

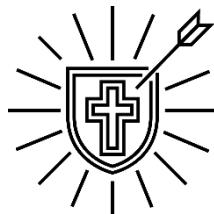


SPIRITUAL WARFARE: RESISTING TEMPTATION AND WINNING THE BATTLE WITHIN



SEAN DEMARS

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INTRODUCTION

Every Christian knows the battle with temptation. Some limp into church on Sunday with fresh wounds from the night before. Others sit smiling on the outside but feel crushed inside, convinced they'll never be free. Still others have grown so numb they hardly notice temptation anymore—they just give in. And then there are those who feel like they're doing well, standing strong. Praise God for that! But even when you're standing strong, Scripture warns: "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). No one graduates from the fight against sin this side of heaven.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). That prayer is not wishful thinking, but a declaration of war. This life skill guide is about learning to fight, not with clenched fists or human willpower, but with the weapons God has given us: His Word, His Spirit, His people, and above all, His Son.

This is the language of *spiritual warfare*—a real, ongoing battle in which the Christian learns not only to resist but to stand firm in Christ.

We will begin our journey by taking an honest look at our weaknesses when it comes to sin. Like Peter in the courtyard, we often overestimate our strength and underestimate our temptation. Seeing ourselves rightly (fragile and prone to fall) humbles us and prompts us to cry out to God for help before temptation has a chance to undo us.

Next, we will think about deliverance. Satan is not just a fictional character in storybooks. No, he is "the tempter" (1 Thess. 3:5). Scripture teaches us that we can't rescue ourselves from his snares. That's why Jesus doesn't tell us to pray for more willpower, but for deliverance. Our victory comes not from being the hero of our own story, but from Christ, the Deliverer, who rescues us when we are powerless.

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Even Jesus Himself modeled how to face temptation in His wilderness battle (Matt. 4:1–11), reminding us that the *temptation of Christ* is our pattern for *fighting temptations* today.

Following deliverance, we will think about identity. The question, “Who are you?” matters more than you might realize. Romans 6 teaches that your ability to fight sin rises and falls with how clearly you grasp your identity in Christ. Knowing that you are dead to sin and alive to God changes how you face temptation day after day.

In the next chapter, we will consider provision. Paul exhorts us to “make no provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14). That word “provision” means something like forethought. Just as we can plan for holiness (through prayer, Scripture, fellowship, and accountability), we can also, tragically, plan for sin. Here we will think about how to starve the flesh by cutting off its supply lines and to feed the Spirit by putting on Christ daily.

Next, we will think about the church. Sin thrives in secrecy but dies in the light of fellowship. That’s why we need a faithful church in order to fight sin and temptation. God never meant for us to fight alone. The body of Christ exhorts, rescues, and carries us when we are weak. To cut yourself off from the people of God is to step willingly onto the battlefield without your armor.

Seeing the Christian life as *spiritual warfare* helps us understand why community matters: no soldier survives long in isolation.

Our next section will be on vision. Here we will be reminded that we don’t kill sinful desires by sheer willpower. Rather, we must replace them with deeper desires. The expulsive power of a new affection means you fight lust and other temptations by looking through them: seeing their true cost and savoring the greater joy of Christ. This is the way of the pure in heart who “shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

Finally, we arrive at God Himself, the One we were made to see. Holiness is not just about rules, it’s about appetite. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). What we want most is not simply freedom from sin but the vision of God face to face. And that hunger fuels our pursuit of holiness until the day He brings us home.

My prayer is that as you work through these lessons, you’ll not only learn how to face and resist temptation, but also understand that *fighting temptations* is ultimately about loving Christ more. Christ has already won the war; now let’s learn together how to live like soldiers who are free.

1

TEMPTATION

How do you see yourself? Virtuous, disciplined, full of the fruits of the Spirit? If so, praise God! But is this view accurate?

What about your future self? How do you see yourself fighting sin when you face it in the days to come? Most of us tend to have a very high view of our future selves. We anticipate that the new diet won't be any problem, that we'll stick to the budget, and that the workout routine will be doable. We imagine our future selves as more courageous, self-controlled, and sober-minded than we really are.

When we experience the rude awakening that our future selves are not as strong as we thought they would be, we can feel a little sheepish. Another failed diet, daily bible reading plan, or workout routine reveals our naivete. But we usually brush off these feelings, laugh at ourselves, and get back to life.

What happens, though, when we overestimate ourselves spiritually? What happens when we think we are more spiritually mature, stronger, and holy than we actually are? Or when we think that we're prepared to handle temptation, but we're not? What if we actually need to be rescued, delivered from our temptations by someone greater than ourselves?

This is why Scripture often frames the Christian life in terms of *spiritual warfare*—a reminder that temptation is not just a bad habit to break but a battle we cannot win in our own strength.

