DEFEATING TEMPTATION

Today I want us to look at what God has to say about man's oldest problem: temptation. It goes all the way back to Adam. We all eventually face it. Sometimes, even when you know what's right to do, it's difficult to say "No"... Irish author, poet, and playwright Oscar Wilde once said, "**I can withstand anything except temptation."**The reality is that the only way to get rid of temptation is to give in to it.

Employee: Excuse me sir, may I talk to you?
Boss: Sure, come on in. What can I do for you?
Employee: Well sir, as you know, I have been an employee of this prestigious firm for over ten years.
Boss: Yes.
Employee: I won't beat around the bush. Sir, I would like a raise. I currently have **four companies after me** and so I decided to talk to you first.
Boss: A raise? I would love to give you a raise, but this is just not the right time.
Employee: I understand your position, and I know that the current economic down turn has had a negative impact on sales, but you must also take into consideration my hard work, pro- activeness and loyalty to this company for over a decade.
Boss: Taking into account these factors, and considering I don't want to start a brain drain, I'm willing to offer you a ten percent raise and an extra five days of vacation time. How does that sound?
Employee: Great! It's a deal! Thank you, sir!
Boss: Before you go, just out of curiosity, what companies were after you?
Employee: Oh, City of Tshwane Accounts, FNB, Woolworths Card Division, & Edgars Arrears.

On a level of 1 to 10, how would you score your "Temptation Level" at this point in your life? If you really thought about it, what would be the main causes or sources of your Temptation? The reality is that adverts play into our restlessness and even help to create it. If they succeed, then by the time the advert is over, we feel the need for the product. Bigger cars, better phone, smoother hands, a nicer smell or a bigger burger... Advertisers are experts on human motivation. They want to create in us an appetite for more. Even without the adverts, we are driven by that appetite..."MORE" is usually seen as the answer to our "If-Only-I-Had's" of life... We try and convince ourselves that there is nothing wrong with us that wouldn't be cured by having more... More...Time, Money, Friends, Job, Clothes, Excitement, Comfort, TV, Cell Phone, IPAD...Let's read this next passage in James together out of the CEV bible;

God will bless you, if you don't give up when your faith is being tested. He will reward you with a glorious life, just as he rewards everyone who loves him. Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others. We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead. Don't be fooled, my dear friends. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father who created all the lights in the heavens. He is always the same and never makes dark shadows by changing. He wanted us to be his own special people, and so he sent the true message to give us new birth. **(James 1:12-18 CEV)**

The reward for enduring temptation is life and more life. When you know how to say "no" to temptation, it produces happiness in your life. In Greek, this means "life itself". James says that when you understand temptation, when you overcome it, when you learn to say 'no, ' then you begin to really live. It is a crown which is life -- abundant life -- itself.The question is, how? How do I handle temptation? How do I say no when I want to say yes? James, being the practical apostle that he is, gives us five principles.

1. BE REALISTIC

Face the facts: You will be tempted. Even Christians are tempted. All of us are tempted. *"**When** **tempted** ... "* not "if tempted..." temptations are inevitable. Like Oprah - Everybody's tempted. You're tempted. I'm tempted. Every day we're tempted. You never get too old for it. You never overcome it by getting too spiritual. Everybody's tempted. The more you grow toward the Lord, the more you're going to be tempted. It's a fact of life. The reality is that all of us are tempted.

But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it. **(1Co 10:13)**

NO DIFFERENT -- that means we're all in the same boat. We all have the same temptations, the same problems. Don't be surprised, shocked. Don't try to hide it. Some of you are caught in a compromising situation right now. But it is liberating to know that other people feel the same way I do. We all have the same struggles and problems.It is not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin to give in to temptation.

