

## Temptation: basics, lessons and strategies

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### This message covers

- What is temptation? Basics from the bible.
- How did a successful evangelist, Billy Graham deal with temptation?
- What are the everyday strategies you can employ to overcome especially in 3 areas that typically trip up Christians, the “Temptation Trinity” of – Money, Sex and Power?

## Part 1: Basics

I am hoping that by the time you are reading this “mature message” on temptation you should know the basics, but in case you don’t know them, let’s quickly dispense with them before moving on:

1. **Temptation is not sin.** Jesus our Great King was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and nights. After that, he was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4: 1-11). 3 times the temptation of food/lust of flesh, Pride and Wealth/Power were presented to him by that accuser of my brothers and sisters<sup>1</sup>. 3 times the Son of Man countered temptation with “it is written” “it is written, “it is written” - Scripture. So he therefore is our model and understands our weaknesses – having been tempted in EVERY WAY as you will, but he did not sin. Hebrews 4: 15 – 16 explains it as follows:

*Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help. Hebrews 4: 15 – 16 (CEV).*

2. **Watch for the escape route.** Every time you encounter temptation, do these two things:
  1. Pray to the Lord “that you don’t fall” (Matthew 6: 13, Luke 22: 32)) and then
  2. Look in front of you, look to your right hand side - there is a door marked “fire exit”. God has created this so that the fire doesn’t overwhelm you to the point of falling.

*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Corinthians 10: 13 (NLT).*

3. **Examine your heart.** Every time you encounter temptation, at its root is your own heart's "evil desires" and perhaps a "custom made" temptation for you. Not all are tempted sexually or by money or by food, so at the root of your constant temptation is your great weakness, which your enemy the prowling lion knows and seeks to exploit, so he can devour you.<sup>ii</sup> BUT here is the encouragement and the secret – "Weakness is where you will be strongest with God" (2 Corinthians 12: 9 -11).

Joseph probably loved power, on account of his dreams. God gave this power to him, he became the Prime Minister of Egypt, but only after breaking him, humbling him (Genesis 37-47). So if you particularly love gossiping, you are probably also a great comforter and counsellor. Hand the weakness to God. Same goes for masturbation. Is it your thorn in the side? It will also be the source of your greatest weapon - sexual purity. Are you stingy? It's the source of your greatest victory - generosity. I wonder if this is Bill Gates testimony. All those years of being stingy and then Bill and Melinda gates foundation was formed - generosity on steroids!

4. **Open yourself to the test.** The bible sees temptation as a test - it like a purifying fire (1 Peter 1:7). God sees you need strength in that area, so he gives you a lesson. Remember what I said first, Jesus was LED by the Spirit to be tempted (Matthew 4)!

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more precious than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1: 7 (BSB).*

## Part 2: lessons from a seasoned Christian in our generation

Paul the apostle had been a Christian for about 20 years<sup>iii</sup> by the time he wrote to the following:

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. Romans 7: 15 (NIV).*

So first, it should comfort us that temptation is not a struggle that will end easily, even for mature Christians but that said and done, I would expect, one of the greatest fears of any typical God fearing servant of God is falling into sin such that it becomes a scandal – whether in their personal life or their ministry, if they are a leader for example (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor or Teacher).

So a big question is how will you keep your life, your ministry scandal free? What can we learn for our generation today?

Billy Graham, born in 1918 died in 2018 was a spiritual advisor to US presidents and has been called one of the "most influential Christian leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over his life he preached to live audiences of 210 million people in 185 countries and in fact just one of his televised broadcasts in 1996 may have reached as many as 2.5 billion people worldwide.<sup>iv</sup>

How did this man, who was also 61 times named one of the "most admired men and women" do it?

How did he keep his ministry relatively scandal free where many of today's "men of God" are in the news for the wrong reasons – buying the latest car when the majority of their congregation is poor, leading false resurrections, giving out fake cures, fake holy water and all other things that bring shame to the Great name of Christ?

Him and his team earlier on analysed what always failed successful ministers and as a result, he and his team came up with the "Modesto Manifesto" (Cliff Barrows jotted down notes in their meeting). Here are the four key components of their strategies employed to help them avoid scandal and that I believe strongly are excellent tools for fighting temptation:<sup>v</sup>

1. **Honesty:** "It was resolved that all communications to media and to the church would not be inflated or exaggerated. The size of crowds and the number of inquirers would not be embellished for the sake of making Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) look better."
2. **Integrity:** "It was resolved that financial matters would be submitted to a board of directors for review and facilitation of expenditures. Every local crusade would maintain a policy of 'open books' and publish a record of where and how monies were spent."
3. **Purity:** "It was resolved that members of the team would pay close attention to avoiding temptation—never being alone with another woman, remaining accountable to one another, etc. A practice of keeping wives informed of their activities on the road and helping them feel a part of any and all crusades they undertook would be encouraged."
4. **Humility:** "It was resolved that members of the team were never to speak badly of another Christian minister, regardless of his denominational affiliation or differing theological views and practices. The mission of evangelism includes strengthening the body of Christ as well as building it!"

