

## Break Free from Temptation

### 1 Corinthians 10:13-14

Someone has said there are two constants in the world: death and taxes. I would like to add another word to that incomplete list - temptation. Do you realize how often we are tempted every day of our lives? Let us take our attitude for instance. How many times are you and I tempted to grumble and complain about life? From unsolicited challenges, to nagging financial struggles, to health challenges, to seemingly unfixable relational problems, every negative circumstance becomes a breeding ground for temptation.

During stressful times we are especially vulnerable to temptation. To alleviate the pressure and dull the pain we often seek immoral pleasure; we get discouraged and give up on our spiritual disciplines and often become unduly judgmental of others.

Today I would ask you to join me in exploring a passage that gives us a path to be able to break free from temptation before it compels us to sin and does damage to our lives.

Please turn to 1 Corinthians 10:13-14. If you have not memorized this first verse that we are going to read today, I hope you will put it on your "to do" list. It is one of the most helpful verses in all the Bible on dealing with temptation. Here is what it says: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."

I would love for you to take an especially important principle home with you today. Here it is: Temptation is defeated by quickly responding to God's help. (Repeat with audience)

This passage is all about seeking to understand and then deal successfully with temptation. But just exactly what is temptation?

Let me share these three definitions.

1. An urge to sin. This simplified definition assumes a value system that relates to what God calls sin. Sin is a violation of God's standards. There is right and wrong in the world. We all logically know this. James tells us that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (James 1:14-15)." The person who always trusts his or her own desires to be wholesome is deceived and needs to start viewing life from God's perspective.
2. The desire to have or do something that you know you should avoid. All value systems have a set of rules that define what you should do and not do. The most famous ones in Christianity are the Ten Commandments. However, beyond the obvious rights and

wrongs are things that might be okay but if we are excessive, they can become sinful. Gluttony comes to mind. We all need to eat, but we can eat too much. You might be saying, okay Pastor Tim it's time to move on – so I will.

3. An enticement to do something wrong by offering a promise of pleasure or gain. Temptations are deceptions that we allow to influence us. Every temptation looks good because we think it will make us feel good or we will get something we want. Because of our flawed nature, what we think will be good for us is not always reality.

In fact, there is a verse in this month's Bible reading in the book of Jeremiah that states: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" This verse is found in Jeremiah 17:9. Without God's help, we are not particularly good at discerning what is genuinely good for us. This is especially true with regards to dealing with temptation.

If you are like me, you are a little curious as to what temptations people say are affecting their lives. In 2013 George Barna gave some attention to this. Though these statistics might not be the same as today in percentage, they give us a glimpse of temptation in our American culture. Let me share some of his findings with you. Maybe you will find yourself in some of them.

60% admitted to being tempted to procrastinate, to put off things that should be done  
60% said they were tempted to worry or be anxious (a side note here: this is especially going on right now during the pandemic)  
55% said they were tempted to eat too much  
44% said they are tempted to spend too much time on media  
44% were tempted to spend more money than you have or could afford  
41% admitted to being tempted to be lazy and not work hard

26% admitted to being tempted to gossip or say mean things about others  
24% were tempted to be jealous or envious of someone  
18% admitted to being tempted to view pornography  
12% said they were tempted to lie and cheat  
11% were tempted to go off (which means to vent your anger) on someone by text or email  
11% said they were tempted to abuse alcohol and drugs  
9% admitted to being tempted to doing something sexually inappropriate with someone

It is possible that each of these percentages are a little skewed because when we self-report there is a tendency to answer questions in a way that makes us look better than we are – especially the super sensitive ones. Did you painfully find yourself inwardly admitting that some of these are temptations that you experience in your life?

You might be saying, but Pastor Tim, things are better now. There is less temptation. All you must do is pay attention to the news to see that this is not true. Just this past week you saw willful destruction of property, giving into temptations to shoot people, increased hostility by the general population as well as some of our governmental officials, temptation is alive and well. Divorce lawyers are seeing an increase in cases because people are giving into temptations that adversely affect their marriages. And many are giving into them at record speed.

Many things that we are tempted with were not on this list from Barna. Listen to one list given by Jesus in Mark 7:21-23 that spell out categories where temptation can occur. He said: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile a person." And each of them starts with a temptation.

If you are like me, you have a disturbing knowledge of things that tempt you. God wants you to be able to overcome temptation because He loves you and knows the pain, guilt and suffering that comes by giving into temptation.

So, what does 1 Corinthians 10:13-14 teach us about how to break free from temptation? Let's explore it together.

Notice that the author, who is the apostle Paul, starts by giving us some important truths about temptation so that we understand it in our minds and therefore approach it with the greatest possibility of overcoming it.

Know these truths about temptation

1. Temptations seek to dominate you. Paul used the word "overtaken" to describe this dominating effect. This word means to get hold of or to grasp. Probably each of us has had an experience whereby someone bigger and stronger than us has grabbed us and we could not break free from their grip.

