

A CHRISTIAN'S
APPROACH TO...

by Cougan Collins

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Table of Contents

A Christian's Approach to...

Temptation	3
Disappointment	10
self-Confidence	16
Worldly Success	23
Guilt	32
selfishness	38
Leisure	45
Grief	52
Envy & Jealousy	60
Disgrace	68
Fear	76
Fading Faith	84
Forgiveness	92

Introduction

Becoming a Christian is one of the easiest things we can do. The real challenge is learning to live a faithful life to God. This is why the New Testament is full of warnings and encouraging words to help motivate us to endure and live righteously. Let us never forget the sobering words of Jesus, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13)

While the road that leads to eternal life in heaven is a difficult one that few will find, it is a journey that is worth it. These 13 lessons will help you learn how to handle some of the common problems that Christians will face. Our hope is that these lessons will help motivate and prepare you to live the life of a Christian so that you can be part of the few who will make it to that narrow gate that leads to eternity in heaven. These lessons will also help you become more confident of your salvation and the wonderful home that awaits you in heaven.

Temptation

If I offered you a brand new car in exchange for slapping someone of my choosing in the face as hard as you can, would you do it? Temptations like these can be hard to resist, but just think of the consequences you would face if I had named your mother, wife, or child.

Every Christian needs to learn how to handle temptation. Otherwise, we will find ourselves in the same boat as the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). We all have weaknesses, but whatever our temptations are, the Bible equips us with ammunition we need to overcome them.

James tells us a lot about temptation in just three verses. Read James 1:13-15.

First, God is never going to tempt us, so we cannot blame Him when we fall (1 Corinthians 10:13). Instead, He provides a way of escape from our temptations, but we must look for it. Sometimes our temptations cause us to have tunnel vision, which prevents us from seeing the way of escape. If we ever hope to overcome our temptations, we must learn to correct our tunnel vision by looking for the escape route God provides.

Second, James tells us exactly what temptation is: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (James 1:14)

Fishing illustrates what James is describing. Fishing requires us to find a lure the fish desires so we can get its attention. Reeling in the lure tempts the fish to chase after it. When he gives in to the temptation he will be hooked.

Satan uses this same technique. He keeps trying new lures until he finds one that gets our attention. Once he has our attention, he hopes we will get tunnel vision, bite down on the lure, and get caught in his snare. This brings us to the third thing that we learn from James: "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." (James 1:15)

Temptation itself is not a sin. It only becomes sin when we take the bait, which is why James says, "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." Satan wants us to remain in our sin, but we do not have to. Like fishing, we are on a catch and release program. Once the devil has us in his boat, if we repent of our sins, he has to let us go. But that will not stop him from trying to catch us again.

Satan is to blame for our temptations. After all, he is called the tempter (Matthew 4:3), and is seeking to devour us like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He is extremely sneaky and good at tempting the most faithful people because his lures are always subtle and can appear to be something good (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Satan can only take advantage of us if we are ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). The more knowledge we gain about him and his methods, the more prepared we will be at resisting him and finding the escape route God provides. John tells us that the methods of Satan are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Satan is called the god and ruler of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31), and he uses these three temptations mentioned by John. It our choice whether we fall for them because he does not have the power to force us to sin against our free-will.

For example, Satan used all three of these devices on Eve (Genesis 3). The lust of the flesh was her desire to taste the fruit. The lust of the eyes was her desire to look at the beauty of the fruit. The pride of life was her desire to have the knowledge of God.

His devices worked on Eve, but not on Jesus even though He was at His weakest (Matthew 4:1-10). He used the lust of the flesh when he tried to get Jesus to turn stones into bread so He could eat and be satisfied. Satan used the pride of life by tempting Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple so He might show how important He was by the angels coming to His rescue. Finally, Satan used the lust of the eyes as he showed Jesus all the kingdoms and offered them to Him if He would simply worship him.

Of course, Satan failed even though he used everything the world had to offer. Jesus defeated Satan by using the Word of God, and we can do the same (Ephesians 6:11-18). The more we put the Word of God in our hearts, pray for help with our temptations (18), and continue to be watchful, the easier it will be for us to avoid taking the bait of the devil, which leads to sin.

