

HOW TO SAY NO TO TEMPTATION

There was this guy who was late for a meeting. He drove around and around the block. He couldn't find a parking spot. Finally, he parked illegally and wrote a note and put it on the windshield, "Dear Mr. Policeman, I've circled this block ten times. My boss will fire me if I'm late for this meeting. Please don't give me a ticket." Then he added a spiritual twist at the end: "Forgive us our sins."

He came back and sure enough there was a ticket there on his windshield. On the back of the ticket there was this note: "Dear Sir, I've circled this block for ten years. My boss would fire me if I didn't give you a ticket." Then this little note at the end: "Lead us not into temptation."

We're going to talk this morning about something we all face. I come to you this morning as an expert. I know what it's like to be tempted. I know what it's like to want to do the right thing and end up doing the wrong thing. I know what it's like to say, "I'm never going to think that, say that, do that again." And then find myself, all too soon, thinking, saying, doing the same thing.

When I first came to faith in Christ, I thought it would make everything easier. I thought my temptations would all go away. I found, and maybe some of you have found, exactly the opposite was true. Instead of them going away, they actually became stronger. When I started trying to do the right thing, the temptations became more and more an enemy to me in many ways.

Today, I'm going to share with you "How to Say 'No' to Temptation." This is the 7th in our series we're calling "Becoming a Champion". Next week is our 8th and final message.

A preacher by the name of Charles Spurgeon once said, "Learn to say, 'No'. It will be of more use to you than being able to speak Latin." That's very true. Learning to say "No" is one of the keys to life.

Isn't it hard to learn to say No? You want to stop, you want to break it off, but you always seem to end up giving in at the end. Some of you here today are very concerned that you're not going to be able to say No to the challenges you're facing right now. Your mind these last few weeks has been filled with the most ugly, hateful thoughts and you just don't know how to turn them off. And you're wondering, "Can I say No?" Your temptation may be towards anger. People you love the most, you're tempted to abuse them physically, emotionally, verbally. Or you may be tempted to cheat on your spouse. You met someone you're attracted to in the office and the feeling gets stronger every day. "How can I say no?"

For those of you who have tried and been knocked down when it comes to this area, today we're going to talk about some practical help and hope from another kind of expert in temptation.

God is an expert in dealing with temptation, in helping us overcome and grow through the temptations in our lives. Today, we're going to look at four simple steps from God's word and how you and I can face the daily temptations that we face. The steps I'm going to share with you today build on one another.

1. RECOGNIZE THE SOURCE

Where does it come from? What causes me to say Yes to that temptation? Who's responsible?

A lot of people blame God. They say, "God made me this way. This is how God wired me. God made me with these desires, so God must be the source of this temptation." Other people blame Satan. "The devil made me do it!" Some people blame others. "It was his fault...he talked me into it...she made me eat the fruit."

Have you noticed that when you start blaming, you stop deciding? Blame is just a way of putting the responsibility on somebody else's shoulders. As long as you're fixing the blame, you're never going to fix the problem.

How do we recognize the real source of temptation? **James 1:13, 14** *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.”*

Notice it says, “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire”. Other versions of the Bible say, "lured" instead of “dragged away.” Those of you who fish, you know what a lure is like. It's one of those things that is supposed to look like the real thing. It's a bait. It's close enough to the real thing that it attracts the fish. It moves, it flashes, it's colorful, even vibrates. It's attractive to the fish. But the lure or the bait always has a hook in it.

There's a kind of lure that sometimes attracts us. Our lures may look a little different, but the same truth is this: It's fake, it's not real. But let me tell you one truth. You see, things that are temptations aren't bad in and of themselves, but we use them in the wrong way. Is there anything wrong with money, sex, the internet, even alcohol? It's the way we use them that makes it bad and leads us into places we never want to be.

An experienced fish recognizes the lure. You see, one of the signs of maturity in our lives is that we recognize the temptation more quickly. We can see it's a fake, not the real thing. We start to see the hook in the temptation.

While accepting the responsibility that we're the ones who bite, it is good to know the different channels from which temptations come. We're the ones who makes the decision but there are different vehicles, different channels that temptation hits us. The Bible says there are three of them.

1. The world. The world around us, everything we see in the world. Go to Vegas, you'll know what I mean.

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the

flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 John 2:15-16)

2. Ourselves. Something within us. I can go up on a mountain away from everybody, away from Vegas, and there are still some things within me that wants to do the wrong thing, that tempts me to do the wrong thing.

“...but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.” (James 1:13-18)

3. The Devil. There is a personal source of evil in the world. Somebody's trying to ruin your life, especially if you're a new believer in Christ. Satan doesn't want you to live out and enjoy this new life so he's tempting you not to. Satan tempted Jesus. He would do likewise to you if you're a follower of Jesus.

“And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” (Luke 4:13)

Those are the channels of temptation. But let me make it clear, we're the ones who make the choice whether to tune it to one of those channels or not.

So, first of all I recognize the source.

