

“WISDOM FOR SAYING NO TO TEMPTATION, II.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 1:10; 4:14-15; 14:16; 16:17-18; 22:3

Introduction.

We are in the midst of a series on the book of Proverbs seeking God's wisdom to live wisely and well in a foolish and fallen world. As Paul says in Romans 12:2 this fallen world all around us is constantly trying to squeeze us into its mold. Sin keeps making us foolish, and we need God's wisdom and the Spirit's help.

Last week we started looking at Proverbs practical wisdom for resisting temptations voice, refusing sinful influences and Satan's bait, and for choosing the path of wisdom. I wonder if any of you recognized temptations this week and were able to respond differently. Any victories?

I cast a big net of twenty different kinds of temptation, ways we fall into sin.

We are hurt or offended by someone and we are tempted to respond with anger or revenge. We are slandered and we want to return slander or gossip. Difficulties in school tempt us to cheat. Business pressures tempt us to do something that lacks integrity, or step on others to climb the ladder. Marriage pressures tempt us unkindness, selfishness or even infidelity. A family member or church member hurts us and we are tempted to never talk to them again. Greed tempts us to find security in something monetary. Lust tempts us to find some pleasure in something momentary. Trials or suffering in life tempt us to doubt or deny God.

Who has not fallen? I closed last week with the example of four men who fell.

The strongest man in the Bible fell into temptation, more than once.

The greatest king in the Bible, a man after God's own heart, fell into temptation more than once.

The wisest man in the Bible who wrote these proverbs fell into temptation more than once.

The man closest to Jesus fell into temptation more than once.

Do you think you are stronger or wiser than them?

I Corinthians 10:12 Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

If they fell what hope is there for us? How can we stand when so many have fallen? What is your plan to resist temptation? Do you have a strategy to fight sinful temptations? Two things.

Pray against temptation.

Jesus foresaw our great need and included a petition in the Lord's Prayer for us to pray every day against temptation with earnestness for ourselves and for those we love. You will not conquer temptation without prayer. ***It is not all you must do, but it is the first thing you must do.***

Four reasons.

First, we pray because the enemy is strong.

I Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

To be a Christian means we are in a lifelong battle with Satan who heads an organized rebellion and leads a well-armed army of demons. He's the prince of an empire of evil.

Don't be naïve or complacent or worse yet, proud. Never underestimate the enemy. We pray because the enemy is real and very strong.

Second, we pray because tests and temptations are hard.

Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Father, if it’s possible let this cup pass from me.” Facing the hardest test of His life, Jesus prayed. So must we pray, “Lord, protect us in severe and hard testing, especially where our faith might not survive.”

There is testing everyday because there is an enemy of our souls. Testing is inevitable, there is no way around it.

We pray because the tests are hard and the temptations are strong.

Third, we pray because we are weak. We pray because the enemy is strong and we pray because we are so weak. We pray to acknowledge our own weaknesses and vulnerability.

Have you ever boasted you would not sin the way some people do, only later, maybe even years later, to find yourself failing in that very thing?

I Corinthians 10:12 Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

We are waging an unending, life-long war with the world, our flesh and the devil. Our prayer is that we are not defeated or destroyed. We pray to ask God to show us the way out, the way to victory, the way to overcome, the way to resist the devil until he flees.

We pray because the enemy is strong, the tests are many and hard, and we are weak.

Fourth, we pray because God is our help in time of trouble and He is good. Thanks be to God who loves us and is with us and gives us the victory in Christ Jesus.

We have a great adversary but... ***We have a greater advocate who is real and present and who helps us.***

Jesus fought and successfully resisted the most powerful tempter and temptations. Three times He was severely tempted and three times Jesus resisted with Scripture.

You will not be able to sustain victory over temptation for the long haul without prayerfully and consciously depending on the power of the Holy Spirit and all the means of grace He offers, especially His Word.

Do you wonder why we so often fall into the same temptations? Because we are relying on ourselves and so God allows us to fall to show us we can't do it on our own, that we must be humbled so we will stop relying on ourselves and depend completely on Him.

We will not prevail on our own or by our own willpower. We must call on and rely on Christ's grace and the Spirit's power. Christ resisted every temptation for us, rely on His victory. Call out to Jesus. Remind yourself you belong to Christ and not the enemy. Jesus is our model for resisting temptation and when we fail He is our forgiveness.

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Corinthians 10:13 God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

I know you know that verse, but do you believe it? Satan wants to convince you it is a lie. But the truth is God will never allow you to be put in a situation where the only option is sin. Never. Pray and ask God to enable you to see the way of escape, to show you His grace in that way.

Jesus resisted every temptation without sin, died for our failures, gives us His Spirit, and promises a way of escape when we are tempted. Take God up on that promise.

Pray! Pray against your specific sins and temptations, and as you do, go a step further and pray for a plan for resisting temptations.

Plan against temptation.

Praying against temptation leads us to plan against temptation in tangible ways. This means we have to actually think about our temptations, we have to study our temptations, know our patterns and inclinations to particular sins. Temptation looks for any weak moment. Recognize this and plan for it.

Wisdom includes self-knowledge, knowing our weakness and weak moments, when we are most vulnerable. When we are tired, hungry, lonely, angry, discouraged, bored, or when we are successful, doing great and feeling like we aren't vulnerable.

I have experienced Satan's temptations after victories, successes, or mountain tops. Noah, Lot, King David and King Hezekiah all fell into sin after great moments in their lives. How many great spiritual leaders riding a wave of blessings have fallen? Wisdom says be especially vigilant for Satan's temptations when things are going well and we let down our guard.

We all have our particular sins, propensities, inclinations, bents. We all have our besetting sins, those persistent, habitual moral weaknesses we continually struggle with and repeatedly fall into. Are you aware of which one's trip you up?

Hebrews 12:1 Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely [entangles, besets], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Sin is serious enough to require radical action.

You know how in our prayers of confession we often confess our sins in our thoughts, words and deed? That pretty well covers all our sins, which is to say it covers all the ways we are tempted to sin. There is our plan for action. Ask yourself the question, "Will this thought, these words or this

action honor God and edify the other person?” Think about how much grief we could avoid.

Husbands and wives, talk about the sources of temptation in your marriage, get to the root and root it out. Expectations, frustrations, finances, intimacy. Work together against the enemy of your marriage.

Parents, repeatedly teach your children not just to not do bad things, but teach them to recognize where those things lead. Help them recognize what increases temptations, people, places, things.

Senior saints. Temptation doesn't stop when you retire. Satan never retires. He keeps tempting us with resentment, bitterness, regrets, greed, pride, self-pity, laziness, fear, doubt. We need wisdom until our dying day.

Plan to take active steps to avoid and resist and flee from temptation. Use practical means, cut off all avenues of temptation. Think about when and where you have the most difficulty and then make changes.

Don't keep your phone by your bed if that is a source of temptation. Delete apps or websites that lead to lust, greed, envy, jealousy, anger, quarreling, frustration, anxiety, fear. What steals your joy, contentment, peace, hope?

Do you get impatient or angry, don't just be sorry and move on, do something tangible about it. Cut off letting any unwholesome word come out of our mouths, anything not grace filled. What are your besetting sins you return to so often? Take active steps to cut them off.

When we change, remove, cut out the things that lead us into temptation, those are the means God uses to answer our prayer to provide a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). Look for it and take it.

God wants to protect us, so ask God to change your heart to want what he wants for you, to change your “wanter.” Pray for the desire to be holy and to kill the sins of the flesh. We will never regret fleeing from evil and avoiding temptation and killing sin. Take active, real steps to love God

and please God and find joy in our obedience. God is worth making sacrifices for.

There is one more step in the preparation. Prepare for being tempted again.

As you pray and plan, prepare yourself to not be surprised when they come and come again. The battle never ends. Don't get defeated and give up, get up and press on in God's wisdom and strength. Remember God uses our failures to humble us and make us more dependent on Him.

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

God is present, He is in the midst of every temptation and trial, and He is using them to test us and mature us and grow us in His grace, and to humble us and make us more dependent on Him.

Implications and application.

How many of you have had the blessing of taking trips to Yellowstone? Of all our National Parks does any other park tempt people to be idiots and do stupid things like Yellowstone? Like taking a close-up picture with a bison or some other wild animal, or seeing how close they can get to a steaming caldron of super hot water. Harlan Kredit can tell you a hundred stories. Our son has his own stories to tell on Catalina of encounters with bison in the wilderness there.

What is it that makes people wonder how close they can get to danger and not get hurt or burned? What makes them think they will be OK just getting a little closer?

Proverbs calls that foolishness. The fool asks how close can he get to sin, how much can he handle and prove how strong or smart he is? You don't defeat temptation by standing next to it and taking a selfie.

The fool keeps seeing the temptation and is drawn to whatever pleasure or benefit or selfishness it offers. He hears the lie and believes it.

Every temptation is ultimately asking us to believe that something other than God and His wisdom and His will can satisfy us better than God can.

The wise person has a completely different response.

Proverbs 22:3 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

The wise person sees danger, foresees where it leads, and asks how quickly can I get away.

Wisdom recognizes the danger and doesn't just rely on itself. Wisdom prays and plans and asks the question, "Will this thought, these words or this action honor God and edify the other person?"

Wisdom prays and relies on and trust in Christ who is the wisdom of God for us. The wise Christian doesn't rely on his own strength or his own wisdom. He says "I know how strong the enemy is, how hard temptation is, how weak I am, and I know I have a strong Savior and advocate and deliverer and protector in Christ. He is my refuge and strength. He is my way of escape."

Proverbs 4:14-15 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.

15 Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.