
WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"

HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION

(SESSION ONE)

PURPOSE: BY THE END OF THIS STUDY, MY YOUTH SHOULD HAVE A STRATEGY AND THE MOTIVATION TO CONSISTENTLY RESIST TEMPTATION.

Teaching Tip

I've included enough material here for several lessons. Resist the temptation to cover too much at one time. Of the 15 major points, you may want to average only about 3 per session.

Develop your own introductions and conclusions. Apply the principles to your own temptations and use personal illustrations when appropriate. Reflect deeply upon the experiences of your life, and the temptations resisted or fallen to by your acquaintances. Think of public figures your youth would have interest in.

Pray about which points need special emphasis for your group. You may want to develop these points further, or plan discussions or activities to drive those points home.

Lawrence Wright, pp. 47-87.)

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: *He aspired to evangelize the whole world, and at 53 years of age, he seemed well on his way. His vast ministry included Christian schools, a mega congregation, a printing plant for his materials, a weekly telecast viewed in 146 countries, and the monetary support of numerous foreign ministries.*

And people believed in him, entrusting his ministry with nearly ½ million dollars per day sent by over 25,000 people each week in 1986. But he failed to control his appetites, risking his entire ministry by compromising himself with a prostitute. Finally, he was exposed and brought to ruin. (Saints and Sinners,

Imagine the power of a temptation that leads a person to risk everything he loves—wife, family, and life's work. But according to the Bible, temptation is "common to man". Temptation urges us, sometimes daily, to risk the things most

dear to us for the passing pleasures of sin. The stakes are high for each of us. Let's search the Scriptures for a strategy to win this war that so many lose.*

I. PREPARE FOR TEMPTATION BEFORE IT STRIKES

If more people concentrated on eating right and exercising (preventative medicine) they wouldn't have to spend some much time at the doctor's office. So the first part of our strategy is to prepare for temptation, before it strikes.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: *To make this series intensely practical for us, let's begin by targeting a few of our most difficult temptations. Here are some ideas: overeating, desiring too many things, theft, lust, cheating (one survey found 76% of America's top students, grades 11-12, admitting to cheating on tests and homework), pride, anger, laziness, rebellion against parents, drugs, alcohol, pornography. Don't write them down! I just want you to begin this series with a goal in mind. Silently pray that God will give you the power and insight you need to win the battle. (After they have a moment to pray, have a youth close in prayer, asking God to touch lives through these lessons.)*

A. JOIN THE WINNING TEAM (JN. 8:34-36)

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

ILLUSTRATION: *Stan had professed personal faith in Christ at a local church. But he couldn't defeat his problem with alcohol. One day a neighbor asked him, “When you accepted Christ, which Jesus did you believe in?” He went on to explain that many people believe in a purely human Jesus, stripped of His deity. Stan, though half drunk, realized that he had merely accepted Jesus as a good man, to be his moral example. When he finally received Jesus as the Son of God, who lives today and wants to change our lives from within, Stan was set free from alcohol. (Classic Christianity, Bob George, pp. 41-45)*

Some people fall to temptation because they don't have Christ within to fight the battles for them. Remember, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”(I Jn. 5:19) The first step to victory is to escape the dominion of the evil one by inviting Christ into our lives. (Jn. 3:16; Jn. 1:12; Eph. 2:8,9) Have you taken this first step?

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B. DISCOVER AND DWELL ON YOUR NEW IDENTITY

***ILLUSTRATION:** Before salvation, Satan controlled us like puppets on his strings. At salvation, Jesus came and cut the power of the strings. But sometimes, not realizing fully that the strings have been cut, we continue to respond to the orders of our old master. And if we picture ourselves as dirty sinners, disgusting in the sight of a stern God, we may find difficulty serving freely, from the heart.*

ACTIVITY: WHO ARE YOU?

Most Christians seem to understand very little about their new identity. (Before the session, write each of these references on separate sheets of paper. Also, purchase enough note cards for each student to have a couple.) I'm handing out verses for each of you to read to the group. After each verse is read, I'd like different group members to tell me what the verse tells us about our new identity, and how reflecting on it could help us in our struggles against sin.

I'm also handing out blank note cards for you to fill out as your "New Birth Certificate" during the discussion. Simply write the reference to each verse, and beside it a summary word or phrase telling who you are in Christ.

Example: Jn. 1:12 - I am God's child.

** I AM ACCEPTED! Jn. 1:12; 15:15, Rom 5:1, I Cor. 6:17,19-20; 12:27, Eph. 1:1,5; 2:18, Col. 1:14; 2:10.*

** I AM SECURE! Rom. 8:1-2, 28, 31-34, 35-39, II Cor. 1:21-22, Col. 3:3, Phil. 1:6, 3:20, II Tim. 1:7, Heb. 4:16, I Jn. 5:18.*

** I AM SIGNIFICANT! Mt. 5:13-14, Jn 15:1,5,16, Acts 1:8, I Cor. 3:16, II Cor. 5:17-21; 6:1, Eph. 2:6,10; 3:12, Phil. 4:13.*

Students may wish to copy the main thought of each verse onto a card to reflect on each morning. (Or, leaders could type up and print off such a card before the session.)

**Verses and points from "Living Free in Christ," by Neil Anderson.*

Many Christians testify that "the more you affirm who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will begin to reflect your true identity." (Neil Anderson, Victory Over Darkness) Encourage yourself with these marvelous truths!

C. KEEP UP YOUR GUARD! (I COR. 10:12)

Paul warned: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” Don’t ever think you are invincible. “It could never happen to me” is an attitude that leaves you in grave danger.

I COR. 10:12

Whenever you see a therefore, ask yourself what it is there for! In this passage, the former context (vss. 1-11), is significant. Make sure to study this context in order to better understand vs. 12.

