

# Temptations--Evil Thoughts

by John Newton

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*The Christian life is marked by temptations, but Christians can overcome them by living a life of dependence on God and trusting in His promises.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:17, Isaiah 40:31, Romans 8:37, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 4:13, James 4:7

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Gods Grace"

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## Description

John Newton preaches about enduring temptations and trials, likening them to the wind that changes direction but ultimately subsides. He encourages the listener to trust in the Lord as the infallible Pilot who will guide them safely through the storms of life. Newton emphasizes the importance of depending solely on God's grace and not on one's own strength, highlighting the ongoing battle against sin and the need for humility and reliance on Jesus for victory.

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## Transcript

June- 1777.

My Dear Madam,

Temptations may be compared to the wind, which, when it has ceased raging from one point, after a short calm, frequently renews its violence from another quarter. The Lord silenced Satan's former assaults against you, but he is permitted to try you again in another way. Be of good courage, Madam: wait upon the Lord, and the present storm shall likewise subside in good time. You have an infallible Pilot, and are embarked in a bottom against which the winds and waves cannot prevail; you may be tossed about, and think yourself in apparent jeopardy, but sink you shall not, except the promises and faithfulness of God can fail.

Upon an attentive consideration of your complaint, it seems to me to amount only to this, that though the Lord has done great things for you, He has not yet brought you to a state of dependence on Himself, nor released you from that impossibility, which all His people feel, of doing anything without Him. And is this indeed a matter of complaint? Is it not every way better, more for His glory, and more suited to keep us mindful of our obligations to Him, and in the event more for our safety, that we should be reduced to a happy necessity of receiving daily out of His fulness (as the Israelites received the manna) than to be set up with something of a stock of wisdom, power, and goodness of our own?

Adam was thus furnished at the beginning with strength to stand; yet, mutability being essential to a creature, he quickly fell and lost all. We, who are by nature sinners, are not left to so hazardous an experiment. He has Himself engaged to keep us, and treasured up all fulness of grace for our support, in a Head who cannot fail. Our gracious Saviour will communicate all needful supplies to His members, yet in such a manner that they shall feel their need and weakness, and have nothing to boast of from first to last, but His wisdom, compassion, and care.

We are in no worse circumstances than the apostle Paul, who, though eminent and exemplary in the Christian life, found, and freely confessed, that he had no sufficiency in himself to think a good thought. Nor did he wish it otherwise; he even gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Unbelief, and a thousand evils, are still in our hearts: though their reign and dominion is at an end, they are not slain or eradicated; their effects will be felt more or less sensibly, as the Lord is pleased more or less to afford or abate His gracious influence.

When they are kept down, we are no better in ourselves, for they are not kept down by us; but we are very prone to think better of ourselves at such a time, and therefore He is pleased to permit us at seasons to feel a difference, that we may never forget how weak and how vile we are. We cannot absolutely conquer these evils, but it becomes us to be humbled for them; and we are to fight, and strive, and pray against them. Our great duty is to be at His footstool, and to cry to Him who has promised to perform all things for us.

Why are we called soldiers, but because we are called to a warfare? And how could we fight, if there were no enemies to resist? The Lord's soldiers are not merely for show, to make an empty parade in a uniform, and to brandish their arms when none but friends and spectators are around them. No, we must stand upon the field of battle; we must face the fiery darts; we must wrestle (which is the closest and most arduous kind of fighting) with our foes; nor can we well expect wholly to escape wounds: but the leaves of the tree of life are provided for their healing. The Captain of our salvation is at hand, and leads us on with an assurance, which might make even a coward bold—that in the end we shall be more than conquerors through Him who has loved us.

I am ready to think that some of the sentiments in your letters are not properly yours, such as you yourself have derived from the Scriptures, but rather borrowed from authors or preachers, whose judgments your humility has led you to prefer to your own. At least I am sure the Scripture does not authorize the conclusion which distresses you, that if you were a child of God you should not feel such changes and oppositions. Were I to define a Christian, or rather to describe him at large, I know no text I would choose sooner as a ground for the subject than Gal. v. 17. A Christian has noble aims, which distinguish him from the bulk of mankind. His leading principles, motives, and desires, are all supernatural and divine. Could he do as he would, there is not a spirit before the throne should excel him in holiness, love, and obedience. He would tread in the very footsteps of his Saviour, fill up every moment in His service, and employ every breath in His praise. This he would do, but alas! he cannot. Against this desire of the spirit, there is a contrary desire and working of a corrupt nature, which meets him at every turn. He has a beautiful copy set before him: he is enamoured with it, and though he does not expect to equal it, he writes carefully after it, and longs to attain to the nearest possible imitation. But indwelling sin and Satan continually jog his hand and spoil his strokes. You cannot, Madam, form a right judgment of yourself, except you make due allowance for those things which are not peculiar to yourself, but common to all who have spiritual perception and are indeed the inseparable appendages of this mortal state. If it were not so, why should the most spiritual and gracious people be so ready to confess themselves vile and worthless? One

eminent branch of our holiness is a sense of shame and humiliation for those evils which are only known to ourselves, and to Him who searches our hearts, joined with an acquiescence in Jesus who is appointed of God-wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I will venture to assure you, that though you will possess a more stable peace, in proportion as the Lord enables you to live more simply upon the blood, righteousness, and grace of the Mediator, you will never grow into a better opinion of yourself than you have at present. The nearer you are brought to Him, the quicker sense you will have of your continual need of Him, and thereby your admiration of His power, love, and compassion will increase likewise from year to year.

I would observe farther, that our spiritual exercises are not a little influenced by our constitutional temperament. As you are only an ideal correspondent, I can but conjecture about you upon this head. If your frame is delicate, and your nervous system very sensible and tender, I should probably ascribe some of your apprehensions to this cause. It is an abstruse subject, and I will not enter into it; but according to the observations I have made, persons of this habit seem to live more upon the confines of the invisible world, if I may so speak, and to be more susceptible of impressions from it, than others. That complaint which, for want of a better name, we call lowness of spirits, may probably afford the enemy some peculiar advantages and occasions of distressing you. The mind then perceives objects as through a tintured medium, which gives them a dark and discouraging appearance; and I believe Satan has more influence and address than we are aware of in managing the glass. And when this is not the case at all times, it may be so occasionally, from sickness, or other circumstances. You tell me that you have lately been ill, which, together with your present situation, and the prospect of your approaching hour, may probably have such an effect as I have hinted. You may be charging yourself with guilt for what springs from indisposition, in which you are merely passive, and which may be no more properly sinful than the headache or any of the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to. The enemy can take no advantage but what the Lord permits him; and He will permit him none but what He designs to overrule for your greater advantage in the end. He delights in your prosperity; and you should not be in heaviness for an hour, were there not a need-be for it. Notwithstanding your fears, I have a good hope, that He who you say has helped you in six troubles, will appear for you in the seventh; that you will not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord, and come forth to testify to His praise, that He has turned your mourning into joy.

I am, &c.

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