

IN A TEMPTATION SITUATION

1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-13

Have you been there? Your head is swimming, your hands are sweating, your heart is pounding...

It looks so good, but you know it's so wrong...

There's a hunger: do you feed it?... It's out there: do you need it?... A hungry, man-eating tiger roams the halls of your heart; will you throw him some meat? Or will you put that tiger back in its cage?

Rationalizations keep ricocheting in your mind...

"So what if I click on that website, who will it hurt?" or "They don't pay me enough anyway, no one will even know the money is gone?" or "Yes, I looked at her test. It wasn't my fault I didn't have time to study."

There's a war raging, and you're caught in the middle. Right and wrong are slugging it out! Your allegiance is at stake! God is tugging in one direction, and a Tempter is tugging in the other direction.

*You've been there, haven't you? I'll bet you were there this past week... **in a temptation situation!***

Understand we all get tempted! **Fulton Sheen used to say, "You are not tempted because you're evil; you are tempted because you're human."** Even God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Himself, was tempted by the devil.

Hebrews 4:15 goes so far as to say the Son of God was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

The only person who's not tempted is the person who is dead! If you've got a pulse, you can expect temptation to raise its ugly head from time to time.

And when it does, we need to be ready!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 provides us strategic help. Here are two vital verses! They teach us how to handle a temptation situation: *what to expect, how it attacks, and the way to react!* Here's a simple outline for us: verse 12, *how to avoid it* - verse 13, *how to survive it.*

Let's start with verse 12, "**Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**" *Be careful of temptation!*

In other words, live on your tip-toes. Keep your head on a swivel. As much as is possible, you need to steer clear of temptation! *Shun it! Shirk it! Skirt it!*

The best way to beat it is to never meet it!

The Christians in Corinth were a cocky bunch. They felt immune to temptation. This church was privileged and prosperous. God had blessed them in abundance.

The church in Corinth had grown overnight - miracles occurred on a regular basis - the Spirit of God was at work in visible and tangible ways. They felt invincible.

Like Israel of old, the Corinthian believers felt like God's special people. That's why Paul uses Israel as an example to them! In 1 Corinthians 10, he retraces Israel's steps through the wilderness. Sadly, their story teaches us that ***a good beginning doesn't assure us of a happy ending.*** They *started well but ultimately failed.*

Ancient Israel had been self-sufficient and proud - and that's what led to their disastrous downfall.

Ironically, you're never closer to temptation than when you think you're farthest from it. Israel's pride set up her downfall. Proverbs 16:18 teaches, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

The best way to avoid a stumble is to remember you're vulnerable. The person who falls into temptation is often the person who's forgotten it's out there.

Bobby Leach was a daring stunt man from Cornwall, England. A member of the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Leach's claim to fame was a barrel ride over Niagara Falls. He was the second person to accomplish that feat. Bobby survived and walked away unscathed.

Yet years later, Leach was walking down the street when he slipped on an orange peel. He fractured his leg, it became infected with gangrene and was later amputated. He died of complications two months later.

The same man who survived a barrel ride over a colossal waterfall broke his leg on an orange peel. *Realize temptation catches us when we least expect it.*

Satan probes around our edges and studies us until he finds a soft spot; he then attacks us from the blindside.

Remember, when the devil finished tempting Jesus, Luke 4:13 tells us, "He departed from Him until an opportune time." The enemy was never successful in trapping Jesus, *but he was persistent.* No sooner had Jesus defeated the devil, that

Satan began scouting for another opportunity to reload and take another shot.

This is why temptation so often comes on the heels of a spiritual highpoint. In the afterglow of a work of God - *when we're feeling the most spiritual* - suddenly an evil thought comes out of nowhere - something happens that fans the flame of a dormant lust. **Satan knows we're weakest when we think we're strongest!**

This is the reason Paul writes in verse 12, "**Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**" A friend once gave me a quote I've never forgotten, **"an unguarded strength is a double weakness."** A strength can actually become a weakness if it stimulates pride.

