

Imitating Jesus ... when Temptations Come

Where do temptations come from? Is it your neighbor, or your coworker, or media, or is it from within? Are temptations bad? A sign of weakness? Or can they also be useful? Before we go any further write your answers to the following 2 questions:

1. From where do temptations come? _____
2. Is simply turning away from temptations an adequate way to deal with them? _____
Why or why not? _____

We know everyone has been tempted, even Jesus. “*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”* When tempted, he didn’t say, “I’m hungry and changing a stone into bread won’t hurt anyone” did he? No. Jesus answered ... “*It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*” After being tempted two more times ... Jesus said, “*Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’*” {Matthew 4:1–10}

That’s how Jesus handled temptations ... but can we do the same? After all, Jesus was the Son of God. We are only human. Jesus anticipated this question, which is why he said, “*Remember, little children, you are from God, and have conquered them {Satan and all temptations}; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*” {1 John 4:4}

In order to better understand how to stand up to temptations, let’s take a moment and look at the meanings associated with the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible and how they can be translated as either “temptation” or “testing”. In the first instance, the word “temptation” implies enticement to do evil; while, in the second, the word “testing” implies an event or process that proves one’s character or determines the depth or integrity of one’s commitment to God.
{The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary}

To help us when we face temptations/testings, St. James wrote, “*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*” {James 1:12} He went on to say “*One is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.*” {James 1:13–15}

Temptations do not necessarily lead to sin if you do your part, standing strong in faith like Jesus did. Temptations/testings, in turn, can lead to strengthening our trust in God.

In the book, *The Imitation of Christ*, attributed to Thomas à Kempis {1441}, the following guidance is offered on how to use temptations to our advantage.

- We must be watchful in prayer lest the devil be given an opportunity to deceive us.
- Temptations reveal our instability and lack of trust in God; temptations reveal what we are.
- This is why we must pay attention to them. We must not despair when we are tempted but, instead, seek God more fervently, asking for his help in this time of tribulation.

- Little by little, through patient endurance of spirit, with the help of God, you will win a better victory than by your own determinations.
- Remember, no one is so holy that he or she does not have to deal with temptations.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, sums up the dilemma we face when being tempted. “*I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***” {Romans 7:21-25}

Thinking back to how Jesus handled temptations, we see: he was grounded in God’s word, he prayed often, and when confronted by temptations he used the power of God to cast out Satan and all his attempts to yield to the temptation and to sin. We can do just what Jesus did!

If you are still wondering if you can overcome a particular yielding to temptations, St. Paul has a final thought for us believers: “*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*” {1 Corinthians 10:12-13}

Reflective Questions:

1. From where do temptations come? _____

2. When you are lured by temptations what might it imply? _____

3. Is simply turning away from temptations an adequate way to deal with them? _____
Why or why not? _____

4. When faced with temptations, how do you try to deal with them? _____
