

## Byrne's Serms I - Passion Week (Thursday)– Temptation in the Garden

### **Mark 14:34-41**

Temptation. Sounds like a perfume being hawked by some aging movie star. Mankind has been dealing with temptation since the early days in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve. Temptation is the devil's invitation to live a life patterned after him, rather than after God. We are constantly tempted. You were tempted this past weekend. Tell me, for just a moment, you didn't think "I should just stay home from church today. I'll go next week." Maybe you added a little rationalization, "I haven't skipped in a couple months." You don't have to raise your hands. I know...

But many of you went anyways. You resisted that temptation. You made a choice to follow God, rather than Satan. It was a little thing, but it was a victory over sin. Those of you that did not go, work on it this weekend, eh?

Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples on Thursday evening, with his arrest, trial and crucifixion following on Friday. After the supper, Jesus took the disciples to a grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane. He brought Peter and the brothers James and John with him as he moved off, preparing to pray alone. Luke took his account up a notch and tells us in 22:43-44, ***Then an angel from Heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.*** Jesus' visit is often referred to as 'The Agony in the Garden.'

There are a multitude of paintings of Jesus in the garden and Matthew, Mark and Luke all mention the visit. It is the last time Jesus will be alone and unhindered while he prays to his Father, since it is here where he will shortly be betrayed by Judas and arrested. Knowing what was coming, we can only imagine the anguish he felt as he prepared himself for the suffering that lay ahead.

Stress is a great contributor to temptation. In the history of the world, has anyone ever been subjected to the stress Jesus was under while he awaited Judas? As we shall see, he did not relish what he was about to face, but he humbly submitted himself to God's will. As he did throughout his life, he rejected temptation and remained faithful to God. The Agony in the Garden is a short collection of verses, but Jesus teaches us much about resisting temptation, even under incredible duress. Let's read from Mark, verses 14: 34-41:

<sup>34</sup> ***"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."***

<sup>35</sup> ***Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.***

<sup>36</sup> ***"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."***

<sup>37</sup> ***Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?"*** <sup>38</sup> ***Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."***

<sup>39</sup> ***Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.*** <sup>40</sup> ***When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.***

<sup>41</sup> ***Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting?”***

In eight verses, Jesus gives us the blueprint for dealing with temptation. You know that the word ‘Gospel’ means ‘Good News.’ Is it not marvelous that we can always turn to the four Gospels and learn about Jesus Christ? That we can turn to the Good News in our daily struggles for hope and help? Today, we’re going to look at four ways to resist and deal with temptation. If you’re a fan of King David, we’re going to be using him as a ‘How Not To’ example.

#### 4 WAYS TO RESIST TEMPATION

Giving in to temptation leads to sin. And sin is deliberately turning away from God. And that cannot be good, right? We can start our battle against temptation simply by watching out for it.

1 – Keep watch – Stay awake and be morally vigilant

The sentences that lay the foundation for resisting temptation are right here. Jesus says to the three disciples, ***Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.***

“Watch and pray.” There it is: Three words. Two simple, direct, divinely inspired guidelines. And why should you watch and pray? “So that you will not fall into temptation.” The spirit aspires to be God-like. But the human body, the flesh, is prone to sin. Jesus, being both human and divine, knows this. Jesus is referring to Psalm 51, which says, ***...and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*** If your spirit is under God’s control, it fights against human weakness. Jesus is giving us a little ‘how to’ help. We’ll start with watching.

In verse 34 we read, ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”***

Just an aside for a moment: what a powerful phrase: ‘my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.’ That’s from the NIV translation. The New Living Translation has ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. The Bible contains some marvelous language. When you’re reading it, try to really absorb the words. Soak in the images and the depth of what the words mean.

So, Jesus tells his disciples to keep watch while he goes to pray. He knows what’s coming, whereas they do not. Just a little before this, in chapter 13, Jesus gave a similar message as part of what we call the Olivet Discourse. Jesus knows he will shortly die on the Cross and takes his disciples up on the Mount of Olives. All three of the synoptic Gospels include the Olivet Discourse and it’s a great read. I really recommend just picking up your Bible when you don’t have anything pressing and going over it. I’m sure you’re just awash in free time, right? The Discourse is one of my favorite Bible verses to study. In fact, it is the subject of an upcoming missive.