One of the most famous accounts from the life of Jesus is of his temptation in the wilderness. In the gospel of Luke, we are told that Jesus went into the wilderness where he endured forty days of temptation. Luke describes the scene: “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-2).

If you know this story, then you know that Jesus was victorious over Satan. The account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness is powerful, and so it's often used as a “how-to manual” for teaching Christians about fighting temptation by the power of the Spirit and the Word of God. And that's not wrong!

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The *temptation of Christ* shows us not only how to resist sin but also that victory over temptation is ultimately rooted in dependence on God, not personal resolve.

What I find interesting, however, is that when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray in the midst of temptation, he doesn't teach them to pray for boldness or for perfect Scripture recall. Rather, he teaches them to pray that they wouldn't end up in the midst of temptation in the first place. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches his followers to pray like this: "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13). It seems as if Jesus, remembering his own harrowing temptation drama in the wilderness, teaches his disciples to ask God that they would never have to experience their own wilderness event.

Jesus teaches us to pray this way because we are weak in our sin and temptation. While it's true that Christians are strengthened by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16), it's also true that we still live in this body of death with its warring desires (Gal. 5:17). Christians are, until heaven, always going to be beset by weakness. A modicum of self-awareness will serve the Christian well on this front.

The most dangerous place a Christian can stand is in the false confidence of his own strength—especially when it comes to battling sin. "Let no saint, therefore," writes Jonathan Edwards, "however eminent, and however near to God, think himself out of danger. He that thinks himself most out of danger, is indeed most in danger."¹ The punch that hurts the worst is the one you don't see coming, and overly confident Christians are the ones who get caught flat-footed by Satan and his schemes.

A mentor once told me that all Christians should see themselves as about to fall over sin's cliff. To paraphrase, "In relation to sin, our temptation moves us closer and closer towards the edge of a cliff, one that we are about to fall off of at any moment, into the abyss of death and ruin. Because of our sinful desires, we are not only standing near the edge of a cliff, we're also standing on a steep incline, slanted downward towards the black abyss. Moreover, we are not only standing on a steep incline near the cliff's edge, but we also stand on slippery ground where we may lose our footing at any moment."

This is how we ought to see ourselves in relation to sin. If we understand this reality—that we are not strong, but weak—it makes sense that Jesus would teach us to pray that God would keep us far from temptation.

So, how do you see yourself? Truth is, we often crumble under the weight of temptation, like we crumble two days into a new diet. "The diet starts Monday" is the same kind of lie as "I can be alone with her; I won't give in to lust," or "I can uninstall this software on my computer, I've got this porn thing under control."

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I can think of no better illustration of this kind of spiritual false confidence than the apostle Peter. Jesus told the disciples that they would abandon him in his darkest hour. “You will all fall away,” says Jesus (Matt. 26:31).

Here’s how Peter responded, “Even though they all fall away, I will not” (Matt. 26:33). Jesus went on to tell Peter that he would, in fact, deny him three times before the night was over. Peter responded, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Matt. 26:35).

Do you remember how the story ends? Not only does Peter deny Jesus, he denies him three times, swearing and calling curses down on his own head (Matt. 26:74). So, I ask again, how do you see yourself in relation to sin and temptation? Do you see yourself as a David, boldly facing down the giant? Or do you see yourself like Peter, quivering with fear in the courtyard?

Now you may be thinking, “What kind of Christian life is this? Where is the victory? Where is the power of God over sin?” To be sure, we *do* have victory, and our ability to resist sin and fight temptation *does* grow in grace over time (with seasons of highs and lows, of course).

We are absolutely called to do battle against sin and temptation, and we should strive to win those battles when we find ourselves in the midst of them! Consider the words of Ephesians 6:11...“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” We are called to take a real stand against the devil and his schemes. And when we find ourselves in the middle of a dogfight, we must raise the sword of God’s Word and lop off the head of any enemy we encounter, trusting in the armor of God’s protection.

This is the active side of *fighting temptation*, where the Christian resists, stands firm, and relies on the strength God provides.

But, and this is key, just because we are equipped for battle, does not mean we should seek it out. We should never confuse the God-given ability to wage spiritual warfare with a God-given desire to engage in it. In both 1 Corinthians and 2 Timothy, Paul tells his readers to “flee” from temptation and sin. Flee sexual immorality, flee youthful passions, flee, flee, flee (1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14, 2 Tim. 2:22). When it comes to temptation, our default setting should always be more flight than fight.