Never say, “I’m too strong.” Sin led to the defeat of Samson, the strongest man in the world.

Never say, “I’m too wise.” Temptation led astray the heart of Solomon, the wisest man in the world.

Never say, “I’m too godly.” Temptation took down David, whom God’s Word called “a man after God’s own heart.”

Never say, “I’m too close to God.” Peter walked w/ Jesus for 3 years, then denied He even knew Him.

If it happened to these, it can happen to me. We must be alert, and search God’s Word for safeguards to keep us from falling.

ILLUSTRATION: One prominent pastor missed this principle. Someone asked, “If Satan gets to you one day, how will it be?” He replied that although he had many weaknesses, Satan would never take him in his moral life and sexuality. A few months later, the pastor fell. The very areas to which he felt invulnerable took him down.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction, you narrowed down some temptations that are trying to pull you down. Think through what we said tonight and jot down an action point or two. Have you been overconfident and left your guard down? Do you need to meditate and believe your incredible new identity in Christ? Or perhaps you’re not certain that you’ve joined the winning team by accepting Christ.

PRAY

SHARPENING YOUR AX
AUTHENTICITY: OPENING YOUR HEART
(Part 1)

Your life may well be your greatest asset, or liability, in teaching. Go ahead, wow them with an excellent presentation of “Dealing With Temptation.” But until they sense that you are in the middle of this battle with them, don’t expect them to take it too seriously. Of course, spending time with your students gives them the best opportunity to see your life, but a second way is through your teaching.

Don’t just open the Word. Open your life. Let them share the thrill of your victories, the agony of your defeats. Ideas:

Distinguish Appropriate From Inappropriate Sharing.

Authenticity doesn’t mean your life is an open book. Some chapters are between you and God. Your reputation is important. Qualified Church leaders must have a good reputation both inside and outside of the church. Total openness could harm anyone’s reputation. Attracted to a girl in your youth group? Don’t bring it up for prayer, even among your two key youth. The “Youth Gossip Network” is highly efficient. When her mom finds out, you may be looking for a new church. A good rule of thumb: don’t share anything you’d be uncomfortable with all the parents and staff knowing.

Other chapters are between you and your wife. Don’t share that family argument without the permission of your family. And don’t constantly tell funny stories that involve your kids if they would not appreciate it.

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY NO

(SESSION 2)

INTRODUCTION

PRAY

D. WATCH OUT FOR THE UNEXPECTED TEMPTATIONS

Last week we began a series entitled, “When It’s Hard To Say No”, all about learning to defeat the temptations that come our way. Most of us have been hounded over and over about certain temptations--drugs, for example. But God’s Word cautions us about other temptations that are more subtle, and for that reason sometimes more dangerous. Today I want to warn you about three of the most dangerous temptations you will ever face. And some of them may have never even crossed your mind.

PRAY

ILLUSTRATION: “Bobby Leach, an Englishman, startled the world by going over Niagara Falls in a barrel without suffering serious harm. Some years later he was walking down the street, slipped on an orange peeling, and was taken to the hospital with a badly fractured leg.” (Battle With Temptation, K. Morgan Edwards)

Here are some serious “orange peelings” that many stumble over:

1. PERSECUTION (John 16:1-3, II Timothy 3:12, cr. Acts 14:22)

“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.” (Jn. 16:1-3)

When persecution comes, Satan tempts many people to doubt God’s love and care for them. Those who equate ease of life with the seal of God’s love are setting themselves up for disillusionment and a spiritual fall.

ILLUSTRATION: Jill faithfully attended Church and weekday Bible study groups, until her mom died of cancer. She couldn’t reconcile God’s love with allowing such a

loss, and began to drift spiritually. Jill didn't fail the test of drugs or alcohol. She failed the test of handling adversity.

You need to seriously face something now in order to keep you from folding at those times when life seems to cave in. And for some of you, that time may be now. Listen carefully. God does many good things for us, but we don't determine God's love for us by how good our circumstances are going. The apostle Paul was often hungry, jailed, and beaten. But He was one of God's choice servants. Listen carefully. Faithful Christians sometimes lose girlfriends, can't find dates or friends, and lose precious family members to auto accidents and disease. And sometimes your circumstances will be worse *because* of your faith.

“So,” you ask, “If I can't always tell God's love and concern for me by my circumstances, than how can I keep from doubting it when the going gets tough? Think of it this way: a scoundrel of a God would have never sent His Son to die for us. The apostle Paul (remember: his life was no party!) put it this way, “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom. 5:8)

ILLUSTRATION: Under Communism, Christians had it rough. You could be an “A” student, but if you refused to join the atheistic Communist Party, your teachers might ridicule you and your principal might refuse to let you into college. Yet many of these youth joyfully stood their ground, knowing that persecution was often a price people paid for faith.

So, if you come to church solely because of warm Christian friendships, forgiveness, and the other benefits of Christianity, be warned. One day you will face the heat because of your Christianity. Jesus warned His followers in the first century, and I'm repeating His warning now: “*All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.*”

2. FALSE TEACHINGS (II Timothy 3:13; cr. Mark 13:21-23 and II Cor. 11:14,15).

“...for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Jesus and Paul warned us repeatedly about false apostles, deceivers who will try to lead us astray. If Satan can confuse our theology, moral corruption can easily follow.

ILLUSTRATION: Toni stood for Christ during her Junior and Senior years of high school. But in college, she fell to the intellectual attacks of her professors against Christianity.

