

“THE SEASON OF TEMPTATION”

Matthew 4:1-11

Growing in the Seasons of Life

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Today we're continuing our series on the seasons of life by focusing on the season of Temptation. Temptation, of course, is humankind's oldest problem. It has been around since Adam and Eve. We all struggle with it no matter how strong you are in your faith. Therefore we will look at six keys from God's Word on how to handle temptation.

The first key to handle temptation is to anticipate it. Don't be surprised or intimidated by it, instead be prepared. You need to remember that it is not a sin to be tempted. Sin rather is to give into temptation. The Bible says Jesus was tempted. You can't stop Satan from bombarding your mind, but you can decide not to dwell on them.

It is not a sin to be tempted and you will never outgrow temptation. You're never going to get to a point in your spiritual life where you can say nothing bothers you anymore. You will be tempted not because you're evil, but because you're human. It's what you do with temptation that makes it either right or wrong; good or bad.

So what is the antidote? Instead of being shocked, intimidated, surprised when Satan puts these thoughts in your mind you need to be prepared for them. Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”* Be prepared.

Now some of you may be most tempted when you are bored. Some are most tempted when you are lonely or are very vulnerable when you are tired and fatigued. Others, when you are under stress. Some are tempted when you are with certain friends on weekends. You need to understand the seasons of life that make you vulnerable and then prepare for them.

The second key to handle temptation is to accept responsibility for it. Don't blame God. Don't blame other people. Don't say, “The devil made me do it.” Even the devil can't make me do something without my cooperation. So accept responsibility.

Now this is very important to understand. We live in a day and age of irresponsibility where no one wants to admit that their problems are their own fault. There was a book written some years ago called *“A Nation of Victims.”* It talks about how we've all become victims. We blame others—the media, our parents, the government, our schools, our bosses—for all our problems.

Yet most of my problems I have brought on myself; that's the truth. We need to accept responsibility and quit blaming others. The reality is if you are facing a secret habit, hang up or hurt you're never going to find freedom until you stop blaming others.

The third key to handle temptation is to ask God for help. God has a 24-hour hot line system. You can call on him anytime. He is willing and waiting to help you with any temptation. Realize he's not surprised, not shocked by it. God already knows everything that's going on in us; he simply wants you to admit it.

Now sometimes we don't ask God for help because we really don't want it. We actually want to give into temptation even though we know it's wrong. We know we are making a mistake and may even feel guilty but we want to do it anyway. We're not going to ask God for help because we don't really want him to help us stay away from this temptation.

Another time we often don't want God's help in a temptation area is when we're too embarrassed because we keep falling in this area over and over again. We don't want to come back and say, "God, I did it again." Yet remember, my friend, God has unlimited patience. His compassion endures forever. He wants you to come as often as you need him.

Why does God want you to come to him? Because he sent his Son Jesus to earth, and Jesus went through everything you and I will ever go through. In other words he understands. You have a sympathetic God; he knows because Jesus had the same temptations.

Does this mean that Jesus was tempted to lie? Yes. Make himself appear better than he was; to go on an ego trip? Yes. Does this mean he was sometimes tempted to lose his temper and attack others? Yes. Was he tempted sexually? Yes, it was because he was fully human.

That's the good news, my friends. If Jesus went through everything I've gone through then he can sympathize with me. Since he didn't give in he can also give me help and show me the way to escape. He can show me how to get through these times. We sure have a caring God.

We need to always remember that willpower only works for awhile and yet it doesn't work permanently. Willpower is not enough. We need to call on God for help. Psalm 50:15 says, "*Call upon me in the day of trouble.*" This is God's 9-1-1 number; it is his SOS. Simply call on him and he will help you.

The fourth key to handle temptation is to admit your struggle to a friend. You don't have to admit it to everyone, just to a close Christian friend who can help and pray for you. Someone who is an unbeliever can't help you here. You need to tell it to someone who you trust will love, accept, keep confidential and pray for you. You need a support network of believing friends.

My friends God wants us to help each other. He wants us to help each other so much that he has made this as one of the prerequisites for healing. James 5:16 says, "*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*"

Revealing your feelings is often the beginning of healing, while hiding them away often intensifies them. Some say that time heals all wounds but that is not true. True healing comes as you share it with a friend who can pray with you, encourage you, counsel and help you.

Now there are two dramatic benefits for sharing your temptation with a person or a small group of believing friends. One is that it helps you gain control. A secret sin you cannot talk about is usually out of control, yet naming and talking about it helps you gain control.

A second benefit is that it relieves inner stress. When you get in a small group and begin to share your real self, who you really are, it's very liberating. Because sharing together you find out that you are not the only one who has ever felt that way. It really can set you free.

That's why at Messiah we are trying to build a healthy, caring church. For some crazy reason some people feel that Christians should not struggle with all these sins and challenges. Yet we're all in the same boat. What we need is to take off our masks and say, "Yes we're all struggling."

Friend, if you are perfect you better go find another church; no one is in this place. Messiah is a church for people who want to grow and develop, who are honest and don't wear masks. It is a church for people who don't have it all together and who know they really need others.

The fifth key to handle temptation is to avoid tempting situations. In other words, if you don't want to get burned don't get too close to the fire. You need to analyze when and where you are most tempted, most vulnerable. Then stay away from those situations as much as you can.

When Joseph in the Old Testament was tempted by Potiphar's wife, a married woman trying to seduce him, he was wearing his favorite coat. But she grabbed him by the coat and he left the coat and split. Sometimes you may need to leave the coat. Get out of the situation. Change the channel. Click out of the website. Take a walk. Read the Bible. Call a Christian friend.

The sixth key to handle temptation is to affirm God's word. Claim the promises God has given. Everyone should memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can stand under it.*" You and I have a choice; God says he will provide a way out.

The Bible says you need to resist the devil. How do you do that? We do it by preparing for temptations. Ephesians 6:17 says, "*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" You've got to be ready for battle. You've got to have the proper armor and weapons, and that is found in knowing God's word.

You and I, my friends, need to somehow instill the truth that is in the Bible into our minds. We need to study, learn and memorize God's word. For example, if you have worry you can remember Philippians 6:8 where Paul says, "*Don't worry about anything...*" If you have a problem resisting something you can remember Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

My friends, when Jesus was tempted he quoted Scripture. Why; in order to show us how to resist the devil. Let us run back to God this day. He's not going to shame you. When you tell God your problems he will welcome you with open arms. Come to him for victory over temptations.