

On Purpose, 8

Resistance Training

Chapters 25-28; August 3, 2008



When are you the most susceptible to the lure of sin? Is it when you're at *home*, or out of *town*, or on the *road*? Are you usually with your *spouse*, or with your *friends*, or all *alone*? Is it when you're feeling *lonely*, or *stressed*, or *bored*?

When does temptation come calling? And when is it the most appealing? We each have a different combination of strengths and weaknesses, but *all* temptations follow the same pattern. The enemy has used the same strategy and the same old tricks since Adam and Eve. And he does so because they work! But, it helps to know that he's so predictable. And Paul makes it clear that his tactics are foreseeable:

For we are not unaware of his schemes." - 2 Corinthians 2:11 NIV

So, let's be aware! His schemes consist of four seeable phases:

1. **He pinpoints a desire** (inside of us). Temptation *always* begins with either a wrong desire for something bad (like revenge) or a right desire for something good (like pleasure).

... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. - James 1:14 NIV



And it's not always an *evil* desire. He'll often take a legitimate need and suggest that you fulfill it in an illegitimate way. Internal desire gives temptation its grip. The hold is so tight because a very *real* longing is being met with a very *clear* promise of fulfillment.

2. **He plants a doubt** (concerning what *God* has promised). He whispers in your ear that God will not or can not satisfy your desire in the way that will *most* satisfy *you*. It's simple unbelief that temporarily turns us away from God.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. - Hebrews 3:12 NIV

Temptation will always win if I buy into the lie that God is *not* going to meet my need the *best* way that it can be met.

3. **He promotes a deception** (which will vary with the situation). “It’ll be okay this *one* time, this *one* little thing. You can easily get away with; nobody’s gonna know. After all, you deserve it; it’s a legitimate need. And it’ll solve the problem ... fast! God will understand and forgive; that’s what He does!”

When a desire is coupled with doubt, it leads to deception.



Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. – *James 1:15-16a NIV*

Paul uses conception and birth to illustrate his point. A little sin is like a little pregnancy. Eventually it’s going to reveal itself; and ultimately a little “monster” is going to come out!

4. **He persuades an act of disobedience**. I use the word “persuade” because he can’t force us, as believers, to take any action contrary to the Spirit. The devil didn’t “make me do it” (as Flip Wilson used to say). He can only make an impassioned recommendation. He has no power without my permission.

We could put his scheme in fisherman’s terms: He finds the best fishing hole among my desires. He baits the hook with a promise of fulfillment. He bobs it in front of me using doubts and lies. And he waits for *me* to bite, and he reels me in. You’ve heard of “fly fishing”, this is “lie fishing”.



When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. – *John 8:44 NIV*

He can bait and bob all he wants, but we’re the ones who get to choose whether or not to bite. He can only dangle the bait. And when I choose to listen, I’m usually persuaded.



So, why does God give him access to us and allow him to tempt us? That’s a good question, and there’s a really good answer: Temptation may be one of the devil’s primary weapons to destroy us, but turns out, it’s also one of God’s primary tools to develop us. Temptation is a stepping-stone or a stumbling-block.

And you get to decide! Every single temptation provides as much opportunity to do what’s right as it does to do what’s wrong. And, with each choice that we make to do what’s right, we grow in the character of Christ.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. – *James 1:12 NIV*

That “**crown of life**” comes during this life as well as the next.



Just as roots will strengthen when the wind blows against a tree, each time we stand up to temptation we become more spiritually robust.

Temptation provides resistance training.

Now, since we are no longer unaware of our enemy's schemes, we should have a battle plan ready in order to combat them. I'll give you a six-part scheme of your own.

1. **Plan on the battle coming.** Don't feel guilty or ashamed for being tempted; that is a misunderstanding of spiritual maturity.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. - *1 Corinthians 10:13a NIV*



Temptation is "**common**" and inevitable. The Bible says, "When you are tempted ..." (*1 Cor. 10:13b*) not "If ..."! That's because God deems it useful in order to make us more like Jesus. Therefore, we will never outgrow temptation. It's not a sin to be tempted; it's a sin to dwell and to act on it.

2. **Prepare for the attack.** We need to be alert and think strategically: when and where and with whom am I most susceptible to the attack of temptation?

Be self-controlled **and alert**. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. - *1 Peter 5:8 NIV*



It just makes sense to identify our inevitable areas of temptation, so that we can be alert, and guard ourselves, and avoid them as much as possible. Wise planning will decrease the attacks.

But when the battle *does* begin ...

3. **Duck and cover.** Duck down, and cover yourself in prayer!

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are ... - *Hebrews 4:15 NIV*



He knows what it's like to have destructive thoughts hop into your head, and inappropriate suggestions made to your mind. He's sympathetic to my struggle. Tell Him what you want to do; why you want to do it. And ask for wisdom and strength to withstand the attack. He gets it. He's been there. He understands.

4. **Retreat!**

The Psalmist said: "Turn my eyes away from worthless things ..." (*Psalms 119:37a*). Paul said to his young protégé, Timothy: "Flee the evil desires of youth ..." (*2 Timothy 2:22a*). And remember when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph? "She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house." (*Genesis 39:12*)



Each of these spiritual giants understood a singular truth: It's easier to stay out than to get out. The quickest way to neutralize a temptation is to turn your attention away from it. Once your mind is on something else, the temptation loses its steam. How many of you have learned *that* lesson the hard way?!

5. **Radio for help.** You need to publicize your struggle; not to the whole world, but to a godly friend or a support group.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. - James 5:16 NIV



Here's the reason: Sin grows in the dark!

A big step in the battle is to bring it into the light. So you can be prayed for and encouraged and loved unconditionally, and held accountable. Some temptations can only be overcome with a partner.

6. **Use your weapon.** "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." - James 4:7 NIV

But how are we supposed to resist (i.e. oppose) the devil? You won't win an argument with him. Jesus calls him the "Father of Lies" and he's had thousands of years to practice! We're expected to resist the same way Jesus did in the wilderness. And He did that with what? Every time Satan made a suggestion, Jesus quoted scripture.

Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. - Ephesians 6:17 NIV



If the "**word of God**" is our "**sword**" then the Bible is my weapon. But it's gotta be loaded. It's no good to go into battle if the bullets are still in their boxes sitting on the shelves back in the armory. If you don't have specific scripture, ready to fire at your inevitable areas of temptation, you've got no bullets in your gun!

But, if you load just one new bullet into your heart each week, by New Year's Day you'll have exactly enough for a 21 gun salute!

If we're going to live life "on purpose" there are some things we need to understand:

1. I must be aware of the schemes of the enemy.

Q: What areas of your life are you pretending aren't a problem?

2. God has a purpose behind every problem.

Q: Is temptation usually a stepping stone or a stumbling block?

3. I must be ready for the inevitable battles.

Q: How prepared are you to face your temptations this week?