Men who hang temporary lighting for concerts and special events don't mind crawling around on rafters 75 feet above the auditorium floor. But what they complain about are jobs where a ceiling is suspended just below the rafters. They know it's still a 75-foot fall to the floor, but their mind plays tricks on them. The drop ceiling creates the illusion that the floor is right below them - it lulls them to sleep - it makes them more vulnerable.

When I'm conscious of my weakness and I'm on my knees leaning on Jesus; then I'm at my strongest. But when I think I've arrived - when I'm *standing* on my own, rather than *leaning* - then I'm prey for a Tempter.

The wise man has no illusions of self-confidence. He's learned not to play with temptation. He humbles himself and tries to avoid temptation the best he can.

Portia Nelson once wrote a brief manuscript she titled, "**An Autobiography in Five Short Chapters.**"

"Chapter 1 - I walk down the street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I'm lost... I'm helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2 - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3 - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see that it is there. I still fall in... It's become a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is all my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter 4 - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter 5 - I walk down another street." A growing wisdom translates into avoidance of a temptation.

And this is the attitude Paul wants us to possess. *Avoid the temptation situation whenever possible!...*

But there are times when temptation is *unavoidable!*

God never creates a temptation, but He does allow us to feel its heat... In verse 12, Paul tells how to **avoid** the temptation situation... *be humble and alert*. Now in verse 13, he tells us how to **survive** the temptation...

He writes to us, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Verse 13 tells us that when we're *in the temptation situation*, we need to remember four truths...

First, you are not alone.

Second, God is faithful.

Third, the temptation will be bearable.

Fourth, there is always a way out.

First, God wants us to know that **we're not alone** in our struggle with temptation. **"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man..."**

Realize, the battle you fight has been fought before! In fact, your exact same battle is probably being fought right now by someone else sitting in this room.

And it's comforting to know we're not alone in the battle. God wants to *promote empathy* among us.

Even if I'm not struggling with the temptation you are, be sure I'm struggling with a temptation just as dangerous. It's said, **"Temptation is the price for being human."** *The temptation situation* is common to us all.

There's a great definition for the term **"empathy."** **"It's your pain in my heart."** Empathy is a powerful tool for combating temptation. To know someone else feels my struggle goes a long way toward easing its pressure.

Listen to God's instructions in **James 5:16**, **"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."** Often, the strength to overcome a temptation is found in the prayers of a person who has overcome the temptation himself.

It's amazing how you can stand at an observation point overlooking a vast mountain range - and take two quarters - hold them an inch before your eyes - and you never see the mountains. They vanish from sight.

Huge majestic mountains are right in front of you, but you can't see their beauty or admire their strength, because your point of view has been impeded.

Little things hinder us from seeing *obvious things*.

And this is often what happens in *the temptation situation*. Mountains of assistance are available to us: *experience from folks who've been there - prayers from fellow strugglers - wisdom from people who empathize*, but we don't see those resources because we're blinded by quarters of guilt, pride, doubt, loneliness.

So often we assume *no one can relate to us - our situation is unique - no one has ever been through exactly what we're being challenged to overcome...*

We figure everyone would be shocked if they knew what we were fighting. "Surely, other Christians don't have these problems!" But the truth is, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man"*

Listen to how the TLV puts it, "Remember this - the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible."

We all need to recall, **it's not a sin to be tempted.** Hebrews 4:15 tells us that even Jesus was tempted. It reads, **"in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."**

I've had people come to me with a guilty, shameful look on their face. They're shaking their heads, **"O, Pastor Sandy, you'll never believe the evil thoughts I've been thinking."** *Oh, yes I would... we live in the same world... we're exposed to the same junk...* and I might've thought the same twisted thoughts myself.

Martin Luther used to say, **"Evil thoughts are like birds. You can't stop them from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair."**

It's wrong to **dwell** on a sinful thought... *but often we can't help thinking them when we first think them.*

Scripture indicates that Satan has access to our minds, just as God does... He can interject thoughts.