In Mark 13:32, Jesus says <sup>32</sup> ***“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.***

In verse 34, he says, <sup>34</sup> ***It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.***

<sup>35</sup> ***“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”***

Jesus is giving this warning in relation to his Second Coming. Nobody can know when he will return: as Christians we must live our lives in a fashion so that we won’t be found wanting at the time of judgment. Accept Jesus into your heart and live a Christ-like life. Stay aware so that you recognize and acknowledge temptation.

Many of you of a certain age have seen *Animal House*, right? A few of you are smiling and a few others are saying “I admit nothing. That is not an appropriate topic during a sermon.” You remember the scene where Larry is looking down at the passed out girl and there is a little angel on one shoulder telling him to be good and a little devil on the other telling him to ravish her? You will be happy to know that he listened to the angel and not the devil. But that’s how Satan gets to us. He is always there, whispering to us. Just little things. We take a step. Then another step. Then another. Suddenly, five little steps have gotten us further than one big one would have. And we look back where we were and ask ourselves what happened. Folks, Satan warred with God. God! How hard do you think it is for him to know which of your buttons to push?

The man at work does not plan to cover up a crime. But he knows that his boss doesn’t like being told certain types of things. He sees something wrong. Not illegal, but not right. His workplace environment encourages people to see gray instead of black and white. And black and white means wrong and right. So he just ignores it. The devil whispers in his ear “It’s a little thing. Just go along and it’s all good. Nobody likes a trouble maker.” Well, it is a little more ‘not right’ the next time. But it is still something that could make his work life uncomfortable, so he doesn’t say anything. Another little step. A few more steps down the line and the inspectors find that a law or regulation has been broken. It is not something that sends people to jail, but it does require an investigation and some explanation. And the man cannot quite put into words why he never told anybody his concerns about what was going on.

Casting Crowns is one of my favorite groups. Their song, *Slow Fade*, is about the gradual descent into sin.

*It's a slow fade when you give yourself away  
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray  
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid  
When you give yourself away  
People never crumble in a day*

In the video for the song, we see the story of a man cheating on his wife; but it's played out from the end to the beginning, so we get to watch every little step in the tale, knowing where the path of temptation had led him. As his tale unwinds in reverse, we saw how he slowly gave himself away. He didn't crumble in just one day. He listened to the whispers and turned away from God at each step.

You cannot always go back to where you started. This being a music video, the end finds the man at the very first step: and this time he makes the right decision. They say it is never too late to do the right thing. That is pretty much true. But I can tell you right here, right now, it's never too early to do the right thing. Stay awake in your daily life. Be morally vigilant.

In the Garden, Jesus showed us four ways to resist temptation. We're going off-road for a moment and adding a sub-item. It's still Biblically based, so don't think I'm just adding wisdom from the Book of Byrne to Jesus' teachings here.

### 1A – Run Away!

So, you've recognized temptation because you don't let it sneak up on you. You are ever vigilant. Now what? It may not be the easiest thing to actually do, but the simplest solution is to just run away. I am not saying you should let out a shriek and sprint off in the opposite direction. Although, if that works for you, go for it. It has a Biblical precedent. But when you're watching television, turn off the Real Housewives of whatever city or the Victoria's Secret holiday show. Not that I would know there is such a show just after Thanksgiving, on CBS... When your gaze lingers on an attractive person who is not your spouse, force yourself to look away. Don't click on the link to THAT website. You can't always avoid temptation, but you can minimize your exposure to it.

Cable television, the internet, smart phones, ipads: we are constantly within arm's reach of temptation and sin. I can pull this iphone out of my pocket and see a pornographic picture or a sex movie in a matter of seconds. Of course, I don't actually know how to do that, but if I did...