2. REFUSE TO FEEL GUILTY WHEN I'M TEMPTED.

Don't feel guilty just because you're tempted. Many people do. The moment a temptation hits you, you think, "How could I think that? How could that kind of thought even come into my mind?" You feel bad just because of the fact that you're tempted. You feel like something is wrong with you just because you were tempted.

Hebrews 4:15 *"Jesus has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin."* Was Jesus perfect? Yes. Jesus was the Son of God in human flesh and if He was tempted, what does that say to you?

It says there is a difference between temptation and sin. If Jesus was tempted while He was on this earth, don't you think you and I are going to be tempted also while we're on this earth?

It also reminds us in this verse that Jesus was tempted *"in every way just as we are"*. That means every time you're tempted, Jesus understands because He was tempted in every way. The difference was He never sinned. Jesus was tempted to be angry, just like you're tempted to be angry. Jesus was tempted toward materialism. Jesus was tempted to commit a sexual sin.

Some of you need to breathe a sigh of relief. Just because you're tempted doesn't mean you've sinned. You're tempted to buy a lotto ticket. That's fine. Until you actually bought that ticket, you haven't sinned.

You may be thinking, "If I was like Jesus and I was tempted and never sinned, I wouldn't feel guilty either. But my problem is, I've sinned sometimes. And I'm so guilty about it."

This next verse is for all of us. **Romans 8:1** *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Notice the period at the end of the verse! There is no condemnation -- period. End of sentence. That's it! It's not "There is no condemnation, unless you do this or that". There is no condemnation - finished story! Because of what Jesus has done for us.

Why is there no condemnation? Because Jesus Christ has said to us, "I'll make you a deal. You come to Me, you trust in Me, and I'll take your sins upon Me and I'll pay the penalty for those. I'll go to the cross for you. I'll die for you." Isn't that a good deal?

For those who belong to Christ Jesus, no condemnation. For those who have not yet made that commitment, He offers you the gift of a life of no condemnation. All you need to do is to believe that Jesus Christ died for you to take away your sins and the guilt. No condemnation anymore for you.

So, refuse to feel guilty.

3. REMEMBER YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

All of us have had the feeling, "I'm the only one to face this temptation." **1** Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) "*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.*" It says common. Meaning, it's not unique in your case. Everyone else faces the same temptations you face. They're common to all of us.

A recent survey of American Christians asked, "What are the common temptations that you've faced?" The top ten:

1. Materialism

2. Pride

3. Self-centeredness

4. Laziness

5-6. A tie between Anger/Bitterness and Sexual lust

7. Envy

8. Gluttony

9. Lying (actually #9 should have been #1, but people lied about it!)

This is what Billy Graham said about temptation in his life, and I quote "Sex, money and pride. Those are the three areas I think Satan attacks God's servants on. I was told that many years ago by an old clergyman and I never forgot it. I learned from that moment on that I would be tempted in those areas. So I never rode in a car with a woman alone. I've never eaten a meal with my secretary alone or ridden in a car with her alone." End of quote.

You look at a man like Billy Graham, who at the end of his life, he could look back on a life of integrity. You wonder why he had not fallen to temptation when so many have fallen, even so many religious leaders. Was it because he was above temptation that he didn't fall?

No. It was because he knew that he wasn't above temptation and he did something about the fact that he wasn't above temptation.

The Bible helps us in this. It says we're all going to face temptation in three specific areas. It sort of lays them out for us. We just read them in the quote of Billy Graham. Earlier in 1 John 2:16 we saw the same three things.

Passion -- our immoral passions. When we allow our body to control us. When the physical becomes in charge. When sex or drink or food starts to control our lives. When something good gets out of whack and we use it the wrong way.

Possessions -- things become our reason for living. We can't keep ourselves from buying. Or our mind gets consumed with what we have and who we can impress with all of it.

Pride -- the temptation of power over people. The temptation to get my way at any cost.

When you recognize that the source of temptation is within you and when you've been honest with the fact that you don't have to feel guilty and other people have faced the same thing, then you find the real solution to temptation.

4. REALIZE THERE'S A WAY OUT – GOD'S WAY.

We've got our way out but there's also God's way out. Our way out is a circle. God's way out gets us out of the temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (the second half) “*And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*”

Our way out is a dead end. The key is finding God's way out.

Notice this verse says, “*he will also provide a way out*”. That means there is no temptation that comes into my life and into your life that you can't handle by His strength. You see, there's no such thing as an irresistible temptation. It often feels irresistible. It often feels like you can't get out.

One of the reasons for that is we often wait until we get nine-tenths of the way in, before we ask for God's way out. But then, it's too late. Just look at the temptation of King David. He went up to the roof of his palace to walk around and when he looked down he saw Bathsheba bathing. He was attracted. Right there and then, he had a choice to linger or not. He did linger for a while until his fleshly desire took over his whole being and he committed the sin of adultery. Folks, the stairs that led him up to the roof are the same stairs that he could have taken to avoid sinning. That was the way out. Maybe he prayed a prayer of deliverance. But he lingered and it was too late.

That happens to us as well. We go to the store, buy the doughnuts, bring them home, have them on the table right in front of us before we say, "God help me!" We should have asked for the help before we went into the store.

