case the Lord took away the man's craving for drink, but he left it in the other case? It's very simple. It says, he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength. One man couldn't take it, so the Lord took the temptation away.

The other man could take it, so the Lord let it remain with a building up of his character. This applies quite generally, and it's worth keeping in mind. Therefore, we ought to reassure ourselves, if the next time you are tempted, you say to yourself, the fact that God has allowed this temptation to come to me is proof that I can stand it.

Otherwise the scripture is a lie. It says, God will not let you be tempted more than you are able to bear. That means if you are tempted, you can stand it.

If you say otherwise, you are making God a liar. But the trouble is that Christians fool around with temptation. I'm quoting a lot from my experience as a teenager, but when I was growing up, I worked in an office which had an elderly manager, 14 girls, and me.

It cured me of any romantic tendency for about several years. This was a bakery office, the office attached to a very large bakery. Sometimes we were troubled with mice.

I found girls don't like mice. Now, when I'm in Africa, I've read about some woman being mauled by a lion. Who ever heard of a woman being attacked by a mouse? But most girls don't like mice.

So I would hear some little squeal, there's a mouse there, there's a mouse there. I said, well, never mind, it won't bite you. Oh, that wasn't enough.

So I had to get, being the man of the office, I had to get a big ruler, and I'd go after the mouse. Just like St. George and the dragon. Except for one thing, it was fun.

All the girls were screaming and standing on top of stools and giggling and so forth. We didn't have coffee breaks in those days, so this was our coffee break. It was fun to me, and I think it was fun to the girls too, but it wasn't fun for the mouse.

The mouse didn't fool around. The mouse didn't run circles around me or say, hi, you didn't get me that time. Oh no.

The mouse knew it was in danger. It was only concerned with one thing, that was the way to escape. So it looked for a way to escape.

And if somebody suddenly opened the door, the mouse just streaked like that, and was gone. The mouse was concerned with only one thing, the way to escape. I wish Christians were like that.

When you realize you're tempted, look for the way to escape. It says so here, God will not let us be tempted above what we're able to bear, but with every temptation he makes a way to escape. There is some way to escape.

I wish Christians were like mice, but instead of that they're more like moths. Have you ever been camping and using candlelight, or a lamp, and some silly moth comes in and flutters around? You bat it away and say, get away. But it comes back again, back again, back again, until finally it comes too close, singes its wings, falls down useless, or dead.

This moth-like behavior of professing Christians impressed my mind very forcibly during the Pacific War. Some of our fellows were really tired of combat in the jungle, and they looked forward to their furloughs in Australia. Each one, Christian or non-Christian, had his own code of behavior.

Muslims said, I know how to take care of myself, I know how far I can go. But they always went further. They seemed to like skating around thin ice.

And when they skated too far, they fell into sin. Don't flirt with temptation. Realize that you're in danger.

Don't flirt with it. Look for the way to escape. I had a friend at Oxford who was a great student evangelist.

He started InterVarsity in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India. A great student evangelist. He told us once that when he was a teenager, he was tempted with unhealthy thoughts.

He prayed a lot about it, but the more he prayed, the worse it got. Even when he was praying, it was almost as if Satan were standing behind him and saying, I don't mind you praying about this as long as you think about it. He was using, Satan was using his introspection to bring the sin before him again and again and again, until he hit on an idea.

He had a cousin in China as a missionary. He thought, the next time I'm tempted to impurity of thought, I'm going to pray for my cousin Henry in China. And even if he were walking down the street and a sudden thought struck him, he would start to pray aloud.

He did it aloud. Oh God bless Henry Guinness in Kaifeng. His wife and children, protect them in the smallpox epidemic, give them opportunity.

And by the time he'd finished praying for Henry Guinness, the devil had left him in confusion. The devil just wanted to make him miserable, but instead of that, he was stirring up a lot of prayer for China. If you're tempted, just you say, Lord bless the team down in Chile at the moment, give them great opportunity in the ministers meetings and the public meetings.

And by the time you're finished praying, the devil won't know what to do. He doesn't want you to pray for Chile or anywhere else. Therefore, if you learn not to pray about your temptation, but to simply say no and say, I'm going to pray about something else.