I remember as a child wrestling with my older brother and sometimes (well most of the time) because he was four years older than me, he would get me in his grasp and would not let me go until I cried "uncle." That was very frustrating for me not to be able to break free. But that is what temptation seeks to do. It wants to get us in its grasp and not let go until we have given in. It is good to know that temptation is not your friend and it seeks to overpower you and dominate you!

2. Your temptations are not unique. Temptations are universal. Everyone experiences similar temptations. Temptation happens to everyone and we all experience the same type of temptations. Knowing this truth helps us to avoid making excuses when we give

into temptation. No one can justly say “Well if you had experienced the temptation that I did you would know why I had to give in.”

Or you might even mistakenly feel that Christ as the Savior does not understand your struggles. Your thinking might be that because He is God, He can't sympathize with your weaknesses and temptations. Nothing could be further from the truth. Remember, He experienced life as both God and man. And Hebrews 4:15 reminds us that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” When you look at other people, you can know that we are all tempted, and the temptations are common to us all.

3. God faithfully offers to help those who want to break free. The truth is, sometimes we do not want to break free. Sometimes it feels momentarily satisfying to give into temptation. But what follows often attacks and damages our soul. It leaves us with guilt that sometimes is so overpowering that we berate ourselves or discouragingly choose to keep living in sin's short-term pleasure and long-term misery. But if you want to break free, God is always there to help you and as a loving heavenly father He wants the best for you. God is faithful and trustworthy. He always keeps His word. You can count on Him. He will not let you flounder if you want help. He is even faithful when we are not.

Listen to 2 Timothy 2:13: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful.” Take note also of 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This means that when we admit doing wrong, every time we seek His forgiveness, He responds with cleansing. God cannot be anything but faithful. He will always do what He says He will do. His integrity demands it.

4. Temptation has limited intensity. Paul said God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. He knows us and how we are made. He knows our experiences in life. He knows our potential and what we are capable of with His help. He is saying that temptation has a limited intensity. Now when we are in the middle of a temptation this is especially important information to remember. With God's help we do not have to give into temptation. The intensity to sin will never exceed our ability to resist if we are approaching temptation with God's way of dealing with our sinful urges.

But let's be honest, sometimes it does not feel this way does it. There may be many reasons for this but let me give you two. The first is that if we are concentrating on our feelings and not processing the temptation God's way, our focus is on the wrong thing. It's like being mesmerized by the flames without focusing on what to do to put the fire out. The second possible reason is that we are often habitual in our reactions to things.

We must learn to do things God's way instead of the way that has not worked in the past.

So, temptations seek to dominate us, they are not unique, there is a way to break free with God's help and God's help is always greater than the intensity of our temptation. If you have misconceptions about temptation, it can be deadly. Can I give you some of these that you might be accepting as truth?

#### Misconceptions about temptation

1. Being tempted is the same as sinning. In other words, temptation equals sin. This is wrong thinking. We sometimes mistake the mental anguish of temptation with guilt. We are only guilty if we give into the temptation and violate one of God's standards.
2. My relationship with God is faulty if I am tempted. God does not tell us that He is disappointed with us because of temptation, He tells us how to break free from it. If you have children, you do not punish your child for being tempted but rather teach them to overcome and then praise them when they learn to resist.
3. If I am spiritual then I will not be bothered by temptation. Being spiritual can ultimately create less opportunities for temptation but it does not get rid of all of them. Jesus was tempted yet did not sin. Being spiritually mature allows you to have more spiritual tools to use for resisting temptation. Where there is sin, there will be temptation. As children of God, we can look forward to a time when there will be no temptation, but it is not now – it will be in eternity.
4. I am powerless over temptation and sin. This is only true if you are not depending on your relationship with God to help you. If we try to resist in our own power, we will find ourselves surrendering to temptation. Romans chapter six gives great instruction with this principle. The apostle Paul said in verse eleven "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." With God's help and a proper perspective, you are never powerless with temptation.
5. There is no way to be prepared for temptation. This is simply not true. There are many passages in Scripture that are instructive and given by God specifically to understand and overcome temptation. God cares enough to instruct. We must care enough to study and obey.
6. If I pray during a temptation, then the urge to sin will immediately go away. God always wants us to succeed in resisting temptation and prayer is always a good thing. However, God also wants us to understand how to bring our feelings and expectations into obedience to His truth. Temptation diminishes because we work our way through it God's way, and then replace it with something wholesome.

So, back to our passage today. Paul now gives us what to do when we are tempted. Before he was talking about our mindset, now he gives us what to do to break free from our temptations.

Use these truths during temptation

1. Be open to God's way of overcoming temptation. Paul calls it the "way of escape." The picture here is of an army trapped in the mountains and the only way to get out is through a specific mountain pass. There is a specific way that God knows will ultimately give you the freedom to go through the temptation to a place of victory. Maybe you have not caught this truth yet. When a temptation comes, God gives a way to break free from it. This means that if you are open, the message God sends will be received.

