

Temptation and Testing

Introduction

All of us experience temptation, and with each temptation comes a host of questions. Why does God allow us to be tempted? Does temptation have some purpose in our lives? Is being tempted a sin?

The words “tempting” and “testing” are frequently used interchangeably in the Bible. However, “temptation” is usually used in the concept of sin, while “testing” is used with the idea of God proving or trying our faith and obedience.

Our Study

Because so many of us have a wrong or confused idea about what temptation is and does, we want to look at what the Bible says about this perplexing element in our lives. Let's get one common misconception out of the way first. When we are strongly tempted to sin, many believe that God is tempting us, but Scripture tells us otherwise.

The Scripture: James 1:13-15

"When tempted no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

1. What should we never say? _____
2. Why? _____
3. What causes our temptation? _____
4. What does desire give birth do? _____
5. What is the end result of sin? _____

When we give into temptation, the result can be disastrous. Therefore, we need to understand as much about it as we can and its purpose in our lives. We said earlier that God does not tempt us to sin. Then where does temptation come from? The above scripture shows us our part in the process, but that isn't the whole story. An experience in the life of Jesus helps us to understand.

The familiar account of the temptation of Jesus helps us to further understand the sources of temptation.

The Scripture: Matthew 4:1

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

6. Who tempted Jesus? _____

It was necessary for Jesus to experience and overcome temptation. Although the Holy Spirit led Him to the place of His temptation, it was Satan who did the actual tempting. Satan's goal was to pervert Jesus from His purpose in coming to earth, but because Jesus was sinless, Satan was unsuccessful. This is not true in our case. Satan is sometimes successful when he tempts us because our own evil desires cooperate with him.

But is temptation itself a sin? Emphatically not! It is the giving in to temptation that is the sin. While we are being tempted, it is easy to believe that we are going through a special kind of trial that no one else has ever experienced. This idea, too, is contested by Scripture.

The Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has seized you except that is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

7. What does the Apostle Paul tell us in this verse? _____

Yes, everyone is tested. Although temptation may take different forms in different people, no one is singled out for special temptation.

8. What does this verse tell us about our ability to withstand it? _____

9. What will God provide with each time of temptation? _____

The Apostle Peter further amplifies this idea.

The Scripture: 2 Peter 2:9, 10

"The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment."

10. What does the Lord know how to do? _____

These scriptures certainly do away with any excuse we might have for giving in to temptation. God does not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist it. Scripture also tells us of an important cause of much temptation. In the explanation of one of His best known parables, Jesus gives us further insight.

The Scripture: Luke 13:18

"Listen to what the Parable of the Sower means. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once received it with joy. But since he has no root, it lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

11. What happens to the man who has no roots? _____

12. What does Jesus say the "thorns" are? _____

The Bible warns us about the temptation of desiring wealth. We'll be discussing the harmful aspects of worry in the study *Renewing Our Minds*. For now, we'll concentrate on the temptation of acquiring wealth.

The Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:9

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

13. What can happen to people who want to get rich? _____

14. What can this lead to? _____

15. What does Paul call the love of money? _____

Although we sometimes feel alone when we are being tempted, we have an advocate who stands with us. Let's put two important scriptures together.

The Scriptures: Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:14-16

"Because He [Jesus] Himself suffered when He was tempted He is able to help those who are being tempted." "Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 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 without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

16. Who is able to help us when we are being tempted? _____

17. What position does He hold? _____

18. Why can He help us? _____

Jesus understands what we are going through because He was tempted in every way.

19. What else does Jesus do? _____

20. Therefore, what can we do? _____

21. What will we receive? _____

22. What is our part? _____

Peter also has advice for us in this area.

The Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith."

23. What does the apostle tell us to do? _____

24. Why do we need to resist Satan? _____

Yes, our enemy Satan seldom rests. Peter compares him to a roaring, prowling lion. On the night He was betrayed Jesus gave His disciples other defenses against temptation.

The Scripture: Matthew 26:41

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

25. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do? _____

We have already said that God never tempts us to commit evil, but the Bible makes it clear that He does test us.

The Scripture: 2 Chronicles 32:31

"When the envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him (Hezekiah) about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart."

26. Why did God test Hezekiah? _____

God tests us for the same reason—to know what is in our heart. Temptation also plays an important role in the developing of our Christian maturity.

The Scripture: 1 Peter 1:6

"Greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even when refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

27. Why does Peter say trials come to us? _____

28. How does he describe our faith? _____

29. What should our attitude be in times of trial? _____

James has more to say on this subject.

The Scripture: James 1:2-4

"Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

30. What does the testing of our faith develop? _____

31. What does perseverance develop? _____

32. Again, what should our attitude be? _____

The Scripture: James 1:12

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

33. What else does James say about those who persevere under trial? _____

Our own temptations and trials are only part of the story. Does it surprise you to know that we can also test God? In describing the Israelites' crossing the wilderness this is what the Bible says about them.

The Scripture: Psalm 78:18-22

"They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, 'Can God spread a table in the desert?... Can He...give us food? Can He supply meat for His people?' When the Lord heard them, He was very angry...for they did not believe in God or trust in His deliverance."

34. What was the chief way the Israelites tested God? _____

God wants us to accept His promises on faith.

Temptation plays an important part in our Christian walk, but we don't have to be afraid of it. It is a tool that God uses for our good. By it, He tests our faith and helps us grow into spiritual maturity. During our time of testing, we must remember that God is always there to uphold us and show us the way through it.

The Answers

1. "God is tempting me."
2. God does not tempt anyone.
3. Our own evil desires
4. Sin
5. Death
6. The devil
7. It is common to man.
8. God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear.
9. A way out so we can stand up under it
10. Rescue the godly from trials (temptations)
11. He quickly falls away.
12. Worries of life, deceitfulness of wealth
13. They fall into temptation.
14. Ruin and destruction
15. A root of all kinds of evil
16. Jesus
17. That of high priest
18. Because He was tempted when He was human
19. Sympathizes with our weakness
20. Approach the throne of grace with confidence
21. Grace to help us
22. To hold firmly to our faith
23. Be self-controlled and alert, resist Satan and stand firm in the faith
24. He is looking for someone to devour.
25. Watch and pray
26. To know what was in his heart
27. That our faith may be proved genuine
28. Of greater worth than gold
29. We are to rejoice greatly.
30. Perseverance
31. Maturity and completion
32. One of joy
33. They will receive the crown of life.
34. They did not believe in Him or trust in His deliverance.

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