This is one of the best ways to resist. The writer of the epistle of James says, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without scolding. God won't say, look at you again.

No, no, he won't scold you. He'll give you generously if you need wisdom and he'll help you. Sometimes I miss the old hymns.

And if you remember the one, yield not to temptation or yielding a sin, each victory will help you some other to win. Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue. Look ever to Jesus.

He will carry you through. And the chorus, ask the Savior to help you, comfort, strengthen and keep you. He is willing to aid you.

He will carry you through. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the man who doubts is like a wave of the sea that's driven and tossed by the wind.

That person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord. Now we talked about this problem of temptation, but there's something that must be stressed. That is, you know there's a reward for enduring temptation? A present reward and a future reward.

The present reward is happiness. When a child of God finally says no to Satan, and when the tempter departs, his heart's not left in a vacuum. It's flooded with love, joy, and peace.

It says, blessed, the word in Greek is makarios, happy is the man who endures temptation. You may ask the question, well then is it possible to get victory over temptation? Oh yes. I'm not thinking of any sinless perfection, but I'd say it's a common experience when you resist the devil and say no, no, no, no, no again, he gets tired of tempting you in that point.

He may watch for an opportunity when you're weak, but he's much more likely to switch to some other kind of attack. Maybe I could give a personal testimony. I told you I'm Irish by birth and upbringing.

What are the Irish noted for? Two things. Good humor, bad temper. Irish people are quite tempered, there's no doubt about that.

I had both. In my teenage days I had a surly bad temper. I used to lose my temper in the office and some of the girls would say, look at the Christian now, temper, temper, temper.

I'd say it's not temper, it's righteous indignation. I thought it was bad temper. It was one of the things I had to deal with.

Yes, I had a bad temper, all right. I remember trying to commit suicide at the age of 11. You might say that was very young to contemplate self-destruction.

Yes, but mother had thrashed me. My father died when I was 10 and mother tried to be father and mother. She thrashed me and I thought, I'm not appreciated around here.

I'll throw myself in the river. It was over some trivial little affair. Mother thrashed me for taking two pennies out of her purse and buying a box of matches and trying to set fire to two other boys.

So I decided I was going to commit suicide. In my imagination I could see the headline in the paper, boys, body, found in river, home difficulties. I thought they won't treat me like that again.

So I went down to the river to commit suicide, but the water was too cold. Back in the Middle West I've told people, I've heard of some folk who have jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to end it all. But I have never heard of anyone committing suicide at Duluth in Lake Superior.

The temperature of the water there in July is 34 degrees Fahrenheit, but it discourages suicide. So I didn't commit suicide after all. Well, that's obvious.

But I had a bad temper and I had to learn it wasn't righteous indignation. If you're in the right, you don't need to lose your temper. If you're in the wrong, you can't afford to lose your temper.

But I got victory over that. I remember at the age of 21 when I made a total commitment in my life to the Lord. Romans 12 and 1, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service.

That issue of my bad temper came up and I decided that I was going to commit this to God. Before that I'd made New Year's resolutions, but they never worked. Sometimes you can keep your temper until January the 6th, but by January the 12th it's pretty hard.

And then you say, what's the use? You say, well, doesn't this sound a bit like sinless perfection? No. It became a habit. I've been married nearly 50 years now.

I think my wife is coming to the third service. I don't mind if you ask her, but the Lord gave me victory. But a month after I got the victory, way back in those days when I was 21, I kept my temper for a month.

I began to congratulate myself and brag about it. Then the Lord said to me, now you're proud and that's worse. The devil had switched his ground, was attacking me some other way.

I learned a lesson from cycling. Any of you remember when you got your first bike? I didn't get my first bicycle until I was 17. Our family was so poor.

Well, if it had been the 1950s instead of the 1920s, I would have said we were so poor we could have been adopted by a Korean family. Of course, the Koreans are quite prosperous today, but they were poor in the 50s. But we were so poor I didn't get a bicycle until I was 17.

I was ashamed to let the little kids seeing me learn to ride, so I wheeled it out of the city, out into the country. I chose a lane with a nice soft mossy bank where I could fall easily. I hesitated a long time, then I pushed off.