I believe this is most often in the form of a thought, that gives what action you must take to resist and break free from temptation. If you are not experienced in listening for this action step, it is often a fleeting thought that is ignored. But we do this to our own detriment. When a temptation comes, so does God's escape path with a way out of the temptation.

He may use the words of another person. He may remind us of a verse or sermon or conversation that gives the way of escape. We must grow in our ability to hear it rather than focusing on the intensity of the temptation.

2. Immediate action is required to break free of temptation. This is the essence of our main principle today. Please repeat it with me.

Temptation is defeated by quickly responding to God's help.

Our indecision or wrong decisions can be deadly with temptation.

Jim Grant, in Reader's Digest, told about someone else who faced a temptation. An overweight businessman decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he showed up at work with a gigantic coffee cake. Everyone in the office scolded him, but his smile remained, nonetheless. "This is a special coffee cake," he explained. "I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window was a host of goodies. I felt it was no accident, so I prayed, 'Lord, if you want me to have one of those delicious coffee cakes, let there be a parking spot open right in front.' And sure enough, the eighth time around the block, there it was!"

With every temptation there is a lie that something good will happen if we give in. Often, we play around with these thoughts and the results are a catastrophic. Let me illustrate. We will let this chair represent the moment of temptation. What we often do is sit down and think

about what we might be missing. This is not what works in overcoming temptation. We must look for a way to escape and put feet to the thought – immediately! When you decide quickly to let action take you away from the temptation, the intensity starts to subside. But if you stay at the point of temptation, the intensity draws you toward giving in. This brings us to our third point.

3. Choosing the escape action creates limited power to the temptation. There will be a period during temptation where there is struggle. This way of escape is a path through the temptation so that you can endure it. Someone said, “Opportunity knocks but once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.” The word “endure” means to bear from underneath, to undergo hardship. In other words, a part of God’s help is to strengthen you to go through the action steps - to go through the temptation and be successful in resisting.

Most of the time we just wish God would take away the temptation so that we do not have to work or struggle. This is not God’s way according to Paul. God wants us to be in partnership with him in breaking free from temptation. God will do His part - we must give effort to do ours. So, do not be surprised by the needed effort or struggle to break free. And always remember that the power of the temptation will diminish by choosing resistance action. It is a part of the process.

4. Flee anything that seeks to usurp God. Every temptation seeks to separate you from God or diminish His importance. Every temptation is an assault on your devotion to God. Paul’s concluding thought after giving the truths of verse thirteen was “Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry.”

What is idolatry? To some, it’s when a person allows something that is created to be worshipped and given allegiance above the Creator. We see this in societies that make their gods out of wood or stone. But in modern societies, idolatry is more subtle. We know a piece of wood or man-made image is not God. Idolatry is placing anyone or anything before God in importance. And Paul knows we are tempted to let all kinds of things become more important to us than God. So, he says “flee” or run away from idolatry. Every temptation is an assault on who is the lord of your life. Every temptation says follow me- do not flee. Is anything more important to you than the true God of the universe?

You might be asking the question: “How do I know if I have let something become more important than God?” It’s a fair question. But for the Christian the Holy Spirit has already pointed those things out to you and continues to do so. He convicts us of things in our lives that seek to replace God or become more important than Him. Your conscience tells you what they are.

When we lay our head down on our pillow at night, He speaks to us. He warns us through Scripture. He convicts us when we are listening to sermons or messages on the radio. He uses people in our lives to help us see when we are straying in devotion to God. He shows us our inconsistencies and hypocrisies and often we feel guilty when we have made someone or something more important than God.

Would you say our main principle with me?

Temptation is defeated by quickly responding to God's help.

So how are you doing with temptation? Paul was speaking to people who have already accepted Jesus Christ as Savior but were not dealing with temptation the right way. You may be defeated by temptation because you have never come to faith in Christ. Know this, He is so serious about helping you with your sin problem that He died for you to take sin's penalty. All He asks of you is to turn from your lifestyle of sin and accept Him as your Savior. Then you can have his help as you face your temptations.

If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, please pray this prayer of faith. "Lord I am a sinner and need your help with my sin and temptations. I turn from my way to your way and ask you right now to be my Savior. I know you died for me to take my penalty. Thank you for your forgiveness and commitment to helping me with my temptations and sin."

What about you Christian? Is guilt and shame weighing you down? Have you been giving into temptation and are defeated and discouraged? Confess your sin, accept His forgiveness, and put into practice God's way of dealing with temptation so you can break free from it.

So, what can we take from here today that will be helpful in breaking free from temptation?

Action steps

1. Choose to resist temptation.
2. Look for the way of escape and take it.
3. Run from things that diminish God in your life.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." 1 Corinthians 10:13-14

Temptation is defeated by quickly responding to God's help.