This is why Jesus, at the end of his ministry, took the time to say this to his disciples: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). “The Spirit is willing” is Jesus’ way of saying, “I know you have the heart of a warrior, but your flesh is weaker than you know. So strive for self-awareness, humility, and a right understanding of the power of sin. Our hearts are wicked, sin

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tastes sweet to the flesh, and the cost of overestimating our own spiritual strength may be nothing less than our very souls.”

Reflection Questions:

1. What does it mean that Satan is “the tempter” (1 Thess. 3:5)? How does that shape how you think about your daily battle with sin?
2. Why is self-reliance dangerous in the fight against sin? How does the gospel reorient us toward God-dependence?
3. The chapter uses the illustration of Captain Phillips needing rescue. How does this image help us better understand Jesus as our Deliverer?

2

DELIVERANCE

Satan is known ubiquitously throughout the pages of Scripture as “the tempter.” He is explicitly called “the tempter” in 1 Thess. 3:5: “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thess. 3:5).

In addition to his nickname of sorts, we see Satan actually acting like a tempter throughout the pages of Scripture. In Genesis 3, he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden. In the wilderness, satan tempts Jesus, the second Adam. This is Satan’s main shtick: tempting the children of God. He’s been doing it since the beginning, and he’ll keep doing it until Jesus comes back.

This is why Christians must see temptation as part of ongoing *spiritual warfare*, not just a moral struggle but a direct conflict with the one who opposes God’s people.

We should, of course, be careful here not to ascribe to Satan certain attributes that only belong to God. Satan is not under every rock and hiding behind every corner. But the Bible *does* speak about Satan as being uniquely powerful over and against humans. In fact, the Bible seems to indicate that in some way, Satan is the father of, or at the root of, or behind the temptations and evil of this fallen world.

For example, Jesus tells the religious leaders that they lie about him because they are of their father, Satan (John 8:44). In Acts 26, Jesus tells Paul that he is going to send him to the Gentiles for the purpose of delivering them “from the power of Satan” (Acts 26:17–18). When Paul writes to the Corinthians about sex in marriage, he urges husbands and wives not to deprive one another for long. Why? Because he knows that prolonged neglect opens the door for Satan to tempt them through their lack of self-control (1 Cor. 7:5). Scripture even describes Satan working through emissaries. Paul, for example, refers to his “thorn in the flesh” as a “messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7).

Passages like these remind us that *the devil’s temptation* is subtle, persistent, and often woven into ordinary moments of life.

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Biblically and theologically, then, it makes sense that when Jesus teaches us to pray “deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13), He is in some sense teaching us to cry out to God for rescue from Satan’s temptations. Do you see your battle with sin that way, as a war with Satan himself? Whether you do or not, the truth remains: we cannot rescue ourselves; we need God to deliver us.

This is why a daily *prayer against temptation* is not optional but essential—Jesus Himself commanded us to pray this way because He knows our weakness.

Our culture says, “If you fall, just dust yourself off. If you land in a hole, climb your way out. If you’re broke, work harder until you’ve made it in life.” That kind of grit may serve you well in school or business, but it will not deliver you from sin and temptation. The Bible does not describe temptation and evil as obstacles you simply power through, but rather, as enemies you cannot escape without a Rescuer. Resisting sin is not an action movie where you’re the hero. It’s a rescue mission where Christ is the Deliverer.

And understanding *how to resist temptation* begins by knowing that victory comes through dependence, not self-confidence.

You may see yourself like John McClane in *Die Hard* at Nakatomi Plaza: caught in a tough spot (and on Christmas, no less!), but confident you’ll improvise, fight your way through, and save the day. That’s the superhero myth: we always find a way. But your life is probably closer to Captain Phillips: outmatched, overpowered, and utterly dependent on someone else (like SEAL Team 6) to come and rescue you. When it comes to temptation, the question isn’t *if* you’ll face it, but *when*. And when it comes to sin, the reality is that none of us will make it to heaven without scars.

Every believer will spend a lifetime *fighting temptations*, and though the battles vary, none of us escape them entirely.

I love lions. They’re strong, regal, and fierce. It’s no surprise, then, that Jesus is described as the Lion of Judah. Some of my favorite images of lions are the high-resolution close-ups: the jaws built for power, the piercing eyes of an apex predator, the proud mane of a leader. But the detail I love most is the scars. A lion’s face tells the story of a hundred battles survived in the wilderness. Each scar is a testimony: they’ve endured, they’ve fought, they’ve bled, and yet they live.

I think that’s how it will be with us in heaven. If you could see our souls in that place, you would see something glorious, yes...but also covered in spiritual scar tissue. Each mark would tell the story of another round in the war with sin. We’ll make it home, to be sure, but none of us will arrive unscathed. Like lions, we will bear the marks of our battles with sin.

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Here's a sobering truth: the question isn't if you will fall into evil and need to be delivered, it's when. And when you find yourself in the grip of temptation, remember how Jesus taught you to pray: "Deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13).