Discussion: How can you prepare yourself to face false teachings and attacks on your faith, so that what happened to Toni won't happen to you? (After they have a chance to brainstorm, perhaps in small groups, make sure they have not missed any of these ideas: 1) Be strong in the Word. The best way to detect counterfeit money, is to become intensely familiar with the real thing. 2) Read some basic books that defend the faith. Where to start: Know Why You Believe, by Paul Little; More Than a Carpenter, by Josh McDowell. On basic Christian teachings: Know What You Believe, by Paul Little. 3) If one day you find yourself sitting under a brilliant Harvard grad who belittles you for your faith, remember that somewhere, another equally brilliant Harvard grad is *defending* the faith to another group of students.

3. THE DESIRE FOR RICHES (I Timothy 6:3-10, cr. Mt. 13:22)

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

ILLUSTRATION: Robin Leach, host and producer of the popular show, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”, referred to the American Dream as: “You work hard, and you are rewarded with \$ucce\$\$\$. You are entitled to spend it the way you want.” If Robin is right, then the American dream is a prelude to a nightmare.

(Teacher: Read the powerful Timothy passage carefully, expressively). What we have here is a root sin, from which many others spring. If you decide to go for riches, these problems come with it. It's a package deal.

BRAINSTORM! (Divide into small groups and appoint a secretary, if your group is large.)
 Tell the youth: “Most Americans, if they were honest, wouldn’t agree with the verse we just read. They think life’s problems would be solved if they could win a million dollar lottery. But let’s reconsider. What are some temptations and problems that come with wealth, particularly when people become possessed by it?”

If they miss some of these, you might want to share them.

- 1) *The temptation to want more. Once a very wealthy person was asked, “How much money would it take to satisfy you?” His answer? “Just a little bit more.”*
- 2) *To become obsessed with money. It becomes all important.*
- 3) *Money consumes all your time.*
- 4) *The temptation to spend too much on yourself.*
- 5) *The temptation to compromise in order to keep the lifestyle you have now gotten used to.*
- 6) *Problems relating to those who are jealous of your wealth.*
- 7) *Problems wondering who your real friends are.*

CONCLUSION

Remember Bobby Leach, the guy who survived Niagara Falls in a barrel, but got seriously injured slipping on an orange peel? We talked about three orange peels that often trip people up. What were they? Which one do you think will be your greatest threat? I’ll give you a moment of silence to write down a couple of Action Points that you think can help keep you from stumbling.

PRAY

SHARPENING YOUR AX
AUTHENTICITY: OPENING YOUR HEART
(Part 2)

Share Your Weaknesses.

When you begin working with youth, you instinctively want to impress them. “If they think I’m a sharp person, they will follow me.” True, but only to a certain extent. No one wants to follow a nerd. But many in your group will never acquire the body of a Greek god, the James Bond way with women, or a perfect SAT score. And many feel they are losers because of it. Even that successful athlete agonizes because he never meets his father’s expectations. Your popular cheerleader may privately agonize over her weight, dangerously teetering on the edge of *anorexia nervosa*.

Since most youth live in painful awareness of their shortcomings, they delight in knowing that you share some of their shortcomings, yet are still able to live an abundant life in Christ. I often share my real and perceived shortcomings from my teen years, like that fateful day in 7th grade P.E. when we were instructed to see how many pull-ups we could do. With all eyes upon me, giving it my all, I managed to hang on the bar without falling. Little, chubby Stevie gutted out exactly zero pull-ups. Most kids know how I felt. The vast majority are not the top athletes. Once they know I can identify, they want to listen to how I learned to handle my self-esteem, and how this experience led me to better diet and exercise. My struggles with academics (my poor memory made some classes very difficult), relationships (stood up the night of my first prom for another guy), and feelings of inadequacy are some of the most powerful tools I have for identifying with my students. In a very real sense, God shows strength through our weaknesses. Relish in them. Don’t hide them. With my strengths I command their respect. With my weakness I win their hearts.

Have you heard any speakers who were transparent? How did their openness affect their impact? I recently heard a man speaking on contentment. It was a good message, but I felt a little detached. After all, here was a handsome, good communicator at a very large, successful church. What did he know about contentment in difficult times? But then he answered my unvoiced question by sharing about he and his wife’s unsuccessful struggle to have children. I agonized with him as he related their love for children, and commitment to family. Yet, they fought bitterness when they saw God giving children freely to undeserving, negligent parents, while passing them by. It was as if he had reached out his hand, gripped my throat, and sat me on the edge of my seat. I stayed on the edge the rest of the service. David Ring effectively ministers out of the crippling effects of childhood polio, and the death of his mother. A Christian comedian relates by sharing his struggles with dyslexia and obesity. What weaknesses can you appropriately share with your youth?

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY NO

(SESSION 3)

INTRODUCTION

Every day, your classmates are falling for temptations that could ruin their lives. Some are already problem drinkers. Some are developing eating habits that may plague them the rest of their lives. And it's not just them. It's us. We all have our temptations that we struggle with.

Two weeks ago we began a series entitled, "When It's Hard To Say No", all about how to defeat temptation. We also tried to identify our own most tempting temptations, so that we could work on them as we learn. Tonight, think again of those temptations you face, and silently ask God for victory.

E. AVOID TEMPTING SITUATIONS (Proverbs 5:8; I Cor. 7:5).

"...do not go near the door of her house..."

According to the Center For Disease Control, most of the people (70%) who currently smoke would like to quit. In fact, many desperately want to quit. But it's tough when you're addicted. I wonder how many times they kick themselves, saying, "If only I had never taken that first puff!"

Tip: What are some situations you avoided growing up? What do you wish you had avoided?

The lesson these millions of smokers would like to tell us? "Don't try it; you might end up liking it. And once you like it, the temptation will be stronger. For us who are addicted, the temptation is almost insurmountable."

