

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH? #2

“Is God Tempting Me?”

Job 1:6-12, Matthew 4:1-11, James 13-18

September 10 & 11, 2022

“A businessman was on a diet and experienced a craving for donuts. (You ever have that happen?) He drove to the donut shop and just kept circling the block. Then he prayed, “Lord, I know You don’t want me to eat donuts. I know that that’s not Your will, but I need You to confirm it. There are no parking spaces at this donut shop, so I’m going to drive around the block and if no parking space comes open, that will be confirmation.”

“After going around eight more times, a spot became available. (You see) his desire gave birth to a behavior and the behavior to a sin.”¹

So let me ask you, where did that temptation to sin come from? Was God tempting this business-man to cheat on his diet? Was God putting this businessman to the test to see if he truly wanted to lose weight through the diet? After all, the man prayed to God for confirmation, didn’t he?

So where did the temptation come from?

Many times we think that it is God who is tempting us, and often we credit God for leading us into sin because of our temptations. **But as we see in our Scripture lessons today, it is NOT God who is tempting us, but Satan.** God gives us His promises, but His hope is that we will remain faithful to Him as we follow His will and His way.

As we look at the Old Testament lesson of Job, we see that Job was “*blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil*” (Job 1:1), and God blessed him because of his faithfulness. But then Satan entered the picture. God lifted up Job as a faithful man, and Satan’s response was, “Well, of course he’s going to be faithful. You’ve blessed him above all others. You protect him and provide for him. Of course he’ll be faithful. BUT, take away all of Your blessings that then watch him turn against You” (Job 1:9-11). That’s the Waddell Commentary Version, of course. But you see it.

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 316, #950)

God was delighted in Job's faithfulness. But Satan hates it when we obey God's commands. Satan wants nothing else but to lead us away from God so that we might suffer the same fate that he is receiving. **Satan hates us so much that he will do whatever he can to make us fall away from the Lord God.** Satan wants to destroy us, but God loves us and wants us to be with Him in heaven when our lives are finished here on the earth.

So when God pointed out how faithful Job was, Satan sneered at God for providing for him, and **then** went on the attack. **So God ALLOWED Satan to bring all sorts of troubles to Job.** And this became the standard measure for all of us who strive to remain faithful to the Lord our God. 1) Satan does his very best to make us stumble and lose our blamelessness, thereby creating guilt that Satan can continue to chide us and belittle us into giving up. 2) Or, another way that Satan works is to discourage us so that we turn away from God because of all the troubles that are faced with. 3) But the third way that Satan works is to give us all that we want, so that we freely disobey God's commands because we have whatever we want. So let's look at these schemes of Satan.

Job was striving after being obedient to God's commands, and because of his faithfulness, he was simply blasted with overwhelming attacks from Satan. We see that in the rest of chapter 1. First, all his possessions and his family were taken away from him. His oxen and donkeys were stolen by the Sabians (Job 1:15). His sheep were roasted by "*the fire of God falling from the heavens*" (Job 1:16). And then the Chaldeans stole all of his camels (Job. 1:17). But worst of all, "*a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on [his sons and daughters] killing all of them*" (Job 18-19). All he had was taken away from him, every single possession. Yet he did not falter in his faith. He grieved terribly, as any one of us would, but "*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing*" (Job 1:22).

You see, it wasn't God who did all of this to tempt Job away from Him. **God allowed Satan to do the tempting and the wickedness against Job.** And God allows Satan to do the same thing to us while we are here in this world. He has been given lordship over this world, and we are subjected to his

work against us in effort to make us fall from God's grace by causing us to sin against God.

And if Satan can make us stumble through his temptations, if he can cause us to move beyond good judgment to follow that temptation to disobey God and sin, He is very good at reminding us of our failures, over and over again. As we strive to remain faithful to the Lord, Satan keeps bringing up the failures of the past and jogs our memories about how we failed at being a good servant of God, so he tells us that we will fail in the future, too. He tells us over and over about our sin, so that he can hold us captive and prevent us from following the Lord God Almighty. So our guilt prevents us from experiencing the freedom of the Lord through His forgiveness and grace. He wants us to give up on God.

But if we do not fall prey to Satan's guilt trips, he then puts a big target upon us and puts his aim on us for all the evil that he can send our way. **Satan will absolutely barrage us with hardship and calamity in order to try to pummel us into submission to his ways.** Not only does he send even more temptation into our lives, but he inflicts us with illness and disease, brings all sorts of destructive hardship upon us, all in an attempt to get us to turn away from God, shake our fists at Him in rage, and blame Him for putting us into such difficult conditions. We even use terms such as "Acts of God," or "God's will for us," or "God punishing us for our sins" or even as "God tempting us." **BUT IT'S NOT GOD DOING ANY OF THAT!** That's Satan's work.

While there are natural consequences to our actions, both good and bad, God does not bring hardship and calamity to us because we are sinners. God has set up His standards for us to follow Him, and when we decide not to follow Him, there are consequences to face. But God's desire is that we all come to Him, that none should perish (Matthew 18:14), but that all should find life through Jesus, His Son (John 3:16).

Yes, there are times when God has destroyed those who were adamantly against Him, but that was because of their hardness of hearts and their refusal to follow His commands. But God does not tempt us into sin so that He might punish us. His greatest desire is that we faithfully follow His

commands and walk and talk and live in His ways.

So if we dare stay faithful to God even through the temptations, even through the hardships and trials, **Satan has found that we are susceptible to turn against God's ways when we have everything our hearts desire.** So Satan will begin to work to shower us with so much material possessions and positions of power and such high standing that we begin to think of ourselves greater than God, hence deciding that we no longer need God's ways to guide us.

And we saw that in our Gospel lesson today of **Satan even tempting the Lord Jesus to turn away from the Lord God Almighty.** Matthew 4:1-11 beautifully describes Satan at work to try to even entice Jesus Christ to turn from His allegiance to God the Father and follow him instead.

Satan first preyed upon Jesus' physical hunger to get Him to misuse His God-given power and authority for His own selfish human pleasure. Satan told Jesus, "Hey, You're hungry. *If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread*" (Matthew 4:3). Surely it was within Jesus' power to do such a thing, since Jesus was with God the Father in the beginning of creation, putting all things into place here on the earth. Surely Jesus could have just spoken the words "be bread" to the stones, and they would have converted into something edible that would have satisfied His physical hunger.

Satan is very good at supplying us with our every earthly desire in the attempt to get us to depend upon him, thereby taking God's place as our provider. Look at the people of the world today who have rejected God and have fallen for Satan's temptation, and have been rewarded with great riches and power and every earthly delight.

But as a model to each one of us, Jesus rejected Satan's suggestion with the words, "*It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'*" (Matt. 4:4). It's not about satisfying our physical hunger that we need to be worried about, but rather satisfying our spiritual hunger with God's Word, that leads to life. If we are true to knowing God's word, we, too, can overcome Satan's temptations.

But then, Satan goes after Jesus in a way that tempts Him to "confirm" God's protection. Satan

tells Jesus, *“If you are the Son of God ... throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command His angels concerning You, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’”* (Matt. 4:6). Here is Satan, tempting Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God by performing a sign that fulfills Scripture. He even quotes Scripture to try to entice Jesus into testing God’s promises.

Folks, you can see that **Satan will use and twist Scripture to get us to do the exact opposite that God wants us to do.** Satan knows Scripture, too, but out of spite for it, he’ll misuse it to get us to believe that HIS interpretation of that Scripture is correct. So we have to know Scripture, too, so that we can protect ourselves from the misuse of Scripture against us to cause us to sin. Always be careful to test Scripture with Scripture to make sure that what your hearing is accurate to the rest of the Bible.

Jesus calls Satan out by responding to his Scripture quotation with other words of God. *“It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test”* (Matt. 4:7). While Satan can twist any promise and any Scripture to his own purpose, we must be able to protect ourselves with the Whole Word of Scripture if we can hope to not fall victim to Satan’s schemes.

Satan just doesn’t give up with Jesus, and takes Jesus to a high mountain where He can see the whole world with its kingdoms. He tells Jesus, *“All this I will give You ... if you will bow down and worship me”* (Matt. 4:9). Satan pulled out all the stops and offered Jesus lordship of the whole world, IF He would turn away from the Lord God Almighty and make Satan His master. It was all Satan’s to give to Jesus, or so he thought.

Satan does the very same thing to each one of us as he offers us all that our hearts desire IF ONLY we will *“bow down and worship”* him. We could have it all! Power, prestige, fame, pleasure - whatever we want, Satan is willing to provide for us, but it demands that we reject God and turn to make him our master. Be careful when he offers you the whole world in exchange for your soul. Once you do that, it’s irreversible because our hearts will be forever set upon worshipping Satan, who supplies us with every delight. **So we must choose carefully whom we will follow as the master of our life.**

Jesus once more uses Scripture to defeat Satan's temptation. He says, "*Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve HIM only'*" (Matt. 4:10). You see, Satan was tempting Jesus to change His loyalty from God the Father to him as the master of this world. He was asking Jesus to give up His heavenly position to enjoy human pleasures and power. Think of the consequences if Jesus had succumbed to Satan's temptation. The whole world would be lost and all of heaven and earth would have become shaken to the point of total destruction and we would be hopeless.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer states it very well for us in his book, *Temptation*. He says, "In our members there is a slumbering inclination towards desire which is both sudden and fierce. With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery over the flesh. All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled. The flesh burns and is in flames. It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire or ambition or vanity or desire for revenge or love of fame and power or greed for money or, finally, that strange desire for the beauty of the world, of nature. Joy in God is ... extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, [we lose] all reality, and only desire for the creature is real' the only reality is the devil. Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God ... The lust thus envelops the mind and will of [mankind] in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us."²

Once we succumb to temptation, it leads us into sin, and the consequences are horrible, even unto death, for we discard our allegiance to God and become a slave to Satan.