Look, friends. We know that temptation is leading us down the wrong path. The most direct response is to simply get off of the path. That's what we mean by running away. Any Seinfeld fans out there? You remember when George was called into his boss' office because it had come out that he slept with the cleaning lady, on his desk? George is busted. There's no way around it. But because George is George, he tries to weasel his way out of trouble:

*Was that wrong? Should I not have done that? I tell you, I gotta plead ignorance on this thing, because if anyone had said anything to me at all when I first started here that that sort of thing is frowned upon...*

We can't plead ignorance when we give in to temptation. We know what we are doing is wrong. George knew that having sex with the cleaning lady on his desk was wrong. At the least it was improper usage of office equipment. He could have run away from temptation, but he didn't. When we recognize temptation for what it is, we always have the option of turning away from it. You and I know it is hard to do. It is easier just to give in. It is easy to listen to those whispers in our ears. But we can always turn away. Every time.

We'll talk about David and Bathsheba shortly. That is most certainly a situation when someone could have saved themselves a lot of trouble just by simply running away. Ouch.

If you saw the movie *Fireproof*, the main character, Caleb, has a weakness for internet pornography. After he has committed to saving his marriage and following where God leads him, he is on a perfectly harmless internet page. I think he is looking at boats because he has saved up to buy one. But one of those ad windows pops up, tempting him to click on it and open a sleazy website. He sits for what seems like minutes, staring at the screen, deciding what to do. And then he grabs up that computer and smashes it into pieces. Now that is running away from temptation!

Do you remember Joseph in the book of Genesis? For those of you with children, think *The Ballad of Little Joe* from Veggie Tales. Joseph had been put in charge of Potiphar's household in Egypt. This is in Genesis 39 if you want to read about it yourself. Now Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph and insisted that he sleep with her. He refused, trying to avoid her as best he could. Finally, when she grabbed him and demanded that he have sex with her, he ran away. Unfortunately she tore the cloak right from his back and used it to frame him. Joseph had been vigilant and he recognized temptation. He resisted it as best he could and literally ran away from it. If you read on, you learn that it did not work out very well and he ended up in prison. So, he did watch out and recognize temptation and he tried to run away from it; but was there something else he could have done?

When you are keeping watch but you do not turn away from temptation, what can you do to stand firm and resist? Gee, if only there was something that we as Christians could do. Something to help guide and strengthen us. Hmm. Watch and read a self-help book. Not quite. Watch and meditate. That does not sound right. Watch and think about it. Nope. Watch and...Wait a minute. Jesus has already told us what to do after we watch. PRAY.

## 2 – Pray to God

Psalm 145 is a wonderful poem of praise to God. Verse 18 starts <sup>18</sup> ***The LORD is near to all who call on him...*** When you see temptation in the path ahead, remember that the Lord is right by your side. Pray to Him.

In verse 35 of Mark, we read, ***Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.***

Jesus prayed in the Garden three different times. Was he trying to get out of the task ahead of him? No. He knew the grueling agony in his future. Not just being tortured and nailed to a cross. But he was going to be sacrificed to God to atone for all the sins of mankind. He was to bear the Wrath of God. Can you comprehend the magnitude of this? He is going to be separated from God. God, separated from God, for us. All the gifts in the history of the world, past, present and future, combined together and multiplied, do not even constitute the tiniest portion of the Gift of the Cross: Cannot even be considered in the same conversation as the blood of the Lamb. When we take the bread and drink the wine, this is what we are commemorating. The new covenant between God and his people: us. No greater sacrifice can be imagined. And knowing, Jesus prayed to God about what lie ahead of him.

He asked, if possible, that he be spared this completely unearned, undeserved, greatest of all punishments. But Jesus Christ, he who was without sin, modeled discipleship for us because as soon as he asked, he obediently submitted to God's will. So he asked to be spared the path ahead, if he could, only if it followed God's plan for him. God's will, not our own.

I believe that here, Jesus, is asking if there is another way. He is the Lamb, to be sacrificed for mankind's salvation. He does not shirk the task, but acknowledging the power of God, his Father, he asks if there is a less horrific way for the offering to be made. This is the act of the fully human Christ. And being without sin, having made the request, he defers to God's wishes over his own. He is our perfect savior.

