



The Sympathetic Savior: Why a Tempted Christ Changes Everything

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Introduction:

As you know, a little over a month ago, we started our series through the book of Hebrews. Last week, as we finished chapter two, we encountered these closing words from the author:

*17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.
18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:17–18, ESV)*

Last week, at the end of the lesson, I had planned a short discussion about temptation, but I simply did not have the time due to the density and depth of the content in those nine verses. So, this morning, I would like to step out of our study in Hebrews and spend our entire time discussing "**temptation.**"

Of all the possible topics we might discuss, this is one that is **very applicable to all of us**. We all face temptations—sooner or later, and I suspect, for all of us, it will be much sooner than later.

This morning, under the title "**The Sympathetic Savior,**" I want to ensure that we have a **biblical understanding of temptations and trials** and what we can do in advance, as well as at the time of temptation, to help prevent us from sinning when temptations or trials come our way. That is where we are headed.

Last week, we ended here in verse 18. The word translated "**help**" means just that: because of what Jesus endured, because of His sufferings, because of His trials, He is totally equipped and fully outfitted to help us when we are tempted. He is able to come alongside and assist; He is able to render aid to us, His brothers and sisters, God's children, when we face temptation.

The writer of Hebrews will tell us an additional piece of information relevant to our discussion in chapter 4:

15 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. (Hebrews 4:15, ESV)

Jesus is fully equipped and prepared to sympathize with our weaknesses. He is perfectly prepared, through the things which He suffered, to come alongside and render aid. He was, in every respect, tempted like we are, yet He never sinned.

So, He endured the temptations that we endure, but He did not fall into sin. This makes Him the **perfect Savior**, the **perfect helper**, and the **perfect High Priest** (as we will see in coming weeks), although today we will not yet develop that point. **Know that it is coming.**

There are a number of crucial points that need to be mentioned on the front end:

1. **Temptations are common to man.** In this fallen world, temptations are common to everyone. We should not be surprised when we are tempted, even from surprising directions. Throughout the Bible, we see God's people wrestling with temptations and sometimes sinning. Remember:
 - Adam's disobedience
 - Noah's drunkenness
 - Abraham's deception
 - Moses' anger in striking the rock
 - Jonah's rebellious spirit
 - David's massive failure

- Peter's denial
- Ananias and Sapphira's deception
- John Mark's departure
- Paul's strife with Barnabas

The culmination of this point—and more significantly than any I listed—is that Jesus was tempted, yet the good news is He did not sin.

The bottom line is that you and I will face temptations.

2. Temptation does not indicate that we are weak in our faith or that something is abnormal about us. Temptations are common. **What we do before and during temptation and trials are really the indicators of our spiritual maturity.**

In fact, the reality that we are facing temptations may indicate that we are on the front line of the battle. It has been said that Satan reserves his fiercest attacks for those who are closest to Him.

Let's be honest: Satan has little concern for those who have little concern for Jesus.

Although there are things, we can do that may lower the number of temptations we face—such as watching the places we go, the things we do, and the people we spend time with—we cannot eliminate temptations entirely. Also, there are things we can do, steps we can take that will help us in this area and we will discuss many of those things.

Temptations can come from anywhere, even surprising locations, or at surprising times.

Isolating ourselves may lower the number of temptations. But, because we are fallen creatures, we recognize that we can be tempted when we are all alone or even in sanctified moments in our lives.

3. **One last point:** I alluded to this earlier, and now I want to be crystal-clear. Satan—by the way, the name *Satan* means adversary or enemy—goes about as a roaring lion.

His desire for us and our families is our ruin. If we are saved, he cannot steal us from Christ, but because he hates Christ, he desires to destroy our family, our testimony, and our witness.

You and I are in a battle. Satan, also referred to as the Tempter, desires our ruin. One of his main schemes is to plan temptations that are in line with what he has learned about us. His design in this scheme is to ruin our family, ruin our testimony, and sully the name of Jesus through our behavior.

Never forget, Satan is a defeated foe. At Calvary the Son of God crushed his head. Like a wild beast that has been mortally wounded Satan is thrashing around and desires to ruin as many as he can. But he is defeated!

