

Temptation

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Matthew 26:41

Everybody is tempted. If you're in the body, you're in a place where temptation can reach you. The impulse to sin exists in your life. Jesus doesn't say, *“Watch and pray, so you will not be tempted.”* There is no way in the Christian life where you are no longer tempted. He says, *“Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.”* Literally it says, *“so that you will not enter into temptation.”*

Entering temptation, has two distinctive components. **First**, Satan becomes more intense than usual. There are times when Satan increases his assaults against you. Not every day in the Christian life is the same. There seem to be times in life when things just come undone. Paul refers to this; *“put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes...”* (Ephesians 6:13).

Second, the heart is unable to escape the trap of temptation. Often you will be able to brush off temptations without serious difficulty. But there will also be times when a temptation will gain a foothold in you. You will find yourself divided, wanting to reject the temptation, but at the same time unable to free yourself from it. Imagine a salesman knocking at your door. You open the door, and he tells you what he is selling. At that point, if you're not interested, it's not hard to say, “Sorry, I'm not interested. Try the nice folks next door.” But suppose you invite this person into your home. He sits down and makes his presentation. He shows you the product. He talks to you about how much you need this and how much better your life will be if you have it. Your mind and heart become involved. Now it's harder to say “No.”

This is what it means to “enter into” temptation. You are engaged with it. You let it inside and it's sitting in your living room. You've become connected to it. Temptation grows in power as it builds a position in your soul.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, Satan was building a position. Satan had entered the heart of Judas. Satan was unleashing his entire arsenal, so our Lord comes to the disciples and says, *“Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.”* What Satan is doing here is going to trap you. Don’t get into a place where sin traps you.”

Temptations will come to you this week, and Jesus says, *“Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.”* We get it into our mind that the temptation is wrong – it is not that. It becomes a problem when we enter the temptation.

Watching

Need to identify our primary battles. James 1:14 says it this way, *“Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed...”* The temptations we face are tied to our own flesh. The distinctive battles you face are, to some extent, rooted in the created form in which God has made you. All Christians are tempted. All Christians are not tempted in the same ways. What I watch for won’t be for you.

Knowing yourself is of huge importance when it comes to living the Christian life. Many people really don’t really know themselves at all... Here’s a woman who is quite sure she can sing, so she comes on the American Idol show. The judges tell her she can’t, but she leaves even more determined than before to prove that she has this wonderful gift. Extraordinary!

John Calvin said that nearly all the wisdom we can possess is in two parts: **Knowing God and knowing yourself**, and you cannot get the one without the other. So, how well do you know yourself? Because the distinctive temptations that you will face rise out of who you are.

David was an **impulsive** person, and his temptation with Bathsheba reflected his impulsiveness. There are certain kinds of sin that dog the impulsive person. One could argue that when David saw Bathsheba he stopped watching himself and checking for temptation! He entered into the temptation in front of him.

Jonah was an **introverted** person, and his temptation to sulk outside Nineveh reflected his introversion. If you are made of that kind of character, you will need to know that you will be tempted that way.

Hezekiah was an **extravert**. He likes to make an impression, and his temptation to show his riches to a visiting king came right out of that. That was the beginning of the end of his reign, because that king saw what Hezekiah had, and he was right back on his doorstep with his army.

A person who is **meticulous** keeps score, so they may be tempted to hold a grudge and not to forgive.

A person who is naturally **cautious** may be tempted to live much of life in fear, rather than taking steps of faith.

A person who is a **perfectionist** will be tempted to feel that nothing anyone else does is good enough, and they are very difficult to live with.

A **laid-back** person is tempted to go through life without making any real commitments.

Become a student of your own heart. Get to know the special temptations that lurk within the frame of your temperament. **WATCH for them.** Ask God to help you see yourself. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Psalm 139:23-24

I believe our text shows us three vulnerable times for us all to “fall into temptation.”

1. When you're tired

The disciples were tired in the Garden of Gethsemane and it was late at night. It had been an exhausting week since they arrived in Jerusalem, after walking from Galilee. Every day they were with Jesus in the temple, with all kinds of debates and questions to answer. The whole business of ministry had been exhausting. I don't know about you, but when I'm tired, I don't see things clearly. Things easily get blown out of proportion in my own mind.

I'm less careful with what I say and less patient, more irritable and more easily provoked. When I'm tired, I'm more vulnerable to temptation, so I've got to watch. I've got to pray.

2. When a friend has failed

“If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Gal 6:1

The disciples had been held together like a team for more than three years, and now Judas walks out of the last supper. Never underestimate the effect in your life that comes from the choices made by your friends. Your friend leaves his wife, or he engages in some deception. What he has done gets into your mind. It makes you more vulnerable to temptation. Your friend tries a drug, and what he or she has done gets into your mind, and you say, “If he can do that, why shouldn't I?”

We read in the New Testament about two men called Hymenaeus and Alexander, who made shipwreck of the faith. When they fell, other people fell with them. People don't fall alone.

3. When people are hostile to Jesus

It's hard to be “for” Jesus in an environment where most people are against Him. Peter sees hostility in the soldiers who arrest Jesus, then later when he's warming his hands, he denies the accusation that he's one of Jesus' followers. The natural thing to do is to keep your love for Jesus secret, or perhaps distance yourself from Jesus altogether.

Watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation on the college campus. Watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation in the business world, because many people there are hostile to Jesus. As our culture becomes increasingly hostile to Jesus, we need to watch and pray so that we do not fall into temptation.

Jesus said, “Watch and pray.” It is important to keep these two together. If you watch but you don't pray, it's like getting a diagnosis from the doctor, but no prescription. That's what happens when you study your self, without doing anything to put it right.

Watching without praying is profoundly depressing. You see the problem, but never take action to move forward. Conversely, if you pray but you don't watch, it's like going into a pharmacy without knowing what's wrong with you. The medicine you need is there on the shelf; it is available, but you don't know what to ask for, so it is of no use to you.

Praying

Pray because your flesh is weak: *“The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 26:41. The flesh is the place where sin lands in your life, and powerful temptations are about to land on you. So, pray that you will not fall into temptation.

Do you believe that your flesh is weak? Peter reminds us of the great dangers of overconfidence. He was the one who said to Jesus, *“I will never disown you”* (26:35), *“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will”* (26:33). Peter did not know the weakness of his own flesh. He did not watch. He did not pray. **He did enter into temptation.** The one who thinks he stands should be careful, lest he fall.

Jesus prayed for Peter, when Peter wasn't praying for himself, *“Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail”* (Luke 22:31). You may say, “I thought Peter did fail.” Yes, Jesus knew that Peter would fail to watch and fail to pray, and that within a few hours he would curse and swear that he did not even know Jesus. Jesus knew Peter would fail, but He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Satan has his eye on you, Peter. He wants to tear you apart. He will come against you with everything he's got. He wants to destroy you. But I have prayed that your faith will not fail.

The Double-edged Sword of Temptation

At the end of the New Testament, we read about how God uses all kinds of **trials** to prove that your faith is genuine, and that this will result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. These words in 1 Peter 1:7 let us know that God will test our faith just as He did with Peter at times.

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been [a]grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,.” 1 Peter 1:6-7

Temptation is a double-edged sword. It was the undoing of Judas, but it was the making of Peter. Even Peter’s failure led to repentance, and it proved that his faith was genuine. It made him humble, realistic about the weakness of his flesh, grateful to His Savior, and gentle towards others who fail.

God Is Able:

- to help you when you are tempted.
- to restore you when you’ve fallen.
- to keep you from falling,
- ***“and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy!”*** (Jude 24).

To God be glory and honor—now and forevermore! Amen.