One day, Jesus asked His disciples the question, **"Who do you say that I am?"** In Matthew 16, Peter answered, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Jesus knew Peter's thought had come directly from God. He responded to Peter, **"Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, but My Father who is in heaven."**

Yet on the same afternoon, as Jesus explained that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter jumped in again, **"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"** But Jesus told Peter, **"Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of man."**

Peter had a thought from God, and on the heels of it came a thought from Satan! This is why it's no sin to be tempted with an evil thought. It becomes a sin by what happens next... *Do we mull it over and yield to its suggestion? Or do we dismiss it as fast as it came?*

Don't let being tempted *and the embarrassment it might cause* keep you from getting the help you need to overcome that temptation! *In the temptation situation*, God knows we need one another's empathy.

Second, in the temptation situation, **God is faithful.**

Verse 13 tells us, and you should underline it, **"But God is faithful."** When you're being tempted - *even if no one knows about it - even if you feel alone - you're not!*

God will go through it with you! He is faithful!

The Bible says the reason Jesus underwent temptation was to know how to help us when we encounter the Tempter ourselves. Hebrews 2:18 tells us, **"For in that (Jesus) Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."**

Sometimes, we get so overwhelmed by the temptation at hand we figure that even God is at a loss.

God's never had to deal with a situation like mine...

But not so, Jesus was tempted **"in all points... as we are."** Everything you go through He's been through!

Jesus knows precisely the insight you need to see through the confusion. He knows the exact amount of strength you need to resist the struggle you're facing.

Hebrews 4 encourages us in the heat of the battle.

When we're in the midst of the temptation situation, we can run boldly, "to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

God is faithful to supply you the spiritual stamina and resources you need to fight the temptation and win!

A man once went to the hospital for a battery of medical tests. He was under anesthesia when the doctor explained the results of the tests to his wife...

"Ma'am, your husband has a very rare form of anemia. If not treated immediately, he'll die. The good news is with the proper rest and nutrition he should recover."

The doctor continued speaking to the wife, "Here's what you'll need to do for him - wake up each day and fix him a hot breakfast - pancakes, bacon, eggs, grits, a slice of fresh fruit, etc... He'll need a beefy sandwich on home-baked bread for lunch, and a meat-and-potatoes dinner each night... You'll have to make sure he gets a nap each afternoon, and since his immune system is weak the house needs to be kept spotless."

About that time, the husband started to awake. The wife turned to him and sobbed, "Honey, I'm so sorry, the doctor says you're going to die!" Well, in contrast, *in your moment of testing, God will be faithful to you!*

When you're *in the temptation situation*, recall God has you there for a reason. It's in the fiery trial that your character is forged and your allegiance is tested.

When you're tempted, you're forced to choose, and to choose well solidifies your devotion. Martin Luther said, "A Christian who's been tempted and has resisted is worth a thousand who haven't been tempted at all."

Overcoming temptation requires internalizing your faith. You don't ride someone else's coattails through the fires of temptation! *The temptation situation* forces you to sift through your own past answers and develop a faith that works in real life. I've heard it said, and it's so true, "Temptations discover what we really are!"

There once was a man who trained his dog by tossing him a piece of meat. Just as the dog started to eat it, the man would shout the command, "No, stay!"

The dog resisted the temptation *by looking away from the meat and into his master's face*. This is the key to us resisting temptation - **looking to our Master**.

God is faithful, and He'll supply what we need in the decisive moment. **Thus, we need to look to Jesus.**

Which leads us to our third point - *in the temptation situation* God makes sure that **the temptation is bearable**. Paul tells us that the Lord "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." God sees to it that we don't face any more temptation than we can handle. He's even willing to *temper the Temptation*.

The plight of the *Thresher* is now a part of naval history. The *Thresher* was a submarine that dove too deep. The accident occurred off Cape Cod in 1963.

As the pressure increased, the seawater crushed the sub's steel bulkheads as if they were made of plastic.

Salvage teams found the wreckage in small pieces. The tremendous pressure had shattered the sub.

And though the pressure for you to cave in might escalate and the pull on you to give up might intensify, nevertheless God gives us His Word that it won't get too intense for you to handle! God promises to keep you and me from reaching our breaking point!

