

Handling Life's challenge of Temptation - Genesis 3:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11

What is temptation? Temptation is part of life. Temptation is the daddy of all Tug-of-Wars. No one is exempt - not even Christians. We perhaps feel temptations more than most trying to live up to God's standards in the way we live. Just because God allows temptation because of Free Will - doesn't mean He wants it.

Temptation creates an internal Tug-of-War. For a Christian we are usually tempted when the way we are living our lives is challenged by the way of the world appearing more attractive. Temptations will be different for each of us cos we all have different Achilles heels, where it's easier to give in to something. Temptation can be used too by the devil to draw us away from God and should never be underestimated or trivialised. Eve and Jesus handled the Tug-of-War very differently - Eve acted impulsively whilst Jesus wrestled - for 40 days.

Temptation of itself is not sin. It's how we handle the Tug-of-War - the choices we make - about temptation that creates sin or not - it's our responsibility. We can't ignore temptation - whatever we choose has consequences. So why did it go so wrong for Eve?

Eve failed a foundational truth - ELIMINATE DISTORTION from what we already know about God.

The Genesis passage is so condensed for such a lesson. The devil obviously had a plan - it wasn't just random conversation. The devil was and is, much more subtle, more insinuating (Genesis 3:1). God gave Eve and Adam the gift of free will - they could choose - which they did exploring the world around them - becoming curious. Just telling Eve to disobey God wouldn't have worked. It's natural when challenged directly about doing something you've always done to defend yourself. So the devil started by simply questioning the way things had always been done.

Eve obviously knew God's instructions (Genesis 3:3). Having raised the question the devil attacked Eve's factual answer from 3 different angles at the same time. The devil got Eve to question God's authority. The devil picked up on something Eve had not experienced - the certainty of death (Genesis 3:4). Neither Eve nor Adam had faced death - so a dilemma - believe God or not.

The devil continued by getting Eve questioning who she was. Mankind was created God centred and innocent - in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Having questioned God's authority the devil made God sound unreasonable, fearing equality, a tyrant (Genesis 3:5). Having allowed herself to question God's authority Eve began to shift from being God Centred to being "I" centred. Hooked, Eve wasn't satisfied with who she was. The devil got Eve to think about herself not God

Eve gave in on all fronts. First giving in to what she wanted - the attractiveness of indulgence - giving in to herself (Genesis 3:6). That single verse covers so much. She gave in to what looked like good food, and, the attractiveness of having wisdom. Eve demonstrated the danger of impetuosity. Eve just acted - game, set, and match to the devil - she ate the apple. Eve chose to act NOW - didn't bother to talk to God - seek His plans - the devil had seemed so reasonable. The account suggests Eve didn't have even a moment of Tug-of-War - she didn't wrestle with it - just jumped straight in. But there were indeed consequences

Adam was dragged into it. The account doesn't indicate Adam put up much of a struggle - didn't object - for Eve this justified her actions. When challenged by God, Adam blamed Eve, Eve

blamed the snake. Both tried to dodge the consequence of their decision to give in to the Temptation. Then there was one final terrible consequence - they were expelled from Eden - from God's presence. Sin had been born - "I" centred living for the rest of us. Eve and Adam learned the hard way to ELIMINATE DISTORTION from what they already knew about God.

Compare that with how Jesus handled Temptation. Jesus applied a foundational truth - RELY on what you know about God already. Whilst the devil tackled Eve in one go he tackled Jesus differently. Fortunately the temptation of Jesus is well recorded in Matthew and Luke and with less detail in Mark. Basic truth - God doesn't contradict himself. First recorded thousands of years ago (Numbers 23:19). Confirmed by Paul when advising Timothy (2 Timothy 2:13).

This was to be the start of Jesus' ministry - how should He go about it? Jesus went into the desert after His baptism to be alone and think. We can only guess what He would have wrestled with? How to go about it? What to emphasis? What help could He muster? Where would He start? Would He do it God's way? Was there another way?

Jesus' temptations were separated out. First Jesus too was tempted by the lure of Indulgence. Would He give into physical cravings and so indulge Himself? For Jesus it was more than just satisfying hunger by turning stones into bread. It was how He would shape His ministry - would He do it by solving people's problems? Jesus got His priorities right by demonstrating that there were more important things in life than satisfying physical cravings - men and women's hearts. Jesus used God's Word and won this battle (Matthew 4:4).

Having failed in that temptation the devil attacked Jesus' identity. How did Jesus know He was the Son of God? Would Jesus put God to the test to prove to Himself He was His Son? Jumping off the top of the Temple, rescued by angels. would do it. The devil tried to reinforce his argument by trying to use Scripture too (Matthew 4:6). Jesus didn't need personal validation - He knew who He was. Jesus won His second battle by again using Scripture to show the folly of testing God (Matthew 4:7).