Max Lucado is a very popular Christian author. He has written dozens of books such as *3:16 – The Numbers of Hope, He Chose the Nails* and *When God Whispers Your Name*. He writes in an easy to read and understand style. In *Facing Your Giants*, he uses the life of David as a way of helping us deal with the obstacles we encounter in our life.

David is the great and tragic hero of the Bible. God elevated him as high as could be, but he fell far and suffered much loss in the latter part of his life. Lucado makes a point that really sticks with me. When David did his greatest things, he prayed to God for guidance and did them in the Lord's name. And when David just acted out on his own and didn't seek God's advice, things didn't go so well.

King Saul doubted that David could kill Goliath. But David told him that ***The Lord...will rescue me from this Philistine!*** And after Goliath taunted him, David replied ***..I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. – the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the Lord will conquer you.*** David, 1. Goliath, 0.

Later, when Saul is hunting him, David has opportunities to kill the king but doesn't because Saul is anointed by the Lord. David and his men, rebels on the run from Saul, have their town raided while they are gone. The Amalekites burned the town and carried off everyone as prisoners. David and his 600 men returned to find their wives, children and others gone and their homes burned. His men actually talked of stoning him. Things were looking bleak. 1 Samuel 30:6 tells us ***But David found strength in the Lord his God.*** David prayed and the Lord told him to pursue the Amalekites. David did so and completely routed them, recovering every single person and thing that had been taken. After David becomes king, there are several stories of his asking God what to do and then following the Lord's instructions to happy results. It is the pattern for David's successes.

God raises up an unknown shepherd to become King of the Israelites. David survives Saul's persecution and quashes Israel's enemies. But he gives in to temptation and it all comes apart. Big time. He listens to the whispers of the devil and a wonderful story of God's majesty becomes a tragedy.

The king normally went to war with his armies. Inspiring to have the big guy out there, etcetera. But one spring, David stays home. It is the first little step in a slow fade.

So, instead of being out in the field leading his armies, David is walking on the roof of his huge palace and he sees this beautiful woman taking a bath and he's smitten. He says, "Hey, she's kinda pretty" and tells one of his servants to go find out who she is. The servant comes back and tells him the woman is Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sends his messengers to bring her to him. They do so, he sleeps with her and she becomes pregnant. David's kingship is crumbling.

David should have turned away when he saw Bathsheba bathing but he had lust in his heart. His vigilance failed. He listened to Satan's whisper. And failing to turn away, having taken that step, he should have prayed. When he faced Goliath and when he pursued the Amalekites he was focused on God. Do you think he talked to God or sought guidance when he lusted after Bathsheba? "Say, God, I saw this beautiful woman bathing the other day. She's married, but I'm thinking of summoning her here to sleep with her. Would that be okay?" Did David pray as he was tempted? Most assuredly he did not.

David:

- A - Abandoned his purpose and duty by staying home in Jerusalem instead of going to war
- B – Focused on his own desires by watching Bathsheba bathe
- C – Failed to turn away from temptation by inquiring after Bathsheba
- D – Sinned deliberately by sending for and then sleeping with Bathsheba

David could have resisted temptation at any of these steps. He could have prayed to God for help, but he didn't even think of turning to him for guidance. In the moment of temptation, you'll be amazed at what turning your eyes to God can do. It's a lot harder to give in to sin when you're God focused. That is one of the wonders of His grace.

Some of you are old enough to remember Watergate. Those of you who do not know what I am referring to need to read more books. Watergate was an example of the cover-up being worse than the crime. It cost Richard Nixon the presidency. Well, David went into full blown cover-up mode:

- E – He tried to get Uriah to sleep with his wife so the pregnancy could be explained away
- F – He committed murder by ordering Uriah into a combat situation where he was certain to die
- G – He took Bathsheba to be one of his wives after the mourning period ended.

Again, do you think David was praying to God for guidance as he was just rolling from sin to sin? Most assuredly he was not. God finally had enough and sent the prophet Nathan to confront David for his misdeeds. David repented after being convicted by Nathan and being warned of the dire consequences that would come. David wrote Psalm 51, which is his plea for forgiveness. If you ever feel you need to seek God's forgiveness and mercy, Psalm 51 is for you. And then read Psalm 32, which David wrote to celebrate the joy of God's forgiveness.

