

Resisting Temptation

What are the keys to resisting temptation?

Answer: Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines temptation as "an enticement or invitation to sin, with the implied promise of greater good to be derived from following the way of disobedience." Resisting temptation begins with knowing that Satan is the supreme "tempter" (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5) who has been tempting mankind since our Creator placed His first two children in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3, 1 John 3:8). Ultimately, however, we know that Satan's power over Christians has been effectively destroyed as the war has already been won through our Savior's death and resurrection which conquered the power of sin and death forever. Nonetheless, Satan still prowls the earth looking to drive a wedge between God and His children, and his temptations are unfortunately a daily part of our lives (1 Peter 5:8). Yet with the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of God's Word to help us, we will find ourselves effectively resisting temptations.

The apostle Paul encourages us with these words: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Indeed, every one of us faces temptations of some kind; even Jesus was not immune as He was "tempted in every way, just as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). Although Satan may be the dark force ultimately behind the tempting, it is our fallen and corrupted human nature that allows these temptations to take root and cause us to act on them, thereby "giving birth to sin" (James 1:15). But it is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to free ourselves from the sin and temptations we struggle with in our daily lives. Thus, if we have the Spirit of Christ residing in our hearts, we already have what it takes to resist the flaming arrows the devil sends our way. As Paul told the Galatians, "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

The Word of God has always been our best defense against Satan's temptations, and the better we know His Word, the easier it will be to claim victory over our daily struggles. The Psalmist tells us "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). When Christ was tempted by Satan in the desert, the first thing He did was to quote Scripture (Matthew 4:4-10), which eventually caused the devil to leave Him. Indeed, Christians need to be diligent in studying God's Word. "Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies" (Psalm 119:97-98).

In addition to God's Word, prayer can help us to resist temptation. The night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and He told Peter to pray "so that you will not fall into temptation" (Mark 14:38). Also, in the "Lord's Prayer," Jesus taught us to pray that we would not be lead into temptation (Matthew 6:13;

Luke 11:4). Yet, when we do fall into temptation, we know that “God is faithful; He will not let us be tempted beyond what [we] can bear,” and that He will provide us with a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). This is a promise from God, and like Abraham, Christians should be “fully persuaded” that God has the power to do what He has promised (Romans 4:21).

Another way to help us resist temptation is to remember what Jesus Christ did for us. Even though He never committed a sin, He willingly endured the torture of the Cross for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). Every sin we’ve ever committed, or will commit, played a part in nailing our Savior to the Cross. How we respond to Satan’s worldly allurements is a great indicator as to just how much the love of Jesus Christ occupies our hearts.

Now, even though Christians already have the tools necessary for victory, we need to use our common sense and not place ourselves in situations that prey upon, or stimulate, our weaknesses. We are already bombarded every day with images and messages that tantalize our sinful lusts. We don’t need to make it more difficult than it already is. Even though Christ’s Spirit resides in our hearts, it is cloaked with our flesh which can be very weak at times (Matthew 26:41). When we know something is or can be sinful, Paul warns us to “flee from it.” Remember, the “tempter” is also the master of rationalization, and there is no limit to the arguments the devil can offer us to justify our sinful behavior.

Armed with His Spirit and the truth of His Word, we are well equipped to overcome Satan’s assaults (Ephesians 6). No matter what trials and temptations come our way, God’s Word and Spirit are infinitely more powerful than any of Satan’s schemes. When we walk with the Spirit we can look at temptations as opportunities for us to show God that He is indeed the Master of our lives.