Lastly, Jesus like Eve was tempted by the question of authority. Whose plan would Jesus follow? This temptation to take a short cut without the pain and suffering that He knew was His destiny and not stick to God's plan. Jesus defeated the Temptation by reminding the devil where true authority comes from (Matthew 4:10).

Yet Jesus REINTERPRETED each of the Temptations in His Ministry. He did meet people's material needs - first at Cana changing water into wine, feeding the 5000 and the 4000. Big difference was that He gave God the honour and glory. Jesus told folk to keep the Law's requirements, to praise God, not to brag about how great Jesus was. Throughout His ministry Jesus did meet the needs of people by healing but He also confronted them with the real issue - their sin. Throughout His ministry Jesus was challenged about who He was - the only Son of God. Jesus knew exactly who He is (John 10:30). He knew He had the ultimate authority given by God - the authority to forgive sin (Luke 5:24). Jesus triumphed by RELYING on what He knew about God and His Word

We face a daily Tug-of-War between "I" centred or God centred living - but we are not helpless when handling it. We do have the lessons provided by the failure of Adam and Eve. We do have the lessons provided by the success of Jesus. We also can't forget our basics. The problem with basics is that they are obvious and therefore get overlooked. We'd pay more attention if it was rocket science or incredibly difficult.

USE our gift of Free Will. Despite what we think - we don't have to do anything. God gave us the gift of Free Will - we make the choices, we make the decisions, we have the responsibility - so don't waste it - use your power. Nothing makes us cave in to Temptation. We can't play the blame game. There are no cop out clauses - it's our responsibility. Temptation is the opposite of self control - we exercise our will as to which wins

THINKING - get it straight - God does NOT tempt us. It's impossible when you think about it - He just can't do evil things (James 1:13). Temptation comes thanks to our basically "I" centred world. We want things the world around us wants (James 1:14). The reality is we are NOT the centre of our universe.

TRUST our CONSCIENCES. Our consciences are one way God can speak to us - to warn us. Our consciences set the rules and standards by which we live. We have to win that constant Tug-of-War between caving in and self control. A good choice can reinforce our values whilst a bad choice can leave us with consequences we have to live with. Conscience is inextricably linked to our handling of temptation. Conscience and temptation are a two way street. Our consciences get pricked and warn us of the temptation - it's not a coincidence. Making a poor choice about something dulls the conscience. We begin to believe that it wasn't so bad - in fact quite enjoyable which makes it harder next time to resist - our conscience has become dulled by the first giving in. The choices we make can dull or strengthen our conscience - affecting how we handle the next temptation

We are not passive victims - we make the choices - we carry the responsibility for the consequences. It's the choice, the decision, we make when tempted that defines us. Self control is a fruit of the Spirit and builds and strengthens our consciences so we are not at the mercy of temptation. A fruit of the Spirit only becomes part of our character the more we depend on the Holy Spirit

CALL IN the cavalry. We are not powerless and we are not alone - we have 4 resources. Remember Jesus has been there, done that and got the sweatshirt (Hebrews 4:15)

USE the resource of prayer. Prayer is an open link to God's presence - we need to double down and use it - Jesus did. Prayer is a powerful, continuous conversation with God - not just a Sunday thing, not just a meeting or Quiet Time. As long as we can think we can involve God in our day (Philippians 4:6)

USE the resource of God's Word. We need to study it not just use it as a reference book or keep it in a bookcase. The world, the context, is constantly changing but basically people don't. People fundamentally have NOT changed since the dawn of time itself. Human behaviour is the same now, as it was at the time of Jesus, or at the time of Moses, or even the time of Adam and Eve. That in many ways gives the Bible its power, turning it into God's Word. In every situation we find ourselves, God's Word is relevant and has guidance on how to handle temptation in this situation - now.

INVITE JESUS into our day to day. Our experience so far is that Jesus is with us whatever the world chucks at us. We beat ourselves up when we recognise a stumble but Jesus triumphed by the cross and His resurrection - temptation is defeated (Hebrews 2:18). Jesus will never let us down but the more in tune we are with Him the better we handle temptation

RELY on the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. We still carry the consequences of our choices. God knows our human weaknesses - that we are works in progress. He knows we need the Holy Spirit to keep us on track - to give us the spiritual support we need

Temptations will come our way - that's life but the Spiritual War is won. Just like physical war skirmishes continue and can go on for some time after the overall victory

When we are tempted - remember our lessons

Perhaps using a tool (CUTTER) to cut through the Tug-of-War may help to remember. CUTTER is a bit contrived but it just might help the memory when attacked by temptation

Call in the cavalry and

- USE prayer - continuous conversation with God
- USE God's Word - study it don't just speed read it
- Bring Jesus into the day-to-day - every day
- Rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit every day too

Use our Free Will

Thinking - get it right

Trust our consciences

Eliminate distortions

Rely on what we know about God

All we have to do is claim the victory for ourselves in our actions (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Trouble is it's so easy to say - more difficult to do cos that's down to each one of us.