If number 2 on our outline is Praying, let's add a 2a: Read the Bible. God's word. Repeat that. God's WORD. You are being tempted. You know that Satan is whispering in your ear. Where better to turn than GOD'S WORD? You might have a favorite verse or a book of the Bible. Most Bibles have topical indexes in the back and you can find verses related to your temptation. If you pray every day and you read your Bible every day, you are going to Think God a lot more frequently. And you are going to be stronger in your fight against temptation if you are conditioned to Think God.

Satan quoted the scriptures when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. But Jesus 'out quoted' him, if you will. Jesus both knew and obeyed God's word: the devil only had the first part down. Ephesians 6:17 refers to the word of God as 'the sword of the Spirit.' Again, beautiful language. That very iPhone that lets me give into temptation in a matter of seconds also lets me arm myself with the sword of the Spirit in the same amount of time. It's just a choice. And I choose God.

So when you're being tempted, and you have prayed, read the Bible. Maybe the Ten Commandments speak directly to your issue. Or maybe you are struggling with possible adultery and the lesson of David will call to you. Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels: God will help you find what you need. But it's called the Good Book. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your savior; and if you pray to him and you read his word, brothers and sisters, I don't care how weak and frail we are: God will put his hand on your shoulder and steer you away from what is tempting you. You will overcome with his guidance. God hears you when you pray. You hear God when you read his Bible.

Okay: Back to our regularly scheduled programming. Prayer fortifies us; especially in times of great stress. Take a look at the twelve apostles. The men handpicked by Jesus to learn from Him and to spread His word. How did they do during the time of testing? The disciples fell asleep. Jesus prayed to God and followed God's plan through to the cross. The disciples slept and failed at their jobs. Here is one way to look at it: An unnamed woman anointed Jesus for his burial and was reprimanded by them. A bystander carried Jesus' cross. A pagan centurion who oversaw his crucifixion acknowledged that Jesus was the



Son of God. A member of the council who helped send Jesus to his death obtained the body and buried it in his own tomb. Women followers who watched Jesus die, in person, came later to anoint the body. Well, what about the disciples, you ask? They slept after Jesus asked them to support Him, they betrayed Him, ran away in fear when He was arrested and denied Him while he was being sentenced to death. Later, they made Him come to them because they were scared and locked themselves in a room. Thomas so doubted His resurrection that he had to poke the wounds before he believed. They fell asleep: they did not pray for God's strength to support them.

We can always pray. We can always ask for his help in resisting temptation. God's voice will drown out Satan's whispers. David did not turn to God until he had sinned greatly. And he was greatly punished. The rest of David's life, the great king, was filled with grief. James 1: 14-15 tells us, **"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.** David's sins gave birth to the death of the blessed life God had given him. You can read 2 Samuel to find out what happened. I'll just give you one example. David's first born son, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's brother, Absalom, killed Amnon. Absalom later rebelled against David, set up a tent on the palace roof and slept with ten of David's concubines. Whew. And there's much more. David suffered greatly for his failure to resist temptation.

God will forgive us, but understand that we may still pay a price for our sins. Consequences can still follow God's forgiveness. Avoid the sin by walking away from the temptation. Be vigilant and recognize the temptation. Pray to God to help you maintain your vigilance and resist the temptation. Read the Bible and hear God's word.

We can also seek the support of those around us.

3 – Seek the support of friends and loved ones

Verse 37 tells us, ***Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?"***

Then verse 40, ***When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.***

And verse 41, ***Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting?"***

Jesus did not go alone when he went into the Garden to pray. He brought Peter, James and John with him. We already saw Jesus resist and even send away Satan during his forty days in the desert. If anyone could resist temptation alone, it was Jesus. But before his darkest hours, he sought the support of his friends.