Remember Job, God allowed Satan to push Job to the brink, but there were limits. Satan could attack Job's *wealth and health*, but he had to spare his life.

In Luke 22:31–32, Jesus said to Peter, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren." Satan was able to *cripple* Peter's faith, but he was not allowed to *crush it!* Jesus prayed for Peter and limited the temptation. His faith would not fail.

God keeps temptation within the *range of our resistance in one of two ways...* Sometimes He restricts the temptation. **If you bought a go-cart for your kids, you'd regulate the throttle to restrict its speed.**

You'd make sure the kids could handle that go-cart.

At times, this is how God helps us with temptation. *He installs a governor.* He regulates the temptation from revving up too fast and overcoming His kids.

But there's another way God keeps temptation from overwhelming us... Remember, the *Thresher* sub?

It's ironic, that fish swim and thrive at the same depths that crushed that submarine. The reason the fish survive, and the sub didn't, is that the pressure *inside the fish* is equal to the pressure *outside the fish*.

God can *restrict the outer pressures* of the temptation, or He can *increase the inner resistance* of the believer. Our first choice is always for God to limit our outer pressures. We pray, "God, back it off. Please Lord, give me relief. God, make my way easier!" But often, God's plan is to *increase our inner resistance*.

I like to call it **spiritual isometrics**. Isometrics is a form of exercise that works by your resistance. Rather than lift weights, you push against your own strength.

And God is into isometrics. When you push against temptation, it builds your faith. It increases your endurance and stamina. It develops spiritual muscle.

It was Mark Twain who once quipped, "I can resist anything, except temptation." That's a funny quote, but it's a cop-out. It's a defeatist attitude. If you really believe in this morning's text, defeat is no longer an option. Listen to Paul's words again... "(God) **will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able...**"

Some of you may never admit it, but if the truth were known, you don't really believe or even like this verse.

When temptation comes calling, you automatically capitulate. You toss in the towel without a fight and hide

behind your excuses. You've blamed others for your weakness. Perhaps you've even blamed God.

You've complained, *"I asked God to help. I depended on Him, but the temptation was too strong. The urge was too much. I had no choice. I couldn't help myself."*

It reminds me of a poem by John Guest, "I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed, to find out why I killed the cat and blackened my wife's eyes. He laid me on a downy couch to see what he could find, and this is what he dredged up from my subconscious mind..."

When I was one, my mommy locked my dolly in the trunk, and so it follows naturally that I am always drunk... When I was two, I saw my father kiss the maid one day. That's why I now gamble and throw away my pay... When I was three, I got ignored by my two brothers. And that's the reason why I poisoned all my lovers... I'm so glad since I have learned that lesson so well taught, that everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault..." People yield to temptation; then fail to accept the responsibility for doing so.

Guys, God isn't buying our excuses. If you succumb to temptation, it's not God's fault! Either you walked into the teeth of the temptation rather than attempting to avoid it, or you tried fighting the battle alone without the empathy of a friend... or you didn't trust God for help... but there's a problem, **and God is not it!**

It reminds me of the little boy who was trying to save his money for a new bike. One night he prayed, "Lord, help me save my money, and please don't let that ice cream man drive

down our street tomorrow.” Maybe the reason we have problems resisting temptation is that *we've never really identified the ice cream man!*

God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what we're able to handle, but you can bring it on yourself!

God can do His part, but if we don't do our part, we can push ourselves past the breaking point. Don't expect God to temper your temptation on one hand, if you invite it in and fan its flame on the other hand.

A wise pastor once remarked, **"Whenever I notice a romantic twinkle in the eye of a woman in the congregation, I always check to make sure it wasn't caused by a reflection of the gleam in my own."** Know for sure, God will keep temptation from overwhelming us if we're careful we don't bring it on ourselves!

Finally, in the temptation situation, **God always provides us a way out.** As Paul puts it in verse 13, **"But with the temptation (God) will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."** God is the ultimate escape artist. He promises to provide an exit.