Some pastors have fallen for adultery with girls they were counseling. Because of this, one pastor decided to limit counseling members of the opposite sex to one session. If that isn't sufficient to solve her problem, he will refer her to someone else.

Do you easily fall for gluttony? Don't work at a candy store.

Tempted to go too far sexually on dates? Date only in groups. Or always plan specifically where you will go and what activities you will do on dates. Avoid just "spending time together" with nothing planned to do.

ACTIVITY: Write down some places, groups of people, or situations you will avoid in order to resist temptation.

F. REMOVE KNOWN SOURCES OF STUMBLING (MATTHEW 5:29,30).

Mt. 5:29,30

“Anything which helps seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life.” (Barclay)

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out...”

I doubt this passage should be taken literally, since my lusts would not be doused by poking out an eye. I could lust just as well with one eye as with two! Jesus’ point? If you must do something radical to avoid sin, do it!

One of Billy Graham’s former associates said that when Graham travels with his crusades, he routinely requests a hotel room without a television. Apparently, he knows that the temptation to watch the wrong things, or to watch it at all when he should be doing other things, is too great. According to one of his former associates, Graham came to his room one day and found a t.v. He called the front desk, but found they could not remove it because the wiring was permanently attached to the wall. He promptly pulled the cord out of the wall and told them he would pay for the damage. (Told by Graham associate Grady Wilson at a ministers meeting.)

What makes you stumble? Pornographic magazines? A type of music? Certain programs or movies? Certain people? Don’t worry about what people might think. If they make you stumble, give them up. The evangelist I mentioned in the introduction would probably give almost anything if he had only dealt with his pornography problem when he was young. (He stated that he began at 10 years of age.)

How about the sin you are fighting? Is there a source of stumbling you need to remove?

G. SEEK AFTER WISDOM (PROVERBS 2:10-12).

“Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.”

1. TREASURE GOD’S WORD IN YOUR HEART (Psalm 119:11, Matthew 4:3-11)

“I have hidden your word in my heart, that I may not sin against you.”

ILLUSTRATION: An African Christian said that the battle between good and evil in his life resembled two dogs fighting inside him. “Which dog wins?” someone asked. “The one I feed the most,” he responded.

Sin begins in the mind. Are you programming your mind with God's thoughts and God's ways? If you fill your mind with merely movies, television, worldly magazines, and godless conversation, don't be surprised at your weakness against the world and the flesh.

TIP: Tell your youth your personal strategy for Quiet Time, long-range Bible reading and study, memorization. Are you slack in this area? Decide on a workable plan and ask your youth to keep you accountable.

Jesus quoted Scripture when tempted. He was prepared. What about you? Do you have any Scriptural ammunition for the temptations you face?

WISDOM SEARCH: Some youth here may have no clue as to how to begin soaking up God's Word. Will some of you share hints from your own experience in the Word as to how they can get started? (Possible Ideas: 1) Begin in the Gospel of John and read systematically. 2) Use a devotional book. 3) Use the Navigator's Topical Memory System. 4) Find a good time and place. 5) Find someone to keep you accountable and to share your insights with. 6) Use a good translation. 7) Start small. Ten minutes a day for a year is better than 1 hour a day for 3 days.)

2. HEED WISE COUNSEL (Proverbs 5:12,13 [note context: vss. 1-14])

"I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly."

Many others have experienced the same temptations you struggle with. Why not get input from someone who may have the same temptations as you? Do you fight overeating. By reading extensively on nutrition, you may find that the answer has more to do with knowledge than will power. Get wise counsel from some your doctor and from some respected books on exercise and nutrition.

With certain temptations, such as addictions (e.g. alcoholism), consider getting counsel from a specialist who has experience dealing with such addictions.

CONCLUSION

Think about the temptation you now face. Did you star any ideas that you think may help you? Some of you can't handle a group of people or a place that keeps getting you into trouble. It's not that you need more will power once you get there. You just can't go there. Someone else needs to memorize some Scripture on the area you struggle. Another needs to get wise counsel. I'll give you a moment to come before God for any commitments you need to make to Him.

PRAY

SHARPENING YOUR AX
AUTHENTICITY: OPENING YOUR HEART
(Part 3)

Share Your Strengths.

On the backdrop of your weaknesses, sharing strengths will less likely come across as arrogance. The Apostle Paul could say, “*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice.*” (Phil. 4:9a) I’m not comfortable using the “whatever” word yet, but I *can* encourage youth to follow me in certain areas of my life. It’s not prideful to tell them how I overcame a temptation, developed a consistent quiet time, made a good choice of friends, and witnessed to that neighbor. It *is* prideful if you share it out of a haughty spirit, not giving glory to God for what He has worked in me. But they need to hear my successes. This is how they know the Christian life works. Is there a strength you could share during this series that helps you overcome temptation?

WHEN IT’S HARD TO SAY NO
(SESSION 4)

INTRODUCTION

In a lot of ways, our life is a warfare. A crafty enemy fires carefully aimed missiles at us, sometimes daily, to try to destroy our walk with God. This week we will continue looking at how to elude these missiles, and walk away from the battle victorious.

PRAY

H. MAINTAIN GODLY RELATIONSHIPS (HEB. 3:13, CR. I COR. 15:33, PROV. 13:20)

“He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

1. FLEE THE BAD

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

Some people think their bad company won't bring them down. But the Bible says, "Bad company corrupts good morals."

(Hint: think of any sports, music, or religious figures that your youth respect for positive or negative examples for this lesson. You know their specific areas of interest.)

