

Tempted But Not Trampled

God invites us to life, a life that is wonderful and filled with many beautiful and satisfying gifts. He created us for that. When our world and our lives became broken through sin, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to deal with sin and suffering and to offer us a new way back to loving relationship with God, our Heavenly Father. However, some of us may wonder if we can ever have "the good life". Our battle against addiction and struggles with poverty and related issues seems endless and hard. We get discouraged and tempted to give up and not bother trying anymore. It seems easier to hide away from life in front of the television or just "passing the time" with friends, helping here and there, as a way to fill our time. We drink a little beer, smoke a little dope and just get through today. We live with frustration and sometimes give in to impatience, blame, angry communication, or even fits of violence. We've given into the temptation to give up and not bother.

The word *temptation* makes everyone think of something different, from ice cream sundaes to more serious problems with addictive habits and lifestyles. Whatever we struggle with, we need to remember that we are not the only one who has a tough time making the right choices. God has encouraging news for us.

Remember this, the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it. (1 Corinthians 10)

Many people face temptation by hoping that it will just disappear. Life will be better when I don't have these feelings anymore. There is no such place in life. We may deal with a craving in one area only to find ourselves drawn down another path. Temptation will forever be part of life. We'll make better progress towards the life we want when we find ways to face and deal with temptation. The first step to winning this war is to realize that we cannot pass the

blame. We're capable and responsible, with God's help, to live in healthy ways today.

There are several precautions we can take when facing temptation. The first one is the most obvious: avoid sinful behavior. Certain places and actions stir up tempting thoughts. We need to know our limitations and avoid those places and relationships. Empty time breeds focus on thoughts and feelings that tempt us to harmful activities. We need to get serious about finding ways we can be involved in positive activities - either as paid employment or volunteering. The Bible tells us to resist the devil and to give ourselves to God. One without the other can't be done but God can give us strength to move out of harm's way and into safe places and practices. Eating well, exercising, and getting plenty of sleep reduces our drive to sin. Having a plan and schedule for our day, and living it, goes a long way to keeping us focused in a positive direction.

We can also avoid temptation by asking God to reprogram our thinking. When we give our lives to God and accept new life through Jesus Christ, we become a new person. However, some of the old "tapes" that once played within our mind remain. By studying and memorizing God's Word, we can break old sinful thought patterns and actions. We can be set free from dark, debilitating thoughts. As we ask God to remove the old, He immediately brings new thoughts to our mind. Old urges disappear under God's protective care.

The key to overcoming temptation is to recognize it when it comes. We need to say no to its pull and then trust God to protect us. Sometimes temptations are taken care of quickly. Other times they seem to linger, buffeting our hearts and minds. This is when it is extremely important to walk closely with Christ, telling him all that we are feeling and trusting Him for the victory.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What kinds of behaviour and actions do we usually mean when we talk about "being tempted" or "giving into temptation"?
2. How does temptation happen in my life?
3. What things seem to keep people from experiencing success in life?
4. What helps me successfully face temptation - both things to avoid and things to do?
5. What difference does it make to face temptation with God rather than facing it alone?

(Note: Some thoughts taken from studies found at www.intouch.org)