

11 SIN



Receive

Genesis 3:1-24

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Genesis 3:6-7, NIV).



Reflect

Is anything blocking my relationship with the Lord (are there sins I need to confess)?

What are the temptations in my life that lure me into sin?

What concrete steps can I take to excise those temptations from my life?

We are so familiar with this age-old story that we tend to glaze over it when we read it again. Yet when we look closely at how the fruit is described—as “good,” “pleasing to the eye,” and “desirable”—we realize that those descriptors could fit any number of our own temptations that lead us to sin. Like Eve, we often don’t think much about the temptation in the moment—we are simply lured by its attractiveness and react to it instinctively, unable to see beyond its enticements. It’s only after we fall prey to the temptation that, like Adam and Eve, our “eyes are opened,” and we realize the gravity of our sin and how it has distanced us, once again, from God.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me face my temptations head-on and admit what they are to You now, so that I can begin the process of returning to You.*

Consider What’s Real: As Romans 8:1-2 says, “There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.” (NLT). Identifying our temptations and confessing our sins are the first steps toward forging a genuine, reciprocal relationship with God. While we will always sin, God’s grace allows us to live free from the power of sin.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 51:1-12

12 TEMPTATION



Receive

James 1:13-15

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15, NIV)



Reflect

Which enticements are the most difficult for me to resist?

How do these enticements turn my head away from God?

Do I ever feel like I am being dragged towards temptation almost against my will, like it is a force beyond my power?

Our desires—whether for money, sex, fame, power, possessions, success, or prestige—are incredibly powerful forces. So powerful, in fact, that they often succeed, as these verses say, in “dragging us away” from what is right and good. Our desires literally turn our hearts and minds away from God toward evil. That’s why it’s so important to identify these desires, these temptations. Bring them into the open; confront them face-to-face. Acknowledging our temptations weakens their power over us, and confessing these temptations to God and asking for His guidance in overcoming them weakens their destructive power even further.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, give me the courage to name my temptations as well as the courage to trust that You will lead me away from them day by day.*

Consider What’s Real: One look at our society tells us that temptations are a very real and powerful force. Society is rampant with sex, drugs, alcohol, overspending, materialism, and a host of other vices. Clearly we are not capable of fending off these temptations on our own accord. Yet God does not leave us to resist temptation all on our own: “When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Additional Verses to Consider: 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Timothy 2:22

13 HEALING



Receive

Malachi 4:1-3

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” (Malachi 4:2, NIV)



Reflect

What healing touch do I need from the Lord?

Can I envision a time when I will be entirely free from the bondage of sin?

What do I imagine that kind of exhilarating joy and freedom feel like?

Although Malachi is referring to a time when we will be free from all sin for eternity, God gives us glimpses of such freedom in the here and now. Handing over our hearts, minds and souls to God, relinquishing control and surrendering to Him and putting our whole lives into His hands allows us a breath of that peace, joy, and freedom. Like the healing warmth of the sun’s rays, God wraps us in His warm embrace and willingly takes our burdens from us. We simply need to allow Him in.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, You know that it’s difficult sometimes for me to hand over my burdens. Help me open my heart fully to You so that You may begin to heal me fully.*

Consider What’s Real: Choose today or another day this week to allow yourself to rest fully in God. That might mean doing absolutely nothing for the day and releasing yourself from your normal duties and responsibilities. Or it might mean allowing yourself to indulge in a creative or outdoor activity that you enjoy but don’t experience very often. Let God guide your day, and allow it to unfold as He wishes. In this place of rest, ask Him to heal your heart and breathe new life into your weary spirit.

Additional Verses to Consider: Matthew 11:28

14 GOD'S GREATNESS



Receive

Deuteronomy 4:32-40

“You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other...Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.” (Deuteronomy 4:35 and 39, NIV)



Reflect

Do I live as though God is truly all-powerful and all-loving?

How can I maintain that sense of awe in the day-to-day?

How does God show me his power and love in my life?

We might read these verses and think, “Well, it was easier to see the hand of God at work in Old Testament times, with the burning bushes and the parting of the Red Sea and all the plagues, but what about now? Where are the signs that show the almighty, awesome God in the here and now?” The truth is, though, God shows us His presence every day, through signs and wonders big and small. But in the tumult of our fast-paced days, we don’t slow down long enough to glimpse His work. We don’t stop long enough to quiet the cacophony of iPods and iPhones, televisions, radios, and the Internet to hear the whispers He intends just for us. Our almighty God is with us—we simply need to open our ears to hear and our eyes to see.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I am always on the go, moving at frenetic pace with my eyes focused on accomplishing the next thing. Help me slow down so that I can see and hear You. I want to experience Your awesome presence in my daily life.*

Consider What’s Real: Try keeping a simple gratitude list to help you focus on the gifts God lavishes on you every day. Keep your eyes and ears open for the presence of God and then jot these occurrences into a notebook. Sometimes it’s helpful to go back to review a concrete record of God’s blessings in our lives and take note of the big picture.

Additional Verses to Consider: 1 Samuel 12:16, Psalm 46:10

15 CHRIST'S LOVE



Receive

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him, “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Matthew 15:23-28, NIV)



Reflect

*Do I live as though Jesus loves me fully, no matter my imperfections and hang-ups?
Do I come to Jesus boldly, despite my flaws and insecurities?
Am I afraid to approach Jesus for what I really need?*

Sometimes we feel like we need to wait until the perfect moment to approach God. We want to wait until we’ve gotten a handle on our temptations or overcome our sins. We feel ashamed to be in His presence with all our flaws and shortcomings revealed. We think, “If I just work on this problem for a little while, *then* I’ll be ready to pursue my faith.” But in waiting, in keeping our sins to ourselves, we miss the whole point. The fact is, Jesus wants us to come to Him when we are *most* vulnerable, when we are *most* dependent on Him. In these verses from Matthew we see a Canaanite woman who persistently asks Jesus for His help, despite the fact that she is clearly seen as an outsider by the disciples. But she is bold and unafraid, pressing on in faith, determined to pursue Jesus no matter what. And Jesus answers.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me approach You boldly and persistently, without shame. Help me lay myself and my sins before You in faith, so that You may heal me.*

Consider What’s Real: Today, instead of trying to solve all of your problems yourself, try putting them before God and asking Him for help. As *The Message* translation of Matthew 7:7 says, “Be direct. Ask for what you need.”

Additional Verses to Consider: Matthew 7:7-11, 1 John 5:14-15