

What is it that really tempts you? Is it shopping all day long, is it nice cakes? What is it that you struggle to put down? Recently in the house after Christmas we have had a stash of chocolate boxes, and I just simply cannot keep my hands away from them. Everyone of us has our weak points don't we, but for some of us our temptations are much deeper – they may have got us into debt, they may have ruined relationships, they could have caused all sorts of damage. And so today as we look at this story of Jesus being tempted in the desert and his encounter with Satan, we are going to look at how he dealt with these, and from this suggest some strategies for fighting temptation.

We all know what it is like to be tempted, but let's be clear on what Temptation isn't. **TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN!** Somewhere along the line, many of us have picked up the false idea that to be tempted is sin or that to be tempted is a sign of weakness...but that's not true. Jesus was not weak and yet he was tempted but he **NEVER** sinned. So when you are tempted it is an enticement...an offer...to succumb to sin but being tempted is not sinful. However giving into that temptation **IS** sin. And temptation is not a sign of weakness...it's a sign of humanity and a sign of life. All of us will be tempted.

And so we have the story from Matthew 4 in which Jesus is tempted by Satan in 3 ways.

Firstly turning stones into bread – for someone who was fasting for 40 days that would have been so enticing I'm sure.

Next, was the temptation to leap from the temple. The Jews were expecting a hero, and so such a feat would have been considered amazing.

And then finally, he was tempted by Satan to worship him.

So, what can we learn?

Well first of all...**We can know that temptation will be a part of this life as long as we are alive...**Jesus had to deal with temptation...therefore who are we to assume that we won't? In fact in my view, if you stick your head above the parapet and have a relationship with Jesus, then you better be ready for an encounter with Satan. This is our struggle while we have breath. Temptation is a part of life which we must fight against.

Then next, **Temptation hits us when we feel secure and safe.** Jesus has just come away from the amazing events surrounding his baptism. He has been baptized and then he sees the Holy Spirit descend upon him. That's a pretty heady experience and coming off of that the natural human emotion would be one of feeling invincible... Paul warns us, If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NLT) When we think we have something conquered, we need to be cautious because that is when Satan will attack. We feel strong and we let our defences down and suddenly we find ourselves vulnerable.

Next, **Temptation hits us when and where we are weak.** Jesus has just fasted for 40 days. He is weak physically and emotionally and mentally. And when he is weak and tired, Satan begins to tempt him. He is at his most vulnerable state. When we are weary, stressed, burned out or under pressure temptation can be at its strongest. Don't think that just because you're down that Satan decides that he'll give you a break for a day or two. He's not concerned about your growth. He wants to see you fall further and further from

the arms of God, and if that means he brings you down and ruins your life then so be it where he's concerned. So temptation is very real, but how do fight against it?

Well I want to leave you with some strategies that will help you to fight the temptations that Satan will throw at you.

The 1st Strategy was Jesus' primary defence, and that was **knowing the Word of God**. Every time Satan offered up a temptation to him, Jesus countered it with Scripture..... The only place you will find truth in this world, that will ease your soul and guard your mind is through the Word of God. If you are not reading your bible daily, then you have nothing to hold on to when things get tough, and they will. There's no excuse folks – find the time – your life depends on it. Jesus knew this – his first response to Satan was that “Man doesn't live on bread alone...but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

### **Strategy 2 Comprehend the Consequences.**

When we are tempted by something, Satan has a way of disguising what is sinful as good. However, for every action there will be a consequence. If you are thinking about those consequences ahead of time you may be much less likely to follow through on the temptation.

### **Strategy 3 Run Like the Wind!**

Do you remember the stories of David and Joseph? Did you know that both were faced with the same temptation but one succumbed and the other did not? Joseph ran from the temptation and left his coat in the hands of Potiphar's wife. David watched Bathsheba take a bath and then had her brought to the palace. Folks - when faced with temptation, whatever it is...RUN. Never think you are invincible, never think that you can face any situation and not get caught in it. When you see it coming, give it over to God, and start running in the opposite direction.

### **Finally Strategy 4 Watch and Pray**

You will all know the story of Jesus in the Garden and he asked his disciples to stay awake and pray so that would not come into the time of trial. Jesus knew that Peter and the other disciples had good intentions but he recognized something that they did not: they were weak. As I said none of us are invincible. Satan is stronger than you think, and therefore we need to have the armour of God protecting us each and every step. Like a soldier in battle, we may need to keep awake and watch out for attacks from the forces of darkness. None of this will you ever be able to do in your own strength, and therefore seeking God in prayer is a strong weapon to counter Satan's tests. Remember Ephesians 6.

In this period of Lent, we set aside more time to consider our weaknesses and to draw closer to God, knowing that whilst the journey to the cross was incredible difficult and traumatic, the result in trusting in God is resurrection. Therefore whilst we go through the trials and temptations in this world, know the peace that will finally come when through our obedience to God. And as James declared in Chapter 1:12 *'God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him'*