This High Priest (Jesus) of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. **(Heb 4:15)**

He was perfect. He was tempted, but He never gave in. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give in to temptation. There's a misconception that says, once you're born again, you've got it all together. You've arrived, so you fake it and wear a mask and pretend like, how could anybody do something like that? We all are tempted. Know that temptation starts with a thought, "Hey, that women at my office is gorgeous" You don't just fall into adultery, it starts with a thought...I meet a lot of Christians who are intimidated by temptation. They think, "How could I have such a thought?" The devil put it in your mind; it's not your fault. You are human. Temptation proves you're human, not that you're evil. IT'S NOT A SIN TO BE TEMPTED; IT'S A SIN TO GIVE IN TO TEMPTATION. The more committed you are, the more you're going to be tempted. **BE REALISTIC**

2. BE RESPONSIBLE

Accept responsibility. Don't blame other people for your problems. We love to blame people, even God.

And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. **(James 1:13)**

We love to blame others. We are in a society of irresponsibility. Blame society, blame the government, blame the environment, blame heredity, blame your parents, blame your spouse, blame the devil, even blame God. Some people say, "It must be God's will, or He wouldn't have let it happen." That's called blaming God. I had a guy tell me, "God told me to leave my wife and go marry someone else that I met at gym." That's called blaming God. Don't make your bad choices and then blame them on God. God does not tempt. He never contradicts His word. God is not going to tell you one thing and have the Bible say something different. If the Bible says something and you say something different, you're wrong. Be responsible. Don't blame God and don't blame other people. It's a sign of immaturity. The fact is, I bring most of my problems onto myself. So do you. We bring them on ourselves; we should stop passing the buck, making excuses.

3. BE READY

When temptation comes, be ready. Be prepared for it. Peter says, *"Be on your guard."* Jesus said, *"Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."* Paul said, *"Put on the whole armour of God".* Be ready. Be prepared.

Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires... So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters... **(James 1:14,16)**

Don't be misled -- we need to be ready and prepared for temptation. Temptation does not warn you in advance. One of the reasons it's a temptation is because you don't even know it's there. It catches you by surprise. You've got to be ready and on your guard. We are most vulnerable after a tremendous success. We think we're doing OK.

Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it's useless. Cultivate God-confidence. **(1Co 10:12)**

It's the little things in life that kill us. James is saying, be ready, don't be deceived.

"In order that Satan might not outwit us, we are not unaware of his schemes." **II Corinthians 2:11**

God wants you to know how the devil operates, how he tempts. The only thing you can say about the devil that's good is this: he's consistent. He's been using the same old tricks for 2000 years and longer. In verse 17, suddenly, James switches gears. He starts talking about the goodness of God. It looks like he forgot what he was talking about -- at first.

v. 17 *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows."*

James is talking about temptation, then suddenly he redirects our thoughts to the goodness of God. First, he's talking about something negative, then he's talking about something positive. He's refocusing our attention on something else. Why? Because that's the next step in overcoming temptation.

4. BE REFOCUSSED

If temptation begins with our inner thoughts, then changing what we think about is the key to overcoming it. The key to overcoming temptation is not to fight temptation but simply to refocus your thoughts. Change your attention. Turn your attention to something else. Shift your thoughts. Change your mind. Refocus. Instead of looking at what you're being tempted by, just look somewhere else. Refocus. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, says...

"do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious--the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse." **Philippians 4:8**

Focus your mind on the goodness of God. Why? Because the more you fight a feeling, the more it grabs you. Don't focus on what you don't want. Focus on what you do want. Turn your attention. Be refocused. Get your eyes off the negative. Get your eyes on the goodness of God. Are you a chronic worrier? It's because you're doubting the goodness of God. Whatever gets your attention gets you. Whatever you resist, persists. Stop fighting it, just refocus. Turn your back on it. Focus on what you want, *"This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad."* It's a choice. *"I will bless the Lord at all times ... His praise will continually be in my mouth ... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Get God's word in your mind and refocus. Quit fighting the feeling. What you resist, persists. You can't fight a feeling. But if you ignore it, you weaken it. Don't try to argue with the devil. He's a lot better at it than you are. He's had thousands of years of experience. When you refocus, it may mean physically removing yourself from the situation. Maybe you need to change the channel on the TV. Maybe you need to walk out of that movie. Maybe you need to change jobs. Paul says to us...

"Bad company corrupts good character." **I Corinthians 15:33**

You know your weakness, and God does too. Maybe you need to be redirected.