Reflection Questions:

1. Why do you think we often overestimate our own strength when it comes to temptation? Can you think of an example from your own life?
2. Jesus teaches us to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation*" (Matt. 6:13). How might your prayer life change if you prayed this regularly and specifically?
3. In what ways can we practice "fleeing" temptation (1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:22) rather than assuming we are strong enough to fight it?

3

IDENTITY

In the age of identity politics, where humans are subdivided into an endless number of groups and used as pawns on the cultural chessboard, Christians may be tempted to be suspicious of the very concept of “identity.” But that’s a mistake.

The word *identity* doesn’t appear in Scripture, but the concept certainly does. Identity is simply the answer to the question, “*Who am I?*”

In Romans 6, Paul is clear: our identity and our sanctification go hand in hand (Rom. 6:4, 6, 11). Therefore, if you have a malformed or underdeveloped sense of identity, you will struggle to put sin to death. But if you know who you are in Jesus, you can walk in the newness of life that belongs to you *in him*.

This is also where *Temptation in the Bible* becomes deeply practical, because Scripture consistently ties our ability to resist sin to understanding who we are in Christ.

So, do you know who you are? When asked this question, most Christians will likely pause and say, “I think so.” But my prayer for you is that by the end of this section, you’ll be able to say with clarity and conviction: “*I know who I am in Christ.*” When you know who you are in Jesus, you’ll be able to resist sin and temptation with all the power available to you in the gospel. In Romans 6, Paul uses two powerful images to help us grasp our identity: baptism and slavery. Baptism shows our *union* with Christ. Slavery shows our new *dominion* under Christ.

These images equip believers for *fighting temptations* by grounding their confidence not in human willpower, but in gospel truth.

Take a moment to read Romans 6 and then come back and finish this section.

Paul’s argument isn’t, “You shouldn’t indulge in sin because you’ve been baptized.” Rather, it’s, “You *can’t* indulge in sin because you’ve been baptized.” Baptism points to your union with Christ: you are dead to sin and alive to God.

Look at the language Paul uses:

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- Buried *with him* in death (v.4)
- Raised *with him* to new life (v.4)
- United *with him* in death (v.5)
- United *with him* in resurrection (v.5)
- Died *with Christ* (v.8)
- Live *with him* (v.8)

Baptism means your soul has been knit to Christ forever. You are in him, and he is in you.

That's why Paul can ask: "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:2). We can't. Not as a way of life. Our "old self" was crucified with Christ (v.6). That corrupt root is dead, and a new root—the life of Christ—now grows in us.

Of course, we still sin. Paul is not teaching sinless perfection in this life. But he is saying that while Christians sometimes stumble, we don't indulge in sin as a settled lifestyle. Why? Because sin has lost dominion in the life of the believer (v.9).

This is why *bible verses about temptation* like Romans 6:14 matter so deeply—they remind us that temptation may be real, but its authority is broken.

Here's the practical takeaway: *Your ability to live a godly life will rise or fall on your ability to comprehend and believe the reality pictured in your baptism.*

- We know (v.6) that our old self was crucified with Christ.
- We believe (v.8) that if we died with Him, we will also live with Him.
- We know (v.9) that death no longer has dominion.
- Therefore, Paul says (v.11), "*Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*"

That word "consider" means "to reckon, to actively meditate." In other words, fight to believe what you already know to be true: You are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

Paul's second image is slavery. The point is simple:

- You used to be a slave to sin.

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- Now you've been set free.
- You belong to Christ as his slave.
- So offer yourself to him in obedience.

Paul personifies sin and righteousness as slave masters. How did you leave the tyranny of one for the service of the other? In the ancient world, a slave could gain freedom in three ways:

1. Purchase it himself.
2. His master died.
3. He was bought by a new master.

Option 1 is impossible for us when it comes to sin. We can't buy our way out of sin. But the gospel achieves options 2 and 3 for us by grace:

- Jesus killed your old master by taking sin to the cross (Rom. 6:6).
- Jesus purchased you for Himself (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

So Paul can say: "You can't keep serving your old master. He's dead!"

This truth directly strengthens believers engaged in *Spiritual warfare*, reminding them that temptation is not a battle fought alone, but with a new Master who has already won.

The Promise of Dominion

Here is one of the most precious promises in the Bible:

"For sin will have no dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14).

No dominion. No power. No authority. Whenever temptation rears its ugly head in your life, preach this to yourself: "Sin has no dominion over me. Only Christ has dominion over me."

Temptation will come, but I don't have to yield. I may stumble, but I don't have to stay down. The world, the flesh, and the devil may press in, but I can stand strong. I can change because sin has no dominion over me. This is not self-help—it's gospel reality.