Pete Rose seemed to have it all. Adored by thousands of fans, he was one of the greatest, most famous baseball players ever. When he broke the all-time hit record, President Reagan called to personally congratulate him. Rich beyond most people's wildest imaginations, he was sure to be inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame. But he lost it all, banished for life from the sport he loves.

Why? Strong evidence found that, in violation of league rules, he fell to the temptation to gamble on baseball. But he loved baseball so much. What could cause him to risk it all for gambling? Rose admitted to choosing the wrong friends. Could there have been a connection?

2. LEAN ON THE GOOD

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."(Heb. 3:13)

ILLUSTRATION: One prominent pastor has an accountability partner. After a road trip, the partner will ask him two questions -- 1) "What movies did you watch?" 2) "Are you telling the truth?"

Especially when dealing with addictions, you may want to join a support group of others who are overcoming the same addiction. You can find groups for overeaters, drug addicts, alcoholics, and other problem areas. If you think you might have a problem like one of these, talk to me afterwards and maybe I can hook you up with some people who can help.

What about the temptation you face? Would it be as tempting if you had different friends?

I. PURSUE GOD (II TIMOTHY 2:22, CR. GAL 5:16,17)

"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the

II Tim. 2:22

Translations: be pursuing/ ever striving for/ running after. As if in a chase (Robertson).

Lord out of a pure heart.”

The Christian life is not so much one of fleeing as pursuing. Just as a man’s passionate love relationship with his wife lessens his temptation to cheat on her, so perhaps the greatest deterrent to cheating on God is a love relationship with Him. How is your personal devotional life?

J. RELY ON GOD’S POWER (ROMANS 6-8, JOHN 14:16-23, GALATIANS 2:20, EPHESIANS 3:16-19, COLOSSIANS 1:26-29; I JN. 4:4).

“...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Tip: If it’s appropriate to use movie clips in your setting, rent the first of the Star Wars Trilogy. Show the clip toward the end where Luke begins to make his final run on the “Death Star”, and he hears something like, “Luke, trust in the Force.” He lets go of all his resources (radar) and makes the big hit. Give enough lead time to get them into the scene. A great illustration of letting go and letting God.

In the introduction, we talked about life being a warfare. Like Luke Skywalker, in the first movie of the Star Wars Trilogy, we are fighting a serious battle against an ominous foe. Although the movie was couched in a rather “New Age” spiritual setting, I think it well illustrates a point that we Christians need to learn. You see, in himself, Luke was no match for the Evil Empire. Had he relied on his own strength, brains, and skill, the Empire would have certainly won. But how did Luke win? In the end, he had to come to the end of Himself and rely on a higher power. I can hear it now, “Luke, let the force flow through you.” Substitute the Holy Spirit for “The Force,” and you get the picture.

We can’t resist Satan’s missiles in our own power. The victorious Christian life is experienced by those empowered by the Holy Spirit, who allow Jesus to live His life through them. Walking in the power of the Spirit guards us from indulging the desires of the flesh.

CONCLUSION

Within each of us resides a power greater than any other power. Let’s take a moment to ask God to live His life through us. The closer we grow to Him, the more we learn to rely on Him, and draw from His power. Some of you know you’re not strong enough to handle that temptation you’re facing. During this prayer time, hand it over to God.

PRAYER

SHARPENING YOUR AX AUTHENTICITY: OPENING YOUR HEART (Part 4)

Share Your Defeats and Victories.

Don't believe everything you read in current success literature. "Apply these six principles, and you will acquire abundant wealth, health, and friendships." Sure. I often wonder what kind of results that orphan growing up on the streets of Calcutta could expect from reading the book? Real life consists of both successes and failures. And the road to success is often paved with failures. Let them know how you are learning to get up from a fall, dust yourself off, and keep plugging away. And when you emerge victorious, everyone can rejoice with you and give praise to God.

One of my greatest compliments came from a former youth of mine, now in seminary, who said, "Steve, you made the Christian life livable." I think what he meant was that I shared enough of my struggles and victories to where he knew that a normal person like himself could follow Jesus. I tell about my struggles to develop a prayer life. If I am teaching on prayer, but my prayer life for the past month has frankly stunk, I admit it, ask for their prayers, and tell them my progress next week.

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY NO ***(SESSION 5)***

INTRODUCTION

Up until this point, in our temptation series, we have talked about *preparing* for temptation. If we practice those principles, we will be like the football player who has trained well before the season. We are ready for action!

But it's not enough to be in shape for the game. We must have a strategy for when the opposing team strikes. This week and next week will give us a game plan. For the overeater, at the moment the hunger pains start, what do you do? For the partier, when the phone rings to plan another wild weekend, how will you respond? Let's pray that God sink this strategy deep into our hearts.

PRAY

II . DEAL WITH TEMPTATION AFTER IT STRIKES

A. PRAY IN FAITH (EPHESIANS 6:16; CR. MATTHEW 26:41)

“...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

We can't fight a spiritual fight with physical weapons. Demons don't cower when we apply our wisest Psychology.

ILLUSTRATION: As Samuel Chadwick once said, “Satan laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

Eph. 6:16

The metaphor is taken from the fire arrows of ancient warfare.

The shield was a doorshield, the largest sort of shield, measuring about 2.5 by 4 feet in size.

B. USE GOD'S WORD (MATTHEW 4:3-11)

“The tempter came to him and said.... Jesus answered, 'It is written...’”.

Do you have enough of the Word memorized to help when you need it? Have you memorized Scriptures that specifically apply to your temptations? If not, what is your plan to systematically put God's Word in your heart? This would be an excellent Action Point!

C. REALIZE THAT GOD IS WATCHING (PROVERBS 5:21, CR. 15:3)

“For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.”

One radio broadcaster enjoyed asking questions of young schoolchildren, to report their often humorous responses. One day he asked a class, “What would you do if Jesus were here?” One child answered, “He is here.”

