

Purpose Driven Life, VIII

Tempted to Grow (Chpt 25-28)

April 4, 2004

SATAN'S SCHEMES

Q: When are you the most vulnerable to temptations?

- What day of the week? What time of the day?
- At work? At home? Out of town? On the road?
- With your spouse? Friend? Strangers? Alone?
- When you're tired, bored, lonely, stressed?
- When you're hurt, angry, worried, provoked?

Q: When are you the most vulnerable to temptations?

Q: Have you thought about it in this strategic way?

All temptations follow the same pattern. The enemy uses an old predictable strategy and Paul alludes to it in 2 Corinthians.

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

The Devil's schemes consist of Four Descending Stages.

1. First, *he pinpoints a desire* inside of us.

Temptation always begins with either a wrong desire for something bad (revenge) or a right desire for something good (pleasure).

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

- Internal desire is what gives temptation its strong appeal.

2. Next, *he plants a doubt* about what God has promised us.

The devil may take a valid, legitimate need and simply proposes that you fulfill it in an invalid, illegitimate way.

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 wins when we believe that God won't meet our needs.

3. Then, *he promotes a deception* that it'll be okay.

I can get away with it. I deserve this. It's a legitimate need. No one will know. It's not a big sin. It'll sure solve my problems.

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 1:15-16 NIV

- A little sin is like a little pregnancy; eventually it shows.

4. And finally, *he persuades an act of disobedience*.

He can't force a believer to *do* anything. He can only suggest. You've heard the saying: The devil made me do it. Well, he didn't! But, if we choose to listen, we'll probably be persuaded.

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

- What begins as harmless desire becomes harmful disobedience.

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW IT?

Q: The question is: Why does God allow him to tempt us at all?

A: Temptation may be the devil's primary weapon to destroy us, but turns out, it's also God's primary tool to develop us.

- Part of our created purpose is to become like Christ.

Christ-like character development has everything to do with learning to make good, healthy, honorable, righteous choices.

- And temptation provides that opportunity.

Every temptation provides just as much opportunity to do what's right as it does to do what's wrong. With each choice to do what's right, we grow in the character of Christ.

- Every temptation can be a stepping-stone or a stumbling-block.

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

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

STANDING THE TESTS

So, since we are not unaware of our enemy's schemes, we should have specific steps ready to overcome them. I'll give you a six-part scheme of your own.

1. Plan on temptation coming.

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

Temptation is common and inevitable. Don't feel guilty or ashamed for being tempted – that is a misunderstanding of maturity.

- We will never outgrow temptation.

That's because God uses it to make us more like Jesus. It is not a sin to be tempted; it's a sin to dwell on it or act on it.

2. Prepare for when and where it will strike.

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

Some circumstances will cause you to stumble almost immediately, while others don't bother you much. These situations are unique to your weaknesses and strengths.

- Wise planning reduces temptation.

Identify your typical pattern of temptation and then prepare to avoid those situations as much as possible.

3. Pray without delay.

For 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

When temptation strikes, you don't have the ability to argue with the devil; but you can cry out to the one who knows your plight.

- Jesus is sympathetic to our struggle.

Lord, right now I'm feeling like *this*; and Jesus I want to do *this*; but I don't want *this* to be part of my life. Help me Father!

- My biggest problem is when I don't want to be helped.

4. Point yourself in a different direction.

Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. –
Psalm 119:37 NIV

Since temptation always begins with a thought, the quickest way to neutralize its allure is to turn your attention to something else.

- It's easier to stay out of it than to get out of it.

Ignoring temptation is far more effective than fighting it. Once your mind is on something else, the temptation loses its power.

5. 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

Sin grows in the dark. The first step in spiritual warfare with temptation is to bring it into the light so we can be prayed for, encouraged, and held accountable.

- We are only as sick as our secrets.

So, take off your mask and stop pretending things are okay when they're not. You're in a place where you'll be loved and accepted.

- So, don't repress it; confess it! Don't conceal it; reveal it!

6. Pound on the devil.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. – James 4:7 NIV

We're expected to fight back the same way Jesus did when He was tempted: with Scripture. Satan fears the power in God's Word.

- (But) The truth must be stored in our heart.

Q: Ever see a movie where the victim points a gun at the villain and pulls the trigger and the gun just goes "click"?

If you don't have specific scripture memorized for your unique pattern of weakness – you've got no bullets in your gun!

- Make sure you got some bullets in your gun.

Every time we defeat a temptation, we become more like Jesus.