This is why studying *Temptation in the Bible* is vital—it teaches us how God has already broken sin's authority through Christ.

So, when you are tempted—whether to lust, anger, gossip, bitterness, overwork, or despair—preach Romans 6 to yourself: "I am no longer in Adam; I am in Christ. My old self was crucified with him. My new self is alive in him. I belong to a new Master." And then let that truth drive you to worshipful obedience.

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And when the pressure feels overwhelming, remember that you are not left helpless in *fighting temptations*—your identity in Christ is God’s built-in weapon for spiritual victory.

Your identity in Christ is not a motivational slogan. It is an unshakable reality: you are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, and you are under His gracious dominion. Believe it, consider it, meditate on it, and live out of it. This is who you are: dead to sin, alive to God, and joyfully bound to Christ.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does baptism picture your union with Christ? Why is that vital for resisting sin?
2. Paul says, “*For sin will have no dominion over you*” (Rom. 6:14). How can this promise shape your daily fight with temptation?
3. Why is it important to see yourself as a “slave of Christ”? How might this truth bring freedom rather than fear?

4

PROVISION

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

—Romans 13:12

Sin is like a filthy robe. Your daily job as a Christian is to take off the dirty rags of sin and put on the armor of Christ—to take off what will get you killed and to put on what will keep you alive.

This is the language of *Spiritual warfare*, reminding us that every believer wakes up on a battlefield where holiness must be practiced on purpose.

Soldiers on deployment don’t stroll through a warzone in gym shorts and flip-flops. They wear armor: helmets, vests, weapons, all of it. If you’re awake, you’re armed. That’s what Paul is saying here: “You’re not asleep anymore. Wake up. The sun is out. Put on your armor.”

In the New Testament, armor isn’t how you achieve victory; it’s how you stand firm in the victory Christ has already won. In the case of the Christian life, you don’t put on the armor to win the battle. Rather, you live like a soldier who is already on the winning side. Consider what Paul said to the Romans: *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”* (Rom. 13:14).

Paul tells the Galatians that all who are baptized into Christ have already “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Positionally, you are clothed in Christ the moment you trust him. And yet, in Romans 13, Paul *also* tells us to keep putting Christ on daily. Why? Because this is the shape of the Christian life: we repent when we come to Christ, and then we keep on repenting. Similarly, we believe in Jesus, and then we keep on believing. We assume Christ’s identity, and we keep living it out until he calls us home.

This is how Paul puts it elsewhere: “Cleanse out the old leaven... as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:7). And again: “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). The word translated “provision” is the Greek word *pronoia*, which literally means “forethought” or “planning ahead.” In classical Greek, it often described prudent planning for the future, like budgeting resources or preparing for a journey. The only other place the word shows up in the

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New Testament is Acts 24:2, where Tertullus flatters Governor Felix for his “foresight” (*pronoia*) in governing the nation.

So when Paul says “make no provision for the flesh,” he’s saying, “Don’t give sin a head start. Don’t plan for it. Don’t build it a runway.” Just as you can plan wisely for righteousness, you can also plan foolishly for sin. Paul’s command is to cut off sin when it’s just a thought.

This is exactly what the Bible teaches about *Resisting temptation*: we don’t simply stand our ground—we remove the opportunities that feed sin.

The reality is that sin doesn’t just happen by accident; it feeds on preparation. Righteousness doesn’t happen by accident either. If you want holiness to win and sin to lose, you need a plan. Think about your finances. The most sanctified part of you wants to spend every dollar for God’s glory. Amen! But another, less sanctified part of you wants to spend it selfishly. Which part wins? The one you planned for. That’s why you make a budget, where every dollar gets a holy assignment.

Or think about health. You don’t stumble into fitness. You plan meals, you schedule workouts, you keep junk food out of the house. It takes intentionality. In the same way, righteousness doesn’t grow by accident. If you want to walk in holiness, you must be deliberate. That means building habits that feed the Spirit and cutting off habits that feed the flesh.

Feed your soul with what strengthens godliness—things such as prayer, Scripture, fellowship with God’s people, and accountability in your local church. Additionally, be sure to **starve the flesh** by removing its opportunities. Think about the following common temptations and ways you can starve them by having a good plan.

- **Affairs:** Live by the Billy Graham rule—not just “it didn’t happen,” but “it couldn’t have happened” because he never went anywhere alone. Additionally, don’t indulge fantasies about another life or a “perfect” spouse.
- **Pornography:** Cut off access. Add filters with software like Covenant Eyes to all your devices. Confess temptations and sins to an accountability partner.
- **Sloth and screen addictions:** Set screen time limits on your phone. Cancel your subscriptions. Choose to read or spend time with friends instead of doomsscrolling.
- **Jealousy and quarreling:** If social media stirs anger or envy, delete it. Don’t feed what poisons you.
- **Greed and hoarding:** Automate your giving so generosity happens before selfishness takes hold.
- **Consumerism:** Don’t “just browse” online or at the mall. Shop with a list and within a budget.