For us, the strength of friends and loved ones can compensate when we are weak. You've heard 'He ran with a bad crowd.' The voice of the devil is amplified when those around us are echoing his evil thoughts. Companions urging "Do it" can lead us to actions we would never take by ourselves. We

should instead surround ourselves with people who help guide us to do God's bidding. Those who truly care about us should be willing to tell us wrong from right. And sometimes the mere presence of close associates can be of comfort. When we are tempted, we are weak.

Boon companions lend us strength; especially when we desire it most. Physically, we lean on people to help support us when needed, like when you twist an ankle. When we are tempted, we can spiritually lean on others to support us.

Friends and loved ones can both help us build up our vigilance and also provide us the opportunity to lend strength to their efforts as well. The Christian life is not to be lived alone. Small groups, Sunday services, lunch conversations, fellowship: we are the body of Christ, and the body is meant to work together; parts in unison.

Here's a little tip: If you are ashamed to ask someone about an issue that is tempting you, or if you know that you probably won't like their answer, it is a pretty good bet that sin is in the neighborhood. Others can help us when we most need it.

So you've tried to watch out for temptation. You've prayed to God about the temptation. You've relied upon your friends and loved ones as you wrestle with the temptation. Yet you still haven't vanquished this foe. There is one more thing you can do and in this case, the last is certainly not the least.

#### 4 – Focus on the purpose God has given us

You all know this line from the Lord's Prayer: Your kingdom come, your will be done. That is one of the simplest yet most profound phrases in our Christian lexicon. Going back to Casting Crowns, a piece of the song *The Altar and the Door* offers a paraphrase: *Your kingdom come, my will was done*. All too often, that is the case.

God doesn't want us to give in to temptation and to sin. That is entirely our doing. David doesn't look away from Bathsheba. David doesn't pray to God about his desire for Bathsheba. David doesn't ask his friends what he should do about Bathsheba. The destination ahead is adultery and he's flying by all the off ramps.

Yet there is still one more exit that he can take. If he had just asked "What does God want me to do?" he could have resisted temptation. God's will certainly was not to give in to lust, leading to adultery, deceit and murder.

Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* is a tremendously successful book. He says that God has five purposes for our lives as Christians: to offer real worship, to enjoy real fellowship, to learn real discipleship, to practice real ministry and to live out real evangelism. It is safe to say that giving in to temptation does not fall into any of those five categories.

If we are in doubt about whether or not to do something, we should ask if it is what God wants us to do. Does it further his kingdom here on earth? Now, my buying a 55" HDTV doesn't do much to further the kingdom. But I don't think it really harms the work, either. Sinning against God; now that is a whole other thing. When I was growing up, when I thought about doing something questionable, I asked myself what my parents would think if I got caught. That was my conscience's monitor. By the way, if you're wondering whether or not to do something, if 'being caught' is part of the equation, you probably should not do it.

But when you are wrestling with temptation, ask yourself what God would say if He confronted you about it. God handed the kingdom of Israel to David. David had slain Goliath, rescued the floundering nation from Saul and restored His chosen people to glory. It was pretty clear what God's purpose for him was. Seducing another man's wife and having that man killed to cover up his sins did not follow the pattern. When we are tempted, we need to ask whether it is an angel or the devil whispering in our ear. We know God's plans for us are good: Satan's are evil. We have to remember this and examine the temptation.

It cannot be summed up any better than it is in Proverbs 3:6, ***in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight***. That is from the NIV; I prefer the wording of the New Living Translation, but the message is the same: ***Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take***.

Do you think that just maybe, Satan was whispering in Jesus' ear while He prayed in the Garden? That the devil might have been making one last ditch effort to hold onto mankind and keep Jesus from going to the Cross? But Jesus knew God's purpose. In John 12:45-46, Jesus says ***"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark. I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it."***

'To save the world.' Wow. Jesus knew God's purpose for him and he stayed steadfast in living it out. Satan tempted him, but he refused to yield. So Jesus prayed in the garden and submitted to the will of God. Jesus had been sent down from Heaven for us. God had a very specific purpose for him. You have seen the signs at football games: John 3:16. ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish but live forever.***

That was God's purpose for Jesus. Christ had the power to avoid the crucifixion. He could have not let himself be arrested, or he could have come down off the Cross, or he could have led the people of Israel in rebellion and overthrown the Roman rulers. He could have bypassed the agony of the Cross. In Matthew 26: 53-54 Jesus says, ***"Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"***

He submitted to God's will and died so that we would be saved. Jesus was willing to go through terrible suffering to stay obedient to God's will. Is it too much to ask of us to try and live our lives in his image? Most of us won't be threatened with persecution and death. Our temptations are real, but we are equipped to overcome them with God's help.