The core lesson from Billy Graham, this great servant of God and his team was this: AVOID tempting situations as a first line of defence.

If the same Spirit of Christ who rested on Billy Graham rests on you, just as he helped their team come up with the Modesto Manifesto, He can help our generation develop strategies which we can learn from to help us overcome temptation – including in the Temptation Trinity areas.

### Part 3: Everyday Strategies for dealing with Temptation.

The Temptation trinity is a word I have come up with for the 3 areas which typically trip most of us – right from Great Leaders (Like King Solomon) to the least of us. How can we learn from God on how to deal with temptation in these areas?

#### **Money.**

The great temptation of money is that it grabs a hold of you and you want more and more and more.. It is also a "gateway" to other evil desires, being the root of evil (1 Tim 6:9-10).

So to avoid the temptation:

1. **In your personal life:** Give it away! Develop a generous giving plan. Get out of debt, including credit card debt, the evil of our generation. There is a temptation here of "easy money for nothing". This is a terrible trap - to make you a slave. A slave of the banks and other lenders (prov 22: 7).

## 2. When Serving the public (e.g. in ministry).

- Get paid a fixed wage so you are not covetous with wanting commissions and bonuses.
- Let there be a remuneration committee so you are not tempted to award yourself “fat cat” salary - the corporate world of listed companies does – they have such committees this for the same reason that the church should - “you are in the public eye” and being highly visible means you need to protect yourself by having “many advisers” (prov 15: 22).

### Sex.

The great temptation of sex is that “forbidden love tastes sweetest”. The bible describes a very interesting story on this:

*Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”  
and call understanding your kinsman,  
that they may keep you from the adulteress,  
from the stranger with seductive words.*

*For at the window of my house  
I looked through the lattice.  
I saw among the simple,  
I noticed among the youths,  
a young man lacking judgment,  
crossing the street near her corner,  
strolling down the road to her house,  
at twilight, as the day was fading  
into the dark of the night.*

*Then a woman came out to meet him,  
with the attire of a harlot and cunning of heart.  
She is loud and defiant;  
her feet do not remain at home.  
Now in the street, now in the squares,  
she lurks at every corner.*

*She seizes him and kisses him;  
she brazenly says to him:  
“I have made my peace offerings;  
today I have paid my vows.  
So I came out to meet you;  
I sought you, and I have found you.  
I have decked my bed with coverings,  
with colored linen from Egypt.  
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,  
with aloes, and with cinnamon.  
Come, let us take our fill of love till morning.  
Let us delight in loving caresses!  
For my husband is not at home;  
he has gone on a long journey.  
He took with him a bag of money  
and will not return until the moon is full.”*

So to overcome this temptation, like Billy Graham's team, you have to operate away from the cover of darkness.

The young man was led away by the flirt at sundown - not when the sun shone. Joseph was tempted when all Potiphar people were away. So you protect yourself in two ways: You have company or protection and you keep away especially in the night.

I would add that in addition to risky people and the night, you must minimise contact with the risky things: movies, books, pictures. Those things that get our hearts racing. Don't imagine you can withstand. What if under pressure you realise that the strength you had is no strength? <sup>vi</sup>.

"Rather be safe than sorry" as my mama used to say ...

### **Power.**

The great temptation of power is pride and self-glory. The solution is to humble yourself. It took King Nebuchadnezzar the Great of Babylon 7 years of running insane and eating grass like an Ox to finally say:

*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. Daniel 4: 37 (NIV)*

The bible actually shows that it's the Humble who will be the rulers of the world.<sup>vii</sup>

So the lesson here is: serve others. Serve your children. In fact, spend your time in God's word was a direct command to Kings as a protection from pride!

*When he is seated on his royal throne, he must write for himself a copy of this instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It is to remain with him, and he is to read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by carefully observing all the words of this instruction and these statutes. Then his heart will not be exalted above his countrymen, and he will not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left, in order that he and his sons may reign many years over his kingdom in Israel. Deuteronomy 17: 18 – 20 (NIV).*

It's in spending time in his word that you learn to worship God Alone- as Jesus responded to the enemy's offer of Power. You counter pride with humility and you counter self-glory with worship of God. So once you feel prideful- serve others, wash some dishes, sweep your house and then put on praise and worship and read your bible.

### **Next steps**

Which are some of the most important strategies you will employ to help you in your next temptation battle?

1. Can you see the Holy Spirit's hand? The escape route He provides?
2. What can you learn from the seasoned Christians to help you overcome in the Temptation trinity of Money, Sex and Power?
3. Who will walk beside you as an "accountability partner" you go through a particular temptation journey ?

You can get more resources on temptation here:

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/temptation-bible-verses/>  
<https://corechristianity.com/resource-library/articles/7-ways-to-resist-temptation>  
<https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/april-2011/how-to-defeat-temptation/>

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> See Revelation 12: 10

<sup>ii</sup> See 1 Peter 5: 8

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/paul/timeline.cfm>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy\\_Graham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham)

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/69841-how-billy-graham-avoided-scandal-his-entire-life>

<sup>vi</sup> See Proverbs 24: 10

<sup>vii</sup> Matthew 5: 5 NLT