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- **Fornication:** If your relationship keeps pushing boundaries, restructure it or flee from temptation. Don't dance on the line.
- **Gluttony:** Don't grocery shop hungry or keep a house full of snacks.
- **Alcohol:** If drinking is a snare, don't keep alcohol in the house "just in case." Don't see how close you can get to the edge of the cliff before falling off it.
- **Addiction:** Stay away from places, people, and situations that drag you back into bondage.

Jesus taught us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation."* Even though Jesus was tempted in the desert and overcame Satan perfectly, He still teaches His followers not to seek out temptation deliberately. His victory does not mean we should chase spiritual danger; it means we should cling to the One who overcame it.

So why would we walk ourselves right into its path?

Here's the danger with a section like this: if all you hear is "try harder," you'll either become proud when you think you're succeeding or despair when you know you're failing. That's not the point. Paul doesn't say "put on Christ so that God will love you." He says, "Put on Christ because God already does." So tomorrow morning, don't just say, "I need to fight sin." Say, "Christ has fought the battle for me. The war is already won. And that changes everything about the way I fight. I will make provision for victory today, and every day until Jesus calls me home."

Reflection Questions:

1. Paul tells us to "make no provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). How does the idea of "forethought" change the way you approach temptation?
2. What are some practical ways you can "feed the Spirit" and starve the flesh in your daily life?
3. Why is it important to remember that putting on Christ is not a way to earn God's love, but a response to already being loved?

5

CHURCH

One of the first lies temptation whispers is this: “*You’re on your own.*”

Sin thrives in silence and secrecy. It wants you to believe that no one else could understand your struggle, that if you speak up, you’ll only be rejected, that if you stumble, you’ll be abandoned. But Jesus didn’t save us into silos; he adopted us into a family—a family full of sinners and screw ups just like you. Every Christian fights, but no Christian fights well by himself. It is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18, Heb. 3:12-13, Heb. 10:24-25).

Temptation weakens us, blinds us, and isolates us (Prov. 18:1). The church, on the other hand, by God’s Spirit, reminds us of what’s real, pulls us back when we wander, and lifts us up when we stumble (Jas. 5:16).

The church reminds us of the truth. Temptation always traffics in lies. It tells you that sin will satisfy, that secrecy will protect you, that repentance can wait until tomorrow. But when you’re joined to a gospel-preaching church, you surround yourself with people who speak the truth of God’s Word back to you. Hebrews 3:13 says, “*Exhort one another every day... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” Left alone, we will certainly be deceived. But joined together in the church, we will see sin for what it really is.

The church pulls us back from danger. There are moments when a sharp word from a brother or sister is like a hand on your arm, yanking you away from the edge of a cliff. That word may sting, but it saves. James 5:19–20 reminds us that when someone brings a sinner back from wandering, he “saves his soul from death and covers a multitude of sins.” Rescue often comes in the form of a warning, a rebuke, or a plea, but it is grace all the same.

The church stands with us in the fight. Temptation often makes us feel ashamed and powerless. But God gives us brothers and sisters who won’t let shame have the last word. Think of the paralytic whose friends lowered him through the roof to Jesus (Mark 2:1–12). He couldn’t walk there himself—they carried him. In the same way, when temptation leaves you weak, the church bears you up in prayer, intercedes for you, and points you to the Savior who never leaves nor forsakes his own.

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Make no mistake: the church is not the Savior—Jesus is. But Jesus has chosen to strengthen us through his body—the church. We plan, we pray, we flee temptation, but if we cut ourselves off from the people of God, we are already halfway to defeat. To fight alone is to fight against the very means of grace Christ has given you. To fight together is to fight as Christ intends.

So don't wait until you're already staggering to seek out help. Stay near the herd. Stay close to the brothers and sisters who will remind you of truth, pull you back from danger, and stand beside you in the fight.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why is secrecy such fertile ground for sin? How have you seen the power of accountability in your own life or others?
2. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to “exhort one another every day.” What does this look like in real, practical terms for you and your church?
3. How can you both give and receive help within the body of Christ without fear or shame?

6

VISION

The point is simple, but simple doesn't mean easy: You can and must put your sinful desires to death. Not just resist them but kill them. This is where overcoming temptation becomes intensely practical—not just saying "no" in the moment, but cultivating a greater love that drives out sin's power.