Matthew 6:13 *"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."*

God says "I want to teach you to pray that you'll find the way out before you even get too far in." Not just "Help me get out of this, God" but "Help me never get into it."

Some of you may be thinking, "I was tempted and I looked for God's way out, it must have been really narrow. Because it was tough to find God's way out." It is difficult sometimes. That's why God and the Bible say they want to give us some help.

We talked earlier of the fact that we're going to be tempted in three common areas. The Bible says, "Here's the way out of those common areas of temptation that you're going to struggle with."

We're all going to face the temptation of immoral passions. It's going to happen in our lives. We're all going to face the temptation to do something with these bodies that God never intended -- sexual temptation or food temptation or whatever. What's God's way out?

A single three letter word -- RUN! Get away from that temptation. There are some things you should argue with, philosophize about. But when it comes to temptations that have to do with our physical appetites the Bible says just run away! Remember Joseph who was tempted by Potiphar's wife? He literally ran away.

2 Timothy 2:22 (NLT) *"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts."* That verse reminds us that when we run we need to remember three things:

1. **You run away.** Away from the temptation, out of the situation. You never linger. Just run away.

2. **You run toward.** Meaning, you pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. It's not enough just to get away. You have to have something to run toward. You run toward the right things in your life.

3. **You run with.** *"...those who call on the Lord with pure hearts."* You get around some other people who want to live the same kind of way so you're not in it alone.

What is the way out of materialism when you're facing one of those materialism attacks? Maybe you go into somebody's house and they have really new furniture and it's better than yours and you leave feeling like, "I've got to go to a furniture store on the way home!" How do you handle those materialism attacks?

By giving thanks. You tell God "Thank you, Lord, for what you have given me." Every time you say that, it loosens the grip of materialism in your life. So, be content. Paul says to Timothy, **"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many**

foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” (1 Timothy 6:6-11)

Now, what's the way out of pride? By serving. You serve your way out of pride. Jesus is the example in this one. When Jesus was tempted near the beginning of His ministry, He was tempted with pride. Satan essentially said, "I'll make you a Superman, a Star. I'll give You the world, powers that everybody would applaud." Instead of deciding on pride, Jesus decided to serve us. He said, "I came to serve." That was His life. That's how He lived. He served us and He loved us. He showed us how to escape pride in our life.

That's God's way out of temptation.

However, many of us here may be dealing with the cycle of Sin-Confess-Sin-Confess...No-Yes-No-No-Yes-- Same thing over and over. No growth at all. It may be year after year and I can't escape this. How do you deal with that?

You break the pattern. You break the pattern from "No. No. No." to "Yes. Yes. Yes." Not Yes to the temptation but Yes to the God who wants to help us to solve the temptation.

One of the greatest ways to think the right way is using some verses out of the Bible. That's why God's given us this book -- to help us when we're tempted. Jesus used this key. When He was tempted, every time it's recorded for us, the Bible says He used some Bible verses to help get His thoughts on the right track.

Take out some verses then put them on your refrigerator, memorize them, put them in your car so they can help you.

For example, if you're fighting the temptation to discouragement, **Heb. 12:2** *"Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross."* If you're struggling with anger, **Ephesians 4:26**. *"In your anger, do not sin."* If you're worried, **Philippians 4:6** *"Don't be anxious about anything but pray about everything."* If you have lust, **Philippians 4:8**

"Whatever is good and honorable and right and pure and lovely, if there is anything excellent, anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

Laziness, Proverbs 12:24. Impatience, Ephesians 4:2. Pride, James 4:6. Use these verses. They are the most powerful thing we have to help us fight against temptation.

Now, before I conclude, ask yourself, What one place in my life can I begin to say Yes to God this week that will help me to defeat some temptation? Some of you have never said Yes to God. You've been checking it out. You've heard about who He is but you've never stepped over the line and made the commitment to Christ, said Yes to living your life for Him. You can do that today. Pray a prayer like this, "Jesus Christ, I say Yes to You. I believe you died for my sins. I say Yes to Your forgiveness. I need it. I admit it. I say Yes to Your leadership and guidance in my life. I've got a lot to learn, but would You teach me? I say Yes to Your being in my life, a part of my life. Would You come in and help me to learn to live?"

Many of you may want to say, "God, here's an area in my life where I want to say Yes to You this week. It's in my marriage, my words, my attitudes, the way I handle money, the way I handle people. Here's the way this next week I'm going to say Yes."

Prayer:

Father, we thank You that when we say Yes to You, when we speak to You, You always hear us. Sometimes we don't feel like You're there, but You're always there. Sometimes we feel like there's no way out but there always is a way out. There are often times in our lives when we feel like the temptation is so powerful we have no hope, but You've reminded us this morning that there always is hope. Thank You for Your promises. Thank You for the life that You want to give us. Help us to live a life not discouraged by the fact that we're tempted but encouraged by the fact that You help us begin to learn one step at a time to defeat those temptations and to live out all You've created us to be. Thank You for this. In Jesus' name. Amen.