I was told all you need to do is to steer and pedal. But when I pedaled, I forgot to steer and I ran into a tree. When I steered, I forgot to pedal and I fell down.

But I didn't lie on the ground, I got up and got on again. And that's the lesson regarding temptation. You can get victory over these habits that pull you down.

I wonder how many of you remember Dr. Henrietta Mears, that great Sunday school teacher who had the biggest Sunday school in the world at Presbyterian Church? She and I were talking about a mutual friend who had a lot of temptation with the opposite sex. I remember I spoke to this friend of mine pretty bluntly, and I said, I've never known of anyone who risks so much for so little. He got angry and he said, you don't have the temptations that I have.

I said, what do you mean, you mean I'm not red blooded? I said to Ms. Mears, why did he say that? She said, poor boy, you see, he hasn't made up his mind yet. When he's tempted, he doesn't know whether he's going to say yes or no. So it's always a fight, always a struggle.

She said, in your case, you've learned to say no, and your disposition will change. The battle never ends, but perhaps that particular temptation ceases to be a temptation anymore. Quite frankly, I would find it difficult to work up that temper now.

I couldn't say that when I was a teenager. I'd fly off the handle at the slightest provocation. But it doesn't mean I'm not without temptation.

After I learned to ride a bicycle, I had to learn to drive a car. When the fellow who taught me to drive said, now you're on your own, I had a strange feeling I was going to end up in the ditch. That prophecy was fulfilled.

But I never think of driving in a ditch today. Never occurs to me even. But I can't fly a plane yet.

And so it goes on. Says, when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those that love him. Now quite frankly, I don't know what the crown of life is.

I don't know any Bible scholar who knows what the crown of life is. The scripture seems to teach that there'll be degrees of reward in heaven, but it doesn't specify what this means. In other words, if you resist temptation, not only are you going to be happy now, but you're going to receive a special prize in the future.

Those of you who have children, have you ever watched their faces on Christmas morning? I still remember my older boy, my older boy is an engineer up in Seattle. He was in charge of the installation of the Alaska pipeline. He loves his work.

But I knew he wanted an electric train. And I didn't tell him I was going to get him that. That was his desire.

But this particular Sunday morning, after the kids were in bed, I laid the whole thing out on rails and had it ready just to pull the switch. He was speechless when he saw it. He said, am I a lucky boy? I had a lot of fun with that train.

I enjoyed it too. But it says he will receive the crown of life. He asked me, what are you going to give me for Christmas? I said, never you mind, you'll be a surprised.

He was surprised all right. The Lord has said, if you learn to resist temptation, I've got a prize for you. He calls it the crown of life.

Now there's a connection between living a victorious life and this problem of temptation. Without the problem of temptation, there wouldn't be a victorious life. So what does it matter if the fire is hot, or the tongs nip, or the hammer hurts, the anvil is hard? God allows these things to shape us.

I'm not going to argue with anyone as to what holiness really means. But I'll state my own definition very simply. I wrote it down.

I believe that the gracious purpose of God to make us in this life more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. We know we'll fall short of his record, but his grace is sufficient for us, because God is working out his purposes in our lives in spite of and because of our temptations.

God can solve your problem. So all I can ask is, do you face temptation? What is your most recurring temptation? Well, look for it along the lines of things you like, the lines of your own desire. But make quite sure that the next time the devil shoots a fiery dart into your mind, smother it, and perhaps learn to pray about something else.

This has been a practical sort of talk. I hope it'll be help to someone. Let us all pray.

We love you, Lord. We thank you for our salvation. We did nothing to deserve it.

Lord, we want to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ, even before we get to heaven. Help us to recognize that it's not a sin to be tempted, but it is sin to yield to temptation. Help us, Lord, to look for temptation occurring along the lines of our greatest desires.

Help us to smother the wrong thoughts that bother us, to nip temptation in the bud. Then help us, Lord, to get victory over these things, that we may be more Christian in our ways, and better able to serve thee among those whose temptations seem to be so much worse. Lord, grant that every one of us may be able to get a victory for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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