

# Everything You've Always Wanted To Know About How To Overcome Temptations In One Easy Lesson!

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Pastor Tom Ford  
Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church  
Pasadena, California

## Luke 4:

- [1] And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit  
[2] for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry.  
[3] The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."  
[4] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"  
[5] And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,  
[6] and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.  
[7] If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours."  
[8] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"  
[9] And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here;  
[10] for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,'  
[11] and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"  
[12] And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"  
[13] And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

Father Flutey was approaching a test of his strength against the blandishments of a near overwhelming temptation—the temptation to skip church and go fishing instead. He struggled mightily, but finally he was overcome. He picked up the phone, called the Bishop's office, and arranged for a stand-in Priest to cover his duties for tomorrow, Sunday, as he had to "travel to the bedside of an ailing close relative."

The next morning, he was as usual up before dawn. He collected his gear, grabbed some bread and cheese for lunch, filled the Thermos with tea, and set off.

The drive was made doubly long by the pangs of guilt that erupted continually along the route. Several

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times he thought to turn back, but committed now, he drove on to the river.

At the river, conditions were just perfect. Absolutely brilliant fishing, all day, until he was nearing the time to return home.

Above, God was interrupted by a knock on the door, and an angel came into the office.

"Excuse me," said the angel, "have you seen what Father Flutey is up to?" "Of course," answered God, a tad testily. "Shouldn't he be punished?" enquired the angel. " Oh, he is about to be," replied God grimly.

Father Flutey was about to stop fishing when his eyes spotted the biggest trout he had ever seen. His cast was perfect. The fish glided up from beneath the water and sipped the hook down.

The fight was a long one, over 40 minutes. At last the fish began to tire, and slowly Father Flutey edged the fish toward the shore. Finally, the fish gave up all resistance and allowed itself to be gently moved into the shallows till it lay there on its side quietly.

Father Flutey gazed down at the fish, in stunned amazement. It was well over 14 pounds, the fish of a lifetime. His only regret was that there were no else around to share in his moment of glory. Briefly, he considered killing the fish and having it mounted, but deciding against it, reached down, and twisted the hook from the trout's mouth. Then gently he lifted and slid the fish into deeper water and watched as it slowly swam away.

"I thought you were going to punish him," pouted the angel. "I am just about to punish him, severely," replied God. "I simply don't understand," bleated the angel, "it does not look like punishment to me." "Oh ye of little faith, it is a punishment all right," said God, smiling omnisciently, "In a moment he will realize: who can he tell?"

Who can he tell? Who can we tell? After we have yielded to temptation and caught whatever it was that was our wildest dream or hope and did it all the while knowing it was against everything we stood for and that God calls us to stand for, who can we tell?

Dear friends in Christ, here we are again with that age-old problem, temptations, and how to overcome them. It's the First Sunday in Lent and the Gospel as always for this day is the story of the temptations of Jesus.

A young man was sent to Spain by his company to work in a new plant. He accepted because it would let him earn enough to marry his long-time girlfriend. As the lonely weeks went by, she began expressing doubts that he was being true to her. After all, Spain is populated by beautiful women. The young man declared that he was paying absolutely no attention to the local girls. "I admit," he wrote, "that sometimes I'm tempted. But I fight it. I'm keeping myself for you." In the next mail, the young man

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received a package. It contained a note and a harmonica. "I'm sending this to you," his girlfriend wrote, "so you can have something to take your mind off those girls." The young man wrote back that he was practicing on the harmonica every night and thinking only of her. When the young man returned home his girl was waiting at the airport. As he rushed forward to embrace her, she held up a restraining hand and said sternly, "Hold on there. First I want to hear you play that harmonica!"

We need to resist temptation—and be able to prove it! Otherwise, we are in big trouble with the Woman upstairs.

Well, dear friends, let's get right to the Good News! Our Lord Jesus Christ defeated Satan and continues to defeat him. You and I can't do it. And God doesn't expect us to!

You're probably thinking: I thought all good Christians are supposed to fight the devil and resist temptation and that God will think more of us when we do. That God is keeping score. Saints versus Sinners! You better watch out!

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in 1937: "The Bible tells only two temptation stories, the tempting of Adam and the tempting of Christ. All other temptations in human history have to do with these two stories of temptation. Either the Adam in us is tempted in which case we fall. Or the Christ in us is tempted in which case, Satan is bound to fall".

Bonhoeffer understood that we cannot possibly resist the temptations of Satan unless it is the Christ in us that is tempted. This means, when we face temptation, we can let the Christ in us do the battle. For then, victory will be assured. For only Christ Our Lord is able to defeat Satan and all Satan represents. The Adam in us always yields.

The issue then is not how you or I by ourselves are to resist temptation. We can't. The issue is receiving the Christ into the depths of our being, so that the Adam, the Eve in us has no room.

The story of Jesus' victory over Satan's temptations is here before us at the beginning of Lent because it is our story! God wants to encourage us. God knows we cannot resist evil by ourselves. He offers us the Christ!

Jesus was tempted not only in the desert but throughout his entire earthly life. The writer to the Hebrews says that in Chapter 4:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16, NIV).

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A Presbyterian pastor put it this way, “. . . the God who loves us is fully aware of and empathetic with all the ambiguities, complexities, trials, and temptations of our lives. He is not a distant and capricious deity. Quite the opposite. If you have felt weak, then remember that Jesus is not condemning you but sympathizing with you.”<sup>1</sup>

This, dear friends, is everything you’ve always wanted to know about how to overcome temptations in one easy lesson. Martin Luther celebrates it in today’s sermon hymn.

**“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”**

**A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing;  
For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and pow'r are great,  
And armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not His equal.  
Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing;  
Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabbath, His name,  
From age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.**

**And tho' this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph thro' us;  
The prince of Darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself* Copyright ©2003 by Dan Clendenin. All Rights Reserved

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**That word above all earthly pow'rs,  
No thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours Thro'  
Him who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill:  
God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.<sup>2</sup>**

**Amen.**

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, 1483-1546; tr. Frederick H. Hedge, 1805-90.

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