If you were tempted to cheat on an exam, would it make a difference if you suddenly realized that Jesus was sitting in the chair next to you? You bet! What if He accompanied you on dates? Sat with you as you read magazines? Joined your family dinner to see how you treat your family? Don't forget, “He is here.”

D. TRY TO PUT OUT THE FIRE (MATTHEW 5:27,28; CR. PR. 3:31, JMS. 1:14,15).

“...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Temptations are appeal to us. Otherwise, they wouldn't be tempting! Like Eve, we become enamored with the beautiful facade, blinded to the true nature of sin. So, if we can win the battle of the thoughts, we can win. By reflecting on the true nature of sin, it can lose its luster. The following verses, when reflected upon, can help us to see sin for what it is.

1. BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE WARFARE (I Peter 5:8)

“...the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine the air head family on vacation, frolicking about in one of the most battle torn areas of former Yugoslavia. Oblivious to the war, they vacation at the risk of their lives. But most Christians seem no better off. They assume that their struggle with sin is just will against flesh, oblivious to the raging cosmic warfare.

Two of my greatest motivations to serve God have been, 1) my love for God and 2) my hate for Satan. If I fall, not only can I grieve the Spirit; I can also satisfy the enemy. I've seen the lives he has destroyed. I want him to have no satisfaction in my life.

ILLUSTRATION: Evangelist Billy Sunday spoke of his warfare this way:

“I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, and I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition.”

2. BY SEEING THROUGH THE DISGUISE (II Cor. 11:14; Heb. 3:13)

“...for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Teaching Tip: Surely you've got an illustration of the heavy toll of alcoholism. Think of former school buddies, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. Don't give out names.

As long as we see a sin as beautiful, delightful, and attractive, we may never have victory. We must learn to see sin as it is, not as it appears. Many present abusing alcohol as fun, or grown up. Counter this thought by reflecting on the families you know who

suffer because of an alcoholic member. Think of families torn apart because a drunk driver killed their child. Seeing sin in all its ugliness can turn a temptation into a turn off.

CONCLUSION

What does this have to do with the temptations you face? We're in a warfare and our enemy is making our temptations look beautiful and innocent. But are you starting to see through the disguise? If you don't, you may never work up the motivation fight your temptation. Finish transferring your main applications to your action points section. Let's pray.

PRAY

SHARPENING YOUR AX BASIC TOOLS (Part 1)

Just as the carpenter is handicapped without his tools, so is the Bible student. Here are my most used tools, the screwdrivers and hammers of my library that I consider indispensable. **Buying tip:** look to mail order companies such as "Christian Book Distributors" (C.B.D, P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961-7000) for sometimes half price off retail.

- **ONE VOLUME COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE** – Consult commentaries after you've done your own study of the passage. Otherwise, you may blindly accept their dogmatic statements on passages that could be legitimately interpreted differently. I heard of one student who consulted the commentaries first. Upon opening the Bible itself, he remarked, "The Bible sure throws a lot of light on those commentaries!" But used correctly, commentaries provide us with much wisdom by gifted scholars who often have profound insight. I routinely consult at least three commentaries on each verse I use in teaching. If I had only one commentary: The New Bible Commentary. Then expand to commentary sets and commentaries on individual books of the Bible. Consult bibliographic guides such as The Minister's Library (Cyril J. Barber) to help you choose the best.

- **TOPICAL BIBLE** – The basic answer to, “Steve, how do you find all those verses?” For this lesson, I looked up “Sin” and “Temptation” in my Nave’s Topical Bible and found tons of verses.
- **STUDY BIBLE** -- Provides you with cross references, study notes, outlines, and maps.
- **CONCORDANCE** – An exhaustive concordance lists every occurrence of every biblical word. (Yes, even the words “and” and “the”!) Great for word studies, finding verses, and brief definitions. I use Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance. CBD calls it “The most valuable Bible-study tool for a century.”

(“Basic Tools” continued after next lesson)

WHEN IT’S HARD TO SAY NO

(SESSION 6)

INTRODUCTION

We’ve come to the last session of our Temptation Series. How many of you have seen people fall to temptations in the last few weeks? Without giving away names, can you tell us some of the things you have seen? How many have seen someone fall for the temptation to cheat on a test? What about going to a wild party? Others?

There really is a war going on out there! Let’s pray that God will give equip us one more time to win the battle.

PRAYER

3. **BY FACING THE CONSEQUENCES** (Gal. 6:7; cr. Pr. 5:3-5)

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”

Most people are deceived into thinking that they can sin with no consequences. “Don’t be deceived,” God warns us. For example,

***ILLUSTRATION:** A person tempted to practice homosexuality may long for the intimacy, but forget the consequences. For example, the American Journal of Public Health found over 2/3 of gay men having had at least one sexually transmitted disease. Some of these diseases are incurable. One leads to certain death. (cr. Rom. 1:27)*

***ILLUSTRATION:** Someone has well said that sin: “Takes you further than you wanted to go. Keeps you longer than you wanted to stay. Costs you more than you wanted to pay.*

What consequences will you face if you give in to the temptations you face?

4. BY ABHORRING SIN (Romans 12:9).

“Hate what is evil...”

*The good gardener must not only love vegetables. He must hate weeds. **But we don’t naturally despise most sins. How do we learn to?***

Romans 12:9

Other Translations: “Regard evil with horror.” “Look with loathing and horror upon.”

Hodge comments: “Expresses the highest degree of hatred.”

Tip: you could really ham up this line of thought and drive the point home!