I'm not saying it's as easy as pressing a button, and I certainly haven't arrived. Like you, and the Apostle Paul, and every sinner saved by grace, I'm still pressing. Paul writes, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil. 3:12).

But putting sin to death is also not as complicated as rocket science (and you don't have to sell everything and move to a monastery to do it). Even the monks of old found that lust followed them into the desert. One early church father, Jerome, admitted that even while living among the scorpions in desert solitude, his heart still burned with lust. He wrote:

How often, when I was living in the desert, in the vast solitude which affords hermits a savage dwelling place, parched by a burning sun, did I think I was in the midst of the pleasures of Rome! My face was pale, my body chilled with fasting, yet my mind burned with desire in my cold body, and the fires of lust flared up even though the flesh was already as good as dead.²

So, if the wilderness can't cure your lusts, how can you fight them right where you are? This is where spiritual warfare becomes real—not loud and dramatic, but quiet and daily, fought in the hidden places of the heart.

Let's start with a thought experiment: Imagine you're alone with a woman who isn't your wife. You crossed *the line* fifteen minutes ago, and now you're about to cross the point of no return. Suddenly, you hear a truck pull into the driveway. It's her father. He's not a big man, but he's big on two things: guns and protecting his daughter.

In that instant, your sinful desires evaporate. Why? Because they're expelled by an even stronger desire, namely, the desire to stay alive. That's what Thomas Chalmers (and later John Piper) called "the expulsive power

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of a new affection.” Of course, these pastor theologians didn’t just make this idea up out of thin air; they got it from the Bible. John writes, “Do not love the world or anything in the world...” (1 John 2:15). And Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...” (Matt. 13:44). Many of the temptation Bible verses we know are really about this very thing—our loves being reordered by something better.

You don’t kill desire by sheer willpower; you kill it by replacing it with a deeper desire. That is the heart of how to overcome temptation.

Picture another scenario. You’re about to watch pornography. You don’t want to (on one level), but you feel like you need to. Or maybe you feel like you deserve it. Or maybe you’re just too tired and numb to care. Why can’t you shut it down? Because, unlike the situation with the father in the driveway, you don’t see any immediate threat. So, you open your phone or laptop and indulge. But just because you can’t see danger doesn’t mean it isn’t there. Remember, sin always hides its hooks. It whispers comfort while sharpening the knife. As Proverbs warns: “The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it” (Prov. 22:3).

So, when lust seems harmless, remember that the danger is real even if it isn’t obvious. Next time you’re tempted, I want you to look *through* your lust and see the consequences on the other side.

- See the embarrassment and shame you’ll feel afterward.
- See the dulling of your witness and how hypocrisy undermines gospel ministry.
- See the tears of your spouse, or future spouse, betrayed by your unfaithfulness.
- See the harm to your children and your church.
- See the loss of eternal rewards.

But don’t just look at the danger. Look, also, at the joy that awaits you on the other side of faithfulness.

- See your future self: stronger, freer, holier.
- See a sex life marked by joy and trust, or, if you’re called to singleness, a heart unshackled by sin, fully devoted to Christ.
- See your marriage free from suspicion and pain.
- See your ministry marked by integrity.
- See your children learning what faithfulness looks like.

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- See the crown of life laid up for those who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).
- See Jesus himself, delighting in your obedience, because you showed by your choices that he really is your highest treasure.

Remember what Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) This is the ultimate reward. Not just a clear conscience, not just a stronger marriage, but the vision of God Himself. To be pure in heart is to be single-minded in devotion, with “only eyes for Him.”

So how do you fight lust? You fight by seeing. You look through the cheap promise of temptation to the real cost, and you look through the lure of sin to the deeper joy of Christ. That’s the expulsive power of a new affection. A stronger desire always drives out a weaker one. And the strongest desire of all is this: to see God face to face.

Reflection Questions:

1. What does Thomas Chalmers mean by “the expulsive power of a new affection”? How have you seen this truth play out in your own life?
2. How does looking *through* temptation to its consequences (Prov. 22:3) help weaken its power?
3. What stronger affection—what greater joy in Christ—can help you replace sinful desires in your life right now?

7

GOD

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
—Hebrews 12:14

There it is. Plain as day. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Let that sink in for a moment. No holiness, no heaven. No holiness, no God. So what are we supposed to do with that?

The temptation is to hear those words and immediately turn inward. *Okay, I need to work harder. I need to white-knuckle this thing. I need to clean myself up so God will let me in.* But that's not what the author of Hebrews is saying. Holiness isn't something you manufacture; it's something you hunger for. It's something God himself produces in you by his Spirit. Do you want to see God? Then his grace is already at work in you. Now strive for holiness by his grace, so that you will get what you want most out of this life—God himself.