Knowing that God is with us at all times will also help us to deal with our temptations. We have already seen how God provides us an escape route (1 Corinthians 10:13), but consider the following verses as well: Hebrews 2:17; 4:15-16; 2 Peter 2:9.

Jesus faced the devil and won. He knows how difficult temptations are, and He is there to help us. He will make sure we have the help we need to avoid sin, but we must pay attention to the escape route He provides. Also, we can take confidence in knowing that if we resist the devil, and remain steadfast in the faith, he must

flee (James 4:7). Let us never forget to use the power of prayer to help us with our temptations (Matthew 6:13; 26:41).

We should never fear our temptations. Instead, we should use them as opportunities to increase our faith. The better we get at resisting our temptations today, the easier it will be to resist the temptations of tomorrow. James teaches that we can use them to make our faith stronger (James 1:2, 12).

Seeing how others handle their temptation can help us overcome our temptations as well (1 Peter 5:9). When we see others resisting the temptations that easily ensnare us, it shows us that we can resist them as well. It also helps to see how others dealt with their temptations in the Bible.

Our first example is when Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph.

Read Genesis 39:7-12.

Joseph could have allowed this temptation to get the best of him, but he did not. He knew it was wrong and that it would cause him to sin against God and his master. So, he did the right thing and ran away from this situation.

It is a good idea to run away from our temptations as well. If we keep our temptations out of our reach, it will help keep us from indulging in them. This is a simple rule that will serve us well. For example, if we hang around people who are doing sinful things, we need to stop hanging around them. If we are tempted to look at pornography on the computer, then we might need to get rid of it or at least install software that will not allow pornographic sites to be visited. The list could continue, but the main point is to make it as difficult as possible for our temptations to pull us in and cause us to sin.

Our second example is about David and how he allowed his temptation to overcome him.

Read 2 Samuel 11:2-5.

Satan used all three of his tactics against David. He used the lust of the eyes by using David and his desire to look at Bathsheba as she was bathing. He used the lust of the flesh by using his desire to lie with her. He used the pride of life to appeal to his power as a king and his ability to have whatever he wants in his kingdom. Unfortunately, Satan won this battle with David. He would have done well to listen to own advice (Psalm 101:3-4).

Since David indulged in his temptation, not only did he break up a marriage and end the life of an innocent man, his sin caused his child to die (2 Samuel 12:14). Though David did not overcome his temptation, he only lost the battle against the devil and not the war. When David repented and asked God for forgiveness, He gave it to him. However, he still had to face the consequences of his sins (2 Samuel 12:15-18).

We must carefully consider how indulging in our temptations will affect others and ourselves. When we do, it should make our temptations less appealing. Also, when we read about the consequences others had when they indulged in their sins, it will help remind us how urgent it is for us to resist our temptations so the devil will stop winning battles in our life.

Application

If we are going to step up to the challenge of overcoming our temptations, we need to put on the whole armor of God. Doing so will help us learn the tactics of our adversary the devil and be able to avoid his snare. We must surround ourselves with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The company we keep makes a difference. When we attend church services regularly and join in activities with like-minded brethren, it will encourage and give us the strength to deal with our temptations.

We must also learn to plan ahead so that we can avoid temptation. This is a simple rule but an effective one. For example, if we are dating, we need to avoid being alone with our date for any length of time because fornication may occur. If drunkenness is our problem, we need to avoid hanging around those that are drinking and avoid going to places where alcohol is sold. Sometimes temptations will corner us without warning, which is why we must determine beforehand that no matter how strong the temptation is, we are going to find the escape route even if it means running away from it.

Questions

1. Discuss what common temptations teenagers have and what they can do to avoid them.
2. Discuss what common temptations younger married couples have and what they can do to avoid them.
3. Discuss what common temptations older people have and what they can do to avoid them.

4. Since we can be forgiven for yielding to our temptations, why should we fight our temptations?
5. Since being tempted is not a sin, why not enjoy our temptations without indulging in them?