Watch out! Be vigilant in avoiding temptation. Pray to God and read your Bible when you are tempted. Reach out to friends and loved ones to support you. And ask yourself if succumbing to that temptation is in accord with God's purpose for your life. We are imperfect. We sin. It is the human condition. But God, through Jesus, conquered death. He can most certainly allow us to resist temptation.

Michael Wilkins, in his commentary on Matthew, summarized Jesus' guidance as follows: 'Resist the devil in the power of the Spirit through the guidance of the Word to accomplish the will of God.' That is a nifty phrase we will probably explore during a discussion of the 40 days in the wilderness.

Resist the Devil – Keep watch  
in the power of the Spirit – Pray to God  
through the guidance of the Word – Read your Bible  
to accomplish the will of God – Focus on God's purpose.

That does a pretty nice job of covering what we have been talking about today. Remember: we talk about RESISTING temptation. We NEVER conquer temptation. Sin is the human condition. We read in Luke 4:13: ***When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*** The NLT translation finishes with ***'...he left him until the next opportunity came.'*** When you resist temptation be grateful and thank God. Then go right back on watch. Sin is waiting just around the next corner.

1 Corinthians, 10:13, reads, <sup>13</sup>***No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.***

God provides us a way out of temptation. Jesus showed us at Gethsemane. We just have to listen and obey.

There is no better way to start your day than with a prayer to God. It doesn't have to be a long one. You can do it in the shower, on the drive to work or in a quiet moment before the craziness of our daily lives takes over. Practice talking to God every day. When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he taught them The Lord's Prayer. I have read that John recited the Lord's Prayer at the start of each day. You know what the last line says: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Jesus taught us to ask God to help us resist temptation.

I'm going to ask you to take less than one minute each morning and say The Lord's Prayer. God gives you twenty-four hours each day. It doesn't seem unreasonable to give him sixty seconds each morning. I spend that much time walking from my car to my office. Some of you already pray each day and you have your own routines. That is wonderful: Consider adding this to it. For those who do not pray regularly, give the Lord one minute. I am pretty sure he wants to hear your voice every morning. And not only when you are cursing the driver who just cut you off on the freeway.

Let us open up our hands to the Lord and recite his prayer together:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

## FURTHER READING

Psalm 51 – David begs God to forgive him for the sins he committed regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. Do we beg God for forgiveness enough? Do we carry the guilt on our shoulders instead of giving it over to Him? If David, whom God called a man after his own heart, can repent and beg God's forgiveness, shouldn't we? Also see Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 - This is a Psalm of thanksgiving, conveying David's joy at receiving God's forgiveness over his transgressions regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. We often forget to thank God, only turning to Him in times of need. Also see Psalm 51.

James 1: 12-18 – Temptation is a result of our desires, not something caused by God. God wants only good for us and rewards those who resist temptation. The illusory benefit of giving in to temptation is short term. The true reward of resisting temptation is eternal.

Matthew 4: 1-11 – Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. Along with Eve in the Garden, it is the most famous temptation story in history. This one has a happier ending! Jesus uses the sword of the Spirit to defeat the devil and send him packing.

2 Samuel 7 – God makes a covenant with David through Nathan. David is promised more blessings than one heart should be able to stand in this chapter. It makes it even more painful to watch David's transgressions and the misfortunes that befall him soon thereafter.

Ephesians 6 – The Armor of God chapter. Paul's imagery ascended to rarified heights in verses 10 to 18.

Proverbs 3 – Jimmy Buffett asked in song, What if the hokey pokey really is what it's all about? Nope. This Proverb talks about trusting in the Lord. THAT is what it is all about.