***ILLUSTRATION:** How many of you have a baby in your family? What are some of the most despicable things you have seen her play with, or put in her mouth? (Get their input here. They may draw out some really funny stories!) When you were a toddler, you would have been delighted to chew gum that you found stuck under a table, discarded in an ashtray, or in the bottom of a toilet.*

But do any of you now struggle with the temptation to pick up used gum off a bathroom floor and get that last bit of flavor out of it?! Why not? Because at some point in life you learned the relation between germs and disease, and your delight in used gum turned to disgust.

But some of us have never grown up. If a sin still appeals to you, perhaps you have never discovered the terrible consequences of it. The next time you face your temptation, think, “used gum.”

The temptation to sin is not sin. Remember, Jesus Himself was tempted. But to dwell on and relish in the tempting thoughts is dangerous.

***ILLUSTRATION:** You can’t keep a bird from pooping on your head, but you can keep it from building a nest there!*

E. FIND GOD'S WAY OF ESCAPE AND FLEE (I Corinthians 10:13; II Timothy 2:22; and see the example of Joseph in Genesis 39).

“But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out...”

ILLUSTRATION: You find yourself in a group of people who just decided to watch a pornographic video. Everyone seems excited about the idea, except you. It's embarrassing to leave. A friend may be hurt if you leave. But there's only one choice. Leave.

Now, think of the temptation you are trying to overcome. Are there times you need to just flee?

F. WHEN YOU FALL, LEARN TO BOUNCE BACK (I JN. 1:9; CR. 2:1,2 AND PETER'S MANY FAILURES.)

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

According to James, “we all stumble in many ways” (Jms. 3:2). Don't let Satan discourage you when you fall and tempt you to give up. Confess it, forsake it, and move on. He puts your sin as far as the East is from the West, sinks it into the deepest sea. You no longer have to wallow in guilt or try to pay God back for it. Jesus paid it all. Our responsibility is to confess, forsake, and move on.

ILLUSTRATION: When it comes to dealing with defeat, there seem to be two kinds of Christians: “Raw Egg Christians” and “Super Ball Christians.” What happens to a raw egg when you throw it against a concrete wall? (It splats.) And the harder you throw it, the further it (let them say it) splats.

Idea: You could present this as an object lesson. Bring two raw eggs and one super ball. Drape thick, brown wrapping paper over a hard wall. Place newspaper on the floor to catch the egg remains.

But did you ever play with those small, hard, rubber balls that used to be called “Super Balls”? They made great stocking stuffers at Christmas. What happens to a Super Ball when you throw it against a concrete wall? (It bounces back.) And the harder you throw it, the harder it (let them say it) bounces back.

Perhaps Satan has been whispering to some of you, “Give up. You'll never get consistent with your quiet times. You'll never stop looking at those trashy magazines. You'll never control your eating or your drugs or your anger.” If

you've been hearing those lies, God has a message for you tonight: "Don't splat. Bounce back."

CONCLUSION

You could be part of the generation that completes the Great Commission and sees Jesus come. But it won't be without a fight. Prepare for temptation by walking with Jesus and growing in Him. When temptation strikes, fight the good fight!

Temptation doesn't have to defeat us. We can win!! (Ephesians 6:16; cr. I Cor. 10:13, Jms. 4:7)

PRAYER AND ACTION POINTS

SHARPENING YOUR AX

BASIC TOOLS

(Part 2)

- **VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS** – Sometimes a different translation will make a verse live for me. Other times, differences in translations warn me that the Greek or Hebrew text could be translated in a way that would change my understanding of the verse. **The New Testament From 26 Translations** lists verses phrase by phrase, comparing them to other translations. I consult it on every New Testament verse I study. There is a similar book on the Old Testament. Example: See my "temptation" lesson where I compare translations of Romans 12:9: "Regard evil with horror."
- **BIBLE DICTIONARY** – Defines and discusses Bible words. I use **The New Bible Dictionary**. A **Bible Encyclopedia** covers more ground, in more depth. Example: "What is sanctification?"
- **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY** – In depth discussions of theological issues. I like Thiessen's **Lectures in Systematic Theology**. Theologically balanced and uses lots of Scripture. Examples: "How can I prove Jesus' deity?" "What are the main views of the end times?"
- **BOOK ON BIBLE INTERPRETATION** – Gives principles on correctly interpreting the Bible. I highly recommend Robertson McQuilkin, **Understanding and Applying the Bible**. Example: "How can I decide when a passage is to be taken figuratively or literally?"
- **NOTE:** – Some computer programs try to put it all together with commentaries, various translations, etc. Some are pretty expensive. None seem to have all my favorite tools. I don't have them. But some pastors love them.

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"

INTRODUCTION

"He Traded His Dreams for a Temptation"

I. **PREPARE FOR TEMPTATION BEFORE IT STRIKES**

A. **JOIN THE WINNING TEAM (JN. 8:34-36)**

"Stan finally beats the booze"

B. **DISCOVER AND DWELL ON YOUR NEW IDENTITY**

"A Puppet on a String"

ACTIVITY! "WHO ARE YOU?"

I AM ACCEPTED!

I AM SECURE!

I AM SIGNIFICANT!

C. **KEEP UP YOUR GUARD! (I COR. 10:12)**

"A Pastor gets too cocky"

CONCLUSION

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO" PART 2

INTRODUCTION

D. WATCH OUT FOR THE UNEXPECTED TEMPTATIONS

"Watch those orange peelings!"

1. PERSECUTION (JN. 16:1, II Tim. 3:12)

"SHE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE"

2. FALSE TEACHINGS (II TIM. 3:13)

"Taken Down By Antagonistic Professors"

3. THE DESIRE FOR RICHES (I TIM. 6:3-10)

"Robin Leach and the American Dream"

"The Dangers of Pursuing Riches"

ACTION POINTS:

**WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 3**

INTRODUCTION

E. AVOID TEMPTING SITUATIONS (PROV. 5:8; I COR. 7:5)

ACTIVITY! "WHERE WILL YOU REFUSE TO GO?"