It reminds me of the chase scenes in the old movies when the hero races through the castle. He turns into a room with no exits - no windows. Any moment now, the bad guys are going to break down the door.

In desperation, our hero leans against the bookshelf, and bingo - **a panel moves... a hidden exit opens up!**

This is what God promises to do for us when we're chased by temptation. It might happen when you least expect it or

occur in a mysterious manner - at the last second - but God is faithful. He provides an escape.

Perhaps, your way out is *a verse that comes to mind at just the right moment... Or a phone call from a Christian friend... Or God engineers it where you miss your ride so you don't end up at the wrong place at the wrong time... Maybe it's a reminder of some advice you got a long time ago - or a prick at your conscience.*

At times, the escape is the still, small whisper of the Holy Spirit nudging you away from a potential danger.

Your exodus could be the kiss your little girl plants on your cheek at night - *how could you do anything to hurt her?...* God's exit plan could even be the family photo you have on your phone. You look at that picture and remember you don't want to do anything that would break up that pose... God's ways of escape are many!

Some of you are too young to remember, but before the days of cell phones, we had pay phones where you could make a call for a quarter. Once, a wise father wanted his daughter to always have a way out of *the temptation situation*. When she went out on a date, he would give her a quarter; then tell the boy if he made any suggestion his daughter wasn't comfortable with she'd call and run it past dad. Over the years, there were occasions when she actually used the quarter.

But on the young lady's wedding night, the dad was surprised by a phone call. His daughter was on the line. She said, "Dad, John just made an interesting suggestion. Is it

okay now?" It was his daughter's way of thanking her dad for years of protection and care.

But here's my point, our heavenly Father will never send us out without a quarter. He's a cry, a prayer away. He always makes for us a way out if we want it!

A church once hired a single assistant pastor. The senior pastor sat him down to discuss the dangers of temptation. The young assistant tried to calm the man's fears, "Pastor, don't worry! I always socialize in group settings. I've found there's safety in numbers."

The old preacher responded, **"Yes son, there is safety in numbers, but there's even more safety in exodus!"** And when we enter a temptation situation we too should immediately start looking for the exits.

If you're safety conscious, this is what you do when you first board an airplane - *you familiarize yourself with the exits...* The first rule in defensive driving is to *leave yourself a way out...* In most public buildings, *the fire exits are posted on the wall...* We should be aware of the exits in the event we have to escape temptation.

Notice the conclusion Paul draws from verse 13. In **verse 14, he tells us, "Therefore, my beloved, flee immorality."** Always be looking for the exit signs so when temptation does arise - you're ready to flee.

It reminds me of the overweight man who every morning on his way to work, picked up donuts for himself and his co-workers. When he went on his diet, he had to stop the donut runs. Everyone understood.

But one day, he drove right past the bakery where he used to buy the donuts. He thought maybe this morning God might make an exception. He prayed, "Lord if you want me to pick up donuts for the office, let there be an open parking spot directly in front of the bakery." And sure enough, there it was, an empty spot in front of the bakery... He found it *on his 8th trip around the block*.

Amazingly, for seven circles around the block, God provided the man a way of escape by filling up all the parking spots. But apparently, **the man didn't want to be delivered**. He wasn't interested in an escape hatch.

God is *faithful*, but so often we're *flirtatious*.

It's said, "What makes resisting temptation difficult for many people is they don't want to discourage it completely." We *flirt with temptation* when God is telling us to *flee temptation!* When the heat is on, and God reveals an opportunity for you to get out of Dodge... make sure you jump on the stagecoach.

Well, we're talking about ***the temptation situation... when you can, avoid it - when you can't, survive it.***

And remember, the four keys to survival...

First, you're not alone. You have friends who care about your struggle and have been right where you are... Jesus understands too - He's qualified to help.

Second, God is faithful. Trust Him in the battle.

Third, *Jesus even promises that the pressure of the temptation won't be more than we can handle.* He'll temper the temptation, or He'll build up our resistance.

And **fourth,** *look for a door of escape* to swing open when you need it most!... Trust the Lord. God will always be with you... *even, in the temptation situation.*