Contrary to what you may have heard, holiness is not primarily about rules. It's about appetite—what you love, what you long for, what you crave. David said in Psalm 27:4: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after...” Do you see? *One thing*, not ten things. That hunger for God is the very heart of holiness.

Jesus blesses that hunger in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). Holiness is, fundamentally, the result of a new appetite—a God-given craving for God himself. Jesus also said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

This is staggering. What greater promise could there be? To see God—not dimly, not at a distance—but face-to-face. This is what the human heart was made for. This is the great reward of holiness.

Do you see the connection? Holiness and vision are tied together. Only the pure in heart will see God. If sin clouds your heart, it clouds your vision. But if your heart is purified by Christ, your vision clears until you can see him as he truly is. John tells us, “We shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2), and that this hope leads us to purify ourselves (v.3). This is why the

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Christian life is always a kind of spiritual warfare—a daily fight to keep our vision fixed on Christ.

So ask yourself: What do you want more than anything else? Comfort? Success? Ease? Or to see God face-to-face? This is the hunger Scripture drives us toward. The more your hunger grows, the more you recognize the true temptation definition Bible teaching gives us: temptation isn't just an urge; it's a rival vision that tries to steal your appetite for God.

Think of the 1959 hit song by *The Flamingos*, “I Only Have Eyes for You.” If you've ever been in love, you understand the image. When you're captivated by someone, everything else fades. That's what happens when you are captivated by Christ. The world's temptations become background noise. Holiness becomes not merely resistance to temptation but the overflow of a captured heart. This is spiritual warfare at its most profound level—not shouting, not dramatics, but loving Christ so intensely that sin loses its pull.

But let's be honest: we live in a world full of distractions. Temptations are constantly calling us off the path of life. If you try to resist by sheer willpower, you will lose. You don't win against sin by starving yourself; you win by feasting on Christ. Paul told the Colossians: “Set your minds on things that are above...” (Col. 3:2–3). That is spiritual clarity in the middle of spiritual warfare.

So let me ask you: What is your soul hungry for? When no one is watching, when the guard is down, what do you yearn for most?

Hebrews says you won't see God without holiness. Jesus says only the pure in heart will see God. John says our hope is to see him as he is. The psalmist says the one thing worth seeking is the beauty of the Lord. Together, these truths form a call to resistance to temptation—a call grounded not in fear but in longing.

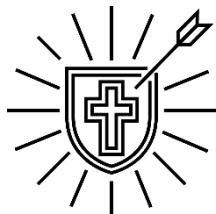
This is why Scripture repeatedly calls us to run, not negotiate with sin. When Paul warns us to flee sexual immorality, or when Joseph runs from Potiphar's wife, Scripture gives us a living illustration of a flee from temptation Bible verse in action. Running isn't cowardice; it's wisdom. It's spiritual warfare expressed through obedience.

So when you pray for victory over temptation, don't just pray for stronger discipline. Pray for stronger desire—for a vision of Christ so beautiful that sin appears cheap in comparison. Ask God to pull your heart toward him with such force that rival loves lose all charm. That is the true engine of holiness.

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Reflection Questions:

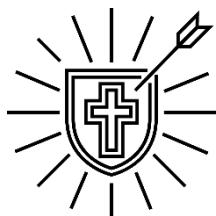
1. Hebrews 12:14 says, “*Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.*” How does that verse both challenge and encourage you?
2. What does it mean that holiness is more about appetite (what we hunger for) than about rules?
3. What does your soul hunger for most? How can you pray for God to give you a deeper appetite for Him above all else?



CONCLUSION

This might seem strange, but would you consider ending this life skill guide by praying along with me? “Lord Jesus, keep me from temptation by giving me a vision of God so beautiful that I want nothing else but you. And if I falter and find myself in the grip of sin, deliver me from evil by drawing me back to you, where there is nothing but beauty, goodness, and joy forevermore. Amen.”

“Lord Jesus, keep me from temptation by giving me a vision of God so beautiful that I want nothing else but you. And if I falter and find myself in the grip of sin, deliver me from evil by drawing me back to you. Strengthen me for spiritual warfare, deepen my desire for holiness, and uphold me with your grace until I see you face-to-face. Amen.”



END NOTES

1. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.ix.v.i.html>
2. Jerome, *Letter 22: To Eustochium*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 23.



Sean Demars is the pastor of 6th Avenue Community Church in Decatur, Alabama. "The Lord saved me from my sins at eighteen and I haven't looked back since. (Phil 3:14) After serving five years in the military, the Lord led our family to Peru as missionaries, and then brought us back to the United States in 2015. Amber and I have two beautiful children: Patience and Isabella. When I'm not serving the church, I like to CrossFit, do jiu jitsu, read good books, and tell dad jokes."