F. REMOVE KNOWN SOURCES OF STUMBLING (MAT. 5:29,30)

"Billy Graham Vs. The Television"

G. SEEK AFTER WISDOM (PROV. 2:10-12)

1. TREASURE GOD'S WORD IN YOUR HEART (PS. 119:11, MAT. 4:3-11)

"Which Dog Wins?"

"What is Your Strategy?"

3. HEED WISE COUNSEL (PROV. 5:12,13)

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 4

INTRODUCTION

H. MAINTAIN GODLY RELATIONSHIPS (HEB. 3:13, I COR. 15:33)

1. FLEE THE BAD

"Pete Rose Bites the Dust"

2. LEAN ON THE GOOD

"Pastor Gets Accountable"

I. PURSUE GOD (II TIM. 2:22)

J. RELY ON GOD'S POWER (I JN. 4:4)

"Luke Skywalker Attacks The Empire"

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 5

INTRODUCTION

II. DEAL WITH TEMPTATION AFTER IT STRIKES

A. PRAY IN FAITH (EPH. 6:16)

"When Satan Laughs/ When Satan Trembles"

B. USE GOD'S WORD (MAT. 4:3-11)

C. REALIZE THAT GOD IS WATCHING (PROV. 5:21)

"He Is Here"

D. TRY TO PUT OUT THE FIRE (MAT. 5:27,28)

1. BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE WARFARE (I PET. 5:8)

"Vacationing in a War Zone"

"Billy Sunday Fights Sin"

2. BY SEEING THROUGH THE DISGUISE (II COR. 11:14; HEB. 3:13)

ACTION POINTS:

**WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 6**

INTRODUCTION

3. BY FACING THE CONSEQUENCES (GAL. 6:7)

"Unhappy Gays"

"How Far Will Sin Take You?"

4. BY ABHORRING SIN (ROM. 12:9)

"Would You Like Some Used Gum?"

E. FIND GOD'S WAY OF ESCAPE AND FLEE! (I COR. 10:13; II TIM. 2:22)

"Your Friends Rent a XXX Video"

F. WHEN YOU FALL, LEARN TO BOUNCE BACK (I JN. 1:9)

CONCLUSION: "WE CAN WIN!"

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"

INTRODUCTION

"He Traded His _____ for a Temptation"

I. _____ FOR TEMPTATION BEFORE IT STRIKES

B. JOIN THE WINNING _____ (JN. 8:34-36)

"Stan finally beats the booze"

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I AM ACCEPTED!

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D. KEEP UP YOUR _____! (I COR. 10:12)

"A Pastor gets too cocky"

CONCLUSION

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"

PART 2

INTRODUCTION

D. WATCH OUT FOR THE _____ TEMPTATIONS

"Watch those orange peelings!"

4. _____ (JN. 16:1, II Tim. 3:12)

"SHE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND GOD'S LOVE"

5. **FALSE** _____ (II TIM. 3:13)

"Taken Down By Antagonistic Professors"

3. **THE DESIRE FOR** _____ (I TIM. 6:3-10)

"Robin Leach and the American Dream"

"The Dangers of Pursuing Riches"

ACTION POINTS:

**WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 3**

INTRODUCTION

E. AVOID TEMPTING _____ (PROV. 5:8; I COR. 7:5)

ACTIVITY! "WHERE WILL YOU REFUSE TO GO?"

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"Billy Graham Vs. The Television"

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1. TREASURE GOD'S _____ IN YOUR HEART (PS. 119:11, MAT. 4:3-11)

"Which Dog Wins?"

"What is Your Strategy?"

6. HEED WISE _____ (PROV. 5:12,13)

ACTION POINTS:

WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 4

INTRODUCTION

I. MAINTAIN GODLY _____ (HEB. 3:13, I COR. 15:33)

2. _____ THE BAD

"Pete Rose Bites the Dust"

2. _____ THE GOOD

"Pastor Gets Accountable"

III. _____ GOD (II TIM. 2:22)

K. _____ GOD'S POWER (I JN. 4:4)

"Luke Skywalker Attacks The Empire"

ACTION POINTS:

**WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 5**

INTRODUCTION

IV. DEAL WITH TEMPTATION _____ IT STRIKES

A. _____ IN FAITH (EPH. 6:16)

"When Satan Laughs/ When Satan Trembles"

C. USE GOD'S _____ (MAT. 4:3-11)

C. REALIZE THAT GOD IS _____ (PROV. 5:21)

"He Is Here"

D. TRY TO PUT OUT THE _____ (MAT. 5:27,28)

5. BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE _____ (I PET. 5:8)

"Vacationing in a War Zone"

"Billy Sunday Fights Sin"

6. BY SEEING THROUGH THE _____ (II COR. 11:14; HEB. 3:13)

ACTION POINTS:

**WHEN IT'S HARD TO SAY "NO"
PART 6**

INTRODUCTION

7. **BY FACING THE _____ (GAL. 6:7)**

"Unhappy Gays"

"How Far Will Sin Take You?"

8. **BY _____ SIN (ROM. 12:9)**

"Would You Like Some Used Gum?"

E. **FIND GOD'S WAY OF ESCAPE AND _____! (I COR. 10:13; II TIM. 2:22)**

"Your Friends Rent a XXX Video"

F. **WHEN YOU FALL, LEARN TO _____ (I JN. 1:9)**

CONCLUSION: "WE CAN WIN!"

ACTION POINTS: