

(Basics) 24. More Reasons for Failure

by Zac Poonen

To overcome sin, we need to recognize our weakness, pray to God for help, and have an attitude of mind that says, 'I would rather suffer than enjoy the pleasure of sin, even for a moment.'

Duration: 13:13

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:7, Hebrews 4:15

Topics: "Overcoming Sin", "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the reasons why many people fall into sin. The first reason is that they don't run away from temptation and instead expose themselves to it. The second reason is that they don't cry out for help when faced with temptation. The third reason is that they don't arm themselves with a mindset to suffer in the flesh like Jesus did, as suffering in the flesh helps us to overcome sin. The speaker emphasizes the importance of pressing on in our Christian lives and not becoming complacent with our progress. He encourages fleeing from temptation and pursuing righteousness and godliness. The sermon references verses such as 1 Peter 4:1-2, Philippians 3:13-14, and various exhortations to flee from sin in the Bible.

Transcript

And we're going to consider today a continuation of our study as to how we can overcome sin, our biggest problem in all of our lives. We saw two reasons why many Christians don't grow in their Christian life, grow to overcome sinful habits. One is a lack of the fear of God and the other is a lack of faith.

See, faith is a personal thing. To believe that Jesus can keep people from falling, that is a fact, an intellectual fact, which even the devil believes. But to personally believe that Jesus can keep you from falling when you are tempted, that is a quality of your heart that can bring you victory.

But that can come only if you have taken the first step of believing what the Bible describes as the seriousness of sin. And when you believe that, then you will long to be free from this wretched disease. So faith is a very important factor.

Now a third reason why people keep falling into sin is because they have not understood that their own flesh, their own human personality and their human being that they are, their human strength, is totally impotent to do the will of God. We, in our own strength, can never, never, never overcome sin. Any amount of determination, any amount of self-discipline, anything you like, you can do.

But you cannot overcome sin because sin is so deeply rooted in our nature. It's like trying to train a pig to be clean. What chance is there of success? Maybe by whipping and beating and offering it rewards, you can try and get a pig to be clean for a little while, but leave it alone sometime and it reverts back to its original nature.

That's how it is. This type of overcoming through self-effort is not victory at all. It's just personal self-discipline, a good thing.

But that's not what God offers us. No. We need to recognize the weakness of our flesh, our own weakness.

And if you realize this, there will be two things that you will do. First of all, you'll run away from temptation. You will not expose yourself to danger.

Who are the people who expose themselves to temptation? Those who don't feel their weakness. One who feels his weakness will run away. And that's what the Bible says we should do.

Flee from youthful lusts. Flee from immorality, the Bible says. 2 Timothy 2, we read that Paul told even a godly man like Timothy to flee from youthful lusts, to flee from the love of money, to flee from idolatry, to flee from immorality.

We read all these exhortations in 1 Timothy 6, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Corinthians 10, 2 Timothy 2. Flee, flee, flee, flee, to run away. Why do we run away? Because we realize we're weak. And we can overcome many sins if we just obey that exhortation to run away.

The second thing that a person who recognizes the weakness of his flesh will do is he will pray to God earnestly for help. You see, prayer is a sign of weakness. When do people usually pray? Even worldly people, when they're in real trouble, when nobody else can help them.

And one of the things that Jesus taught us to pray is lead us not into temptation. Why do we pray that prayer? Because we're convinced that our flesh is weak. One would think that someone like Timothy, who had advanced in the Christian life so much, was not in danger of youthful lusts.

But even he needed to run away. Now, if we realize our weakness, we will not only want to run away from temptation, but we will also pray, O my Lord, please help me, give me strength to overcome this weakness. Just like we need to see the seriousness of sin, we also need to see the weakness of our flesh.

One of the wonderful things, truths in scripture, we read in Hebrews 4.15, is that Jesus Christ was tempted in all points as we are. He did not live on earth without being tempted. In Matthew chapter 4, we're given a very clear description of how he was tempted, at least in three areas.

But in Hebrews 4.15, we are told he was tempted in all areas, just like us, but he never sinned. How is it he never sinned? Was it because he automatically could not sin? Well, we don't want to probe into the nature of Jesus as much about his inner nature that we cannot understand. As much about our own inner nature we can't understand.

Psychologists try so much, and they still don't know everything about the human personality. It's impossible to try and gauge what went on within Jesus, and we don't even want to attempt it. But one thing we know.

Jesus prayed. Why did he have to pray? You know, the stronger we feel within ourselves, the less we pray. The more capable we think we are, the less we pray.

He's the one who realizes his helpless dependence upon the Father for everything, for wisdom, for strength, for guidance. That's the one who prays. The one who feels, yeah, well, I can handle all that myself, I don't need God's help.

I can sort out and I can gauge the relative importance of things and take a decision. He doesn't pray. But Jesus prayed.

He prayed all night once before he chose his twelve apostles. He didn't want to make a mistake. Now, these things indicate that Jesus received strength from the Father through prayer.

And we don't receive it because we don't pray as much, or we don't pray as earnestly. We're told in Hebrews chapter 5 that Jesus prayed with strong crying and tears. Imagine that.

Can you picture that in your mind? Of Jesus Christ, the perfect man who walked on this earth, praying with strong crying and tears. When was the last time you prayed with strong crying and tears? Why a difference? Don't you think you and I need to pray much more than Jesus needed to? He had lived in the presence of the Father from all eternity. He did not have a sinful nature like you and I have.

And yet he prayed. How much more we need to pray? See, true humility is to recognize the weakness of our flesh. All of us are weak, but not all of us are equally conscious of our weakness.

The one who is conscious of his weakness will run away from danger when he sees it, and he will cry out for help. So this is the third reason why many people fall. They don't run away from temptation.

They foolishly expose themselves to temptation, and they don't cry out for help. Let me give you a fourth reason why many people fall into sin. In 1 Peter 4, verses 1 and 2, it says we must arm ourselves with a mind to suffer in the flesh, like Jesus suffered in the flesh.

Because if we suffer in the flesh, we cease from sin, it says. Now, that's not a verse easy to understand. It's not talking about bodily suffering, because people who suffer bodily don't finish with sin.

We know that. Otherwise the hospitals would be full of people who finish with sin. So it's obviously not referring to bodily suffering.

What does it mean when it says, as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourself with the same mind, 1 Peter 4, verses 1 and 2, because he who suffers in the flesh ceases from sin, so that he can do the will of God. It's referring to an attitude of mind where we would rather suffer in self-denial rather than get the least pleasure out of even a single sinful thought. See, when we are tempted, all of us, we have the opportunity either to indulge it and get some pleasure out of it, or to resist it and reject it, and that causes a certain suffering.

That's the suffering that's mentioned here. And he says, before you are tempted, you must be armed for the conflict. In other words, you must be armed with this attitude of mind, which says, I would rather suffer than enjoy the pleasure of sin, even for a moment.

It says about Jesus, he was obedient unto death, even unto death, which means that Jesus' attitude was he would rather die than sin. Now, that's quite a radical attitude. I would rather die than disobey my father

in the smallest little thing.

That's the meaning of Philippians 2, verse 8. He was obedient even unto death. He calls us to follow in his footsteps, to be willing to suffer rather than displease God. A fifth reason why many Christians do not progress spiritually and fall is because they are not seeking to press on to perfection.

They are satisfied with the progress that they have made thus far. And if you become satisfied with second standard, you'll never get to the third standard. That's for certain.

Because you feel you're better than all the others who are in the first standard and the kindergarten. But if you are determined to press on and say, well, I've overcome something but I'm going to get something more. I want to press towards the mark.

Paul said in Philippians 3, 13 and 14, One thing I do, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. That is the goal of becoming like Jesus totally in every part of our personality. What is the result of Paul having this attitude? It not only kept him from stagnating in the Christian life, it also kept him from sin.

Paul told Timothy, not only to flee from temptation, but also to pursue after righteousness and godliness and love and gentleness. Any point in our Christian life where we get satisfied with our progress is a danger point. That's the time we're going to fall into sin.

And that's where we need to ask ourselves, Am I progressing? Am I longing to become like Jesus in every area? Am I mourning every time I see something in my life that's un-Christlike? Do I cry out to God or say, Lord, I have failed? Begin today, my friend, to mourn every time you see something un-Christlike in your life. To cry out to God for help and see if your life doesn't change from this very day.

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