5. BE REBORN

The single most important principle in breaking bad habits and getting control of your life is to let God have control of it. Get Him in your life so He can start changing your character. Being born again gives you a new capacity to resist temptation. You don't have enough power in your willpower. That's why you keep falling. You need some supernatural power. You need Jesus Christ in your life. That's what it means to be reborn. It means you get a fresh start on life. Ask Christ in. Ask Him to make the changes and give you the power you need to do what you know is right to do anyway. You will not be able to say no to temptation until you first learn to say yes to God. You need His power in your life. You need to not only be redirected and these other things, but you need to be reborn. That's the starting point. Then you'll have more than just your power. The principles of BEING REALISTIC, RESPONSIBLE, READY, REFOCUSED, and REBORN will help you fight temptation.

Here are some ACTION STEPS that I want us to commit to today, which will help us:

- **PRAY REGULARLY**

Set aside time every day to spend time with God... Go to a quiet place where you won't be distracted...

- **READ YOUR BIBLE**

They key here is that you shouldn't see the bible just as a story book about an interesting past or as an obscure manuscript that you need to decipher, but as a means by which God will speak to you today... EXPECT HIS WORD TO SAY SOMETHING TO YOU...

- **COMMIT TO CHURCH**

It is actually a discipline to attend Church regularly... A bit like going to the gym... While you know that it is going to be very valuable to your health, there will be times you don't enjoy it, times when you won't want to bother going at all – PUSH THROUGH – PERSIST...

GOD HAS ALWAYS WORKED THROUGH COMMUNITY!!!

- **BE ACCOUNTABLE**

It is very helpful to have someone whom you can trust and respect as a believer in Christ, with whom you can be honest… Someone who can ask you the tough questions

- **SET YOURSELF HIGH TARGETS**

It's so easy to look around and think that we are better than other people… I don't murder, steal… This is nothing but a recipe for mediocrity… If you are going to compare yourself to anyone, compare yourself to Jesus… If you shoot for the stars, you may still hit the moon…

- **KNOW YOUR WEAKNESSES**

We are all prone to different temptations… Some may gamble, others may have no interest in gambling… Know your weaknesses so you can watch out for them… Make a mental note to avoid getting yourself into a situation where you know you will be tempted…

- **HAVE PURITY OF PURPOSE**

You need to be determined and keep on persevering, but you need a good sense of direction… What good is a powerful car with a focused driver if it keeps driving on the wrong road?

What is your most vulnerable area this morning? What is your weak spot? God knows it. The devil knows it. Have you ever figured it out? If you haven't, you need to because once you've figured out where you're weak, you will know when and where you're most likely to fall, and you can avoid it. It's stupid to put yourself in situations that will automatically tempt your weakest area. Where are you vulnerable? Be realistic about the problem. Where do I have a lack of self-control? Is it my temper? Is it my appetite? Is it spending? Is it my words -- I'm continually talking all the time and saying things I later regret? Is it drinking? Is it boom? Drugs? Food? Is it lustful thoughts? What is the area that Satan knows which button to press, and he's always baiting me in that area? Figure it out and then admit it to God. Say, "God, You know the areas I've fallen in. I've stumbled. I want a clean slate. I want to start over. Get free of the past. Get forgiveness. That's available. Then salvation is the first step in victory over temptation. Ask Christ to come into your life and give you the power.

ACT – Action Changes Things

God says, "I will make a way out if you trust Me." The fact is, there is hope, and you can change if you want to and if you'll let Christ change you from the inside out. There is a way out if you trust in Him. What is it that you want in your life so badly that you're willing to compromise to get it? A promotion? A thrill? Confess it to God. The time to deal with temptation is right at the start. When it starts in the desire stage, nip it in the bud. You cannot live in a temptation-free world. It's all around you. It's not a sin to be tempted. So don't be intimidated by it. It is a sin when you begin to dwell on that temptation and think about it so that it eventually begins to take form in your life and heart.You may be struggling in an area which has been bothering you for years. What is your weakness? What is your hot button? Where are you being tempted?

Come Holy Spirit