So James wrote to "*the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*" (James 1:1) a warning to those who follow Jesus to be careful. Listen to his words. (READ James 1:13-18)

God is perfectly holy, free from any kind of evil and therefore unable to be tempted by anything. He is incapable of sinning, and therefore there is not the slightest moral depravity to which temptation may appeal to Him.

Since God is pure and holy, there is no way that He could be the author of any temptation. So

² (Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 566)

when trials and struggles and temptations come to us, God is not responsible for them. **It is inconsistent with the very nature of God to do any tempting, so James accurately dispels the thought that God could be the author of temptation.** For if God desires that we all follow His will and His way, he would not be putting up road blocks to keep us from following Him. God does not want us to fail, but rather to succeed in living a sinless and perfect life. In fact, He calls us to “*be holy because I am holy*” (Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26). Why would God call us to be a holy people, and then tempt us to turn against Him and to sin, thereby no longer being holy? It just doesn’t make any sense that God would want us to be a holy people, but at the same time tempt us to sin and fail at being holy.

But James opens the reality of what happens. “...*each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed*” he tells us. **Satan gets into the picture and causes us to focus so much on our own personal desire that we are overcome with that desire and we leave our God-given common sense and pursue that evil desire within us.** That desire causes us begin acting in such a way as to obtain that desire, and that behavior leads us into full-blown sin. And that sin leads us into death, spiritually and most often physically, too.

It’s like this: “What the worm is designed to do is entice the fish so that fish can become food for the fisherman. It is an enticement (bait that attracts the fish to the hook the fisherman uses to catch the fish. It’s not about the worm. The worm is the attraction. The real deal from the fisherman’s standpoint is the hook, but a fish is not going to go swimming toward a bare hook. Fish are dumb, but they are not crazy. It won’t head for a hook but it will swim toward a worm, not understanding that the worm is covering the real deal). “No bear goes looking for a bear trap. (No, it just goes looking for food, and is trapped by the sweet delicacies laid out by its hunters). No mouse goes looking for a mousetrap. What entices the mouse is cheese. But cheese is set on the trap, and because of its lust for cheese, the mouse is deceived in not recognizing the trap. Therefore, it is enticed or deceived or duped by something that is legitimate to create an opportunity for the destruction of the prey.”³

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 315-316, #948 & 951)

The same goes for us. The temptation entices us toward a dangerous desire, and when we take the bait, we are caught in the trap of our own sin, and it brings death to us. That's the way that Satan works to lead us away from God and into the darkness of sin and death.

Yet **James is emphatic to tell us, “Don't be deceived” (James 1:16). It's not God tempting us, but rather our enemy, Satan, who wants to destroy us.**

God provides us with *“Every good and perfect gift...coming down from the Father of ... lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”* (James 1:17). God desire is to bless us, even though for a little while we must suffer the trials of temptation and strife. He wants us to remain faithful to Him all of our days. Look at the last chapter of Job and you will find how God blessed Job with even more abundant blessings after he endured Satan's great hostility against him. We hear the “rest of the story,” *“The Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before...the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part”* (Job 42:10, 12).

That's God's desire for each one of us as we remain faithful to Him. **God desires that we live for Him by following His son, Jesus Christ**, and become living witnesses of the greatness of the Lord our God so that others might see and follow, too.

So never say “God is tempting me to do...” Rather, give credit where credit is due. Say, “Satan is tempting me to do...., but I am not going to listen to him. I will follow the Lord Jesus Christ!” And the more you say that, the more your life will be focused on following all the ways of the Lord Jesus, and you will begin to live your life according to all His ways. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your tremendous blessings in our lives. Thank You for being an awesome God who has called us to follow You in all our ways. Give us the courage to learn Your way, then follow Your way, and focus our life on pleasing You in everything. Give us strength to overcome the temptations of Satan, so that we are not hooked into His trap of sin, and we find ourselves headed toward death. Grant us the power to endure all of the hardships dealt to us by Satan. And Lord, may we always be ready to praise You and give our lives to following You when we find ourselves blessed beyond belief. Grant that we might not fall away to do our own thing, but rather seek You even more, to accomplish Your purpose for our life. This we pray in Jesus' precious and powerful Name. Amen.