These three points serve as the starting point for our more in-depth discussion.

1) Biblically Defining Temptation:

The Greek words that underlies our topic is *peirasmos* (πειρασμός), used 21 times in the New Testament and translated in the ESV as "temptation" ten times, "trial" eight times, and "test" three times and *peirazō* (πειράζω) used 38 times in the New Testament and translated as **tempt**, **test**, **try**, or **examine**.

Let me give you a few examples of the way the word *peirasmos* (πειρασμός), is used:

39 And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. 40 And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:39–40, ESV)

27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. 28 You are those who have stayed with me in my trials. (Luke 22:27–28, ESV)

13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. (Luke 8:13, ESV)

In the Greek both *peirasmos* and *peirazō* are neutral; the **exact meaning** of either word is determined by the context. In the Scriptures we find these words being used in two main ways:

- **As a Test/Trial:** It can mean an external trial, hardship, or testing sent or allowed by God to prove, refine, and strengthen a believer's faith and/or character.

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:2–3, ESV)

- **As a temptation or a solicitation to sin:** It can mean an enticement, trap, or test initiated by a malicious source (Satan, the world, or human desire) designed to lure a person into moral failure and disobedience against God.

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1, ESV)

So, in dealing with these Greek words and how to understand either of them, **context is king!** The exact same word can be used to describe God testing our faith, or the Devil coming with the **goal of tempting us to sin.**

In the book of James, the author provides us with a **working definition** and **an associated explanation of temptation (solicitations to sin)** and also **discusses trials or tests:**

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (James 1:13, ESV)

So, as you consider the two major divisions of the word:

1. **Test or trial:** Hardship sent or allowed by God to prove, refine, and strengthen a believer's faith and /or character.
2. **Temptation:** A solicitation designed to lure a person into moral failure.

This forces a question: **Does God bring or allow trials into our life to refine our faith or character?**

Absolutely. We have a number of verses that indicate He does. I will give one clear and obvious example:

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 8 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:6–8, ESV)

So, does God bring or allow trials into our life to refine our character? **Positively yes!** We will speak more about this when we unpack the goals of trials.

The next question: **Does God bring temptations or solicitations designed to lure us into moral failure?**

Absolutely not!

James helps us immensely at this point:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted (here using as led to moral failure), "I am being tempted (here using as led to moral failure) by God," for God cannot be tempted (here being used as led to moral failure) with evil, and he himself tempts (here being used as leads with the goal of moral failure) no one. (James 1:13, ESV)

So, to summarize this point: **God does directly bring or indirectly allow tests or trials of our faith into our lives, but He never does so with the goal of leading us into moral failure.** His goal is always our spiritual growth and the maturation of our character.

Can a trial that has a **good goal** (our spiritual growth) end up producing a **bad outcome** (sin or moral failure)? **Yes**, and we will talk about how that happens in a moment.

But for now, God does not tempt His children to get them to fail morally. Period—and I mean period!

2) The Major Categories of Temptation:

Many generally see temptations operating in three simple yet major areas, a classic triad: **money, power, and sex.**

Theologians see in the Scriptures **three major areas of temptations:**

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:15–16, ESV)

Many would explain these three vectors like this:

- a. **Material security and comfort (money) / The desires (lusts) of the eyes:**
 - Natural desires themselves can become sources of temptation when their fulfillment is pursued through unethical means, for improper motives, or as ultimate ends.
- b. **Status and recognition (power) / The pride of life:**
 - Natural desires themselves become sources of temptation when their fulfillment is pursued through unethical means, for improper motives, or as ultimate ends.
- c. **Authority and control (sex) / The desires (lusts) of the flesh:**
 - The final temptation involves dominion itself—the promise of worldly power and glory in exchange for allegiance to competing authorities and/or the ultimate control of gratification that is found in sex.

We must admit, regardless of the model one prefers, these all look very similar.

As we consider this point, I would add, you should imagine these as Satan's three baits, these are his three lures. He really has a very limited toolbox, but he is very good at using these three hooks.

It is important and helpful for us to understand these are his baits.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATION: Often the actual temptation is in the shortcut. In fact, temptation is routinely presented as a shortcut to a God-given desire (comfort, love, peace, control, money, authority, or whatever).

The desires themselves are not usually sinful, but the method seeking fulfillment obtained outside of God's design or in a way that is contrary to God's word, and that is where the trap (temptation) lies.

3) The Progression of Temptation

We looked at James 1:13 earlier; we are now going to extend James's discussion, for it is here that James explains what the progression of temptation, more specifically what causes temptation:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. (James 1:13–15, ESV)

Here, James is dealing with **temptation** or **solicitation designed to lure a person into moral failure**. James explains a few key pieces of information. First, the real problem is **internal**, not **external**.

James writes that a person is actually ***lured*** and ***enticed*** by their own **fallen desires**. This means that the external temptation only has power because of the **internal craving**, (a matching desire) in the human heart.

James uses two metaphors to refer to this trap: ***"lured"*** and ***"enticed."*** ***Lured*** is the picture of luring or baiting an animal out into the open, while ***enticed*** implies taking a hook, camouflaging the hook, and using it to entice.

Follow James' explanation: There is an **external stimulus** that aligns with an **internal desire**, which creates a **trap (*lured and enticed*)**. This gives birth to sin—eating the forbidden fruit, telling the lie, whatever it may be—that, when fully developed, brings forth death.

The language is striking. Just as a pregnancy naturally results in the birth of a child, unbridled sin naturally leads to death. That is the natural progression of sin.

What should surprise us is that the **external stimulus** is not the real issue; the **internal *"desire"*** to have **something forbidden**, or to have **something allowed but in a forbidden way**, is the core or the driving force. For it is that **internal desire** that baits us into the trap.

IMPORTANT OBSERVATION ABOUT TEMPTATIONS: Many times, temptation will come right on the heels of a great spiritual success or a spiritual high-water mark in our lives. I say this because we need to be prepared.

Jesus, from the dove to the devil:

16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 3:16–4:1, ESV)

Elijah, from seizing false prophets to running from Jezebel:

38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." 40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there. (1 Kings 18:38–40, ESV)

19:1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Kings 19:1–3, ESV)

Israel, from receiving the Ten Commandments on the mountain to the idolatry and chaos at the base (Exodus).

Peter, from his grand confession "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" to Jesus rebuking him; "Get behind me, Satan" in Matthew 16.

4) God's Goals When You and I Face Trials and even Temptations

I mentioned this last week, so I will not spend much time here only to remind you of the verses. The Bible states this in many different places, here are three:

*2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces **steadfastness**. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2–4, ESV).*

*6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested **genuineness of your faith**—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pe 1:6–7, ESV).*

*3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that **suffering produces endurance**, 4 and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Ro 5:2–5, ESV).*

Clearly, God has the desire and design, through trials and even when He allows temptations, to make us more like our Savior and to grow our faith, trust, and reliance in HIM!

5) God's Provisions in our Temptations:

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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. (1 Corinthians 10:13, ESV)

From this verse, four truths become apparent:

A. As we said earlier, the temptations we face are common. They are normal, and they are common to all people. When we are tempted, we are experiencing that which is common to the human experience, at least in this life.

We do not face the same temptations, nor is everyone tempted in the same way(s). But temptations as a whole are universal.

Temptations do not only happen to young saints; they affect saints in all walks of their spiritual life. As you grow in your faith the temptations may change, or become more nuanced, but we do not, in this life, ever “outgrow” temptations.

B. When we are tempted, we must never forget that God is with us. God is faithful to us, and because He is faithful, He will not let the temptation be more than we can bear. This means that all of our temptations fall under the sovereignty of God.

More than that, it means that all of our temptations are in what we might call a “**controlled environment.**” In the same way God set the limits around Job’s trials, He sets limits for ours. He loves us and has **our growth, not our destruction**, in mind.

C. With the temptation, our faithful God also makes the way of escape. Did you see that? In other words, the temptation is in a “**completely controlled environment**”, and as the test or temptation starts, the way of escape—the specific escape hatch—is already there.

God is not waiting to see how you do or waiting for you to get beaten up a little bit. The loving Father, who is sovereign over everything, has not only goals for the temptation, but also the way of escape.

God has provided the escape hatch for each of us right in the midst of the trial or temptation. Your translation may say “*a way*,” but the Greek includes the definite article: with *the temptation*, a loving God provides *the way* of escape!

D. Now, point number four is extremely important, because point number three without point four might lead us to an incorrect conclusion.

Fourthly, it appears “*the way*” of *escape* is normally, and often, *through* the trial. Notice that “*the way*” of escape is provided so that you and I might be able to *endure* it.

The Greek word here means to **bear up** or **bear under** something. More than likely, God will not slip us out, but He will give us sufficient grace and He will provide “*the way*” so that we can go through (*escape*) the temptation.

Remember how we started this lesson:

18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:17–18, ESV)

Jesus has been there. He has gone through it, He was successful in it, and with every temptation, He is calling us to look to Him, for He is able to help those who are being tempted.

CONSIDER: With the temptation, God makes the way of escape. That means in the temptation, when we see the way, we need to take it!

6) Resisting Temptation (What should we do)?

- a. Steps to take now.
- b. Steps we need to be ready to take then.

First, this is by no means exhaustive, but I will provide three commands that we will touch upon here, a full and complete development will need to wait until a later day. But I think you will get the thrust of what each New Testament writer is saying.

First: *16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5:16–17, ESV)*

Although this verse is worthy of much greater individual attention: Suffice to say we are to walk in the Spirit as we align with the Holy Spirit's direction and power in our life.

It involves our "walk" being in line with the Spirit; it involves submission to the will of God. It is the metaphor of staying in step with the Spirit.

Paul doesn't just say, "**Stop sinning.**" He says, "**Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.**" Victory comes by cultivating a positive, **daily dependence** on the Holy Spirit rather than simply focusing on **trying harder** in our own strength.

Second: *10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Eph 6:10–18, ESV).*

Again, this is worthy of much greater attention than I will give it now, but it involves equipping ourselves with God's resources to aid us in resisting Satan's schemes. It involves the truth, the righteousness of Jesus, the peace found in the gospel, faith, eternal security, the Word of God, and prayer.

Here in Ephesians 6, the emphasis is entirely on defense and holding our ground ("**stand firm**," or "**withstand**"). We are never told to attack the enemy in our own strength; rather, we are told to put on God's armor and **stand firm**.

Notice also that the armor covers every vital part of the believer.

Third: *22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22, ESV)*

In fact, the New Testament provides three areas where we are told to flee. Lust or youthful passions (1 Cor 6:18), greed (1 Tim 6:11), and idolatry (1 Cor 10:14).

If we find ourselves in a place where we are wrestling with lust, get out of that place!

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is run. We saw this in the life of Joseph with Potiphar's wife.

7) Practical Helps:

First, as we have walked through this topic, the Bible has already provided us with a number of practical tips, things that we can do in advance or things we can do, should we find ourself in the midst of temptation.

By way of a quick review:

- **Remember Christ offers help, so look to Him**
- **Walk in the Spirit**
- **Put on the whole armor of God**
- **Submit to God and resist the devil**
- **Take the way of escape that God provides**
- **When necessary and if needed, Flee**

But there are other ways as well!

- **Pray for protection and deliverance, and more specifically pray about your own personal temptations:** Pray for strength, particularly in areas we know we are vulnerable.

41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt 26:41, ESV).

11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Mt 6:11–13, ESV).

- **Hide God's Word in our Heart:** Memorize and meditate on Scripture so we have divine truth ready when temptation strikes. Also, memorize scriptures that can speak right into our areas of temptations.

11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Ps 119:11, ESV).

- **Be Particularly Alert for Pride:**

18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Pr 16:18, ESV).

- **Make a Covenant with Your Eyes:** Guard what you look at and consume, refusing to fix your gaze on things that stir up sinful desires.

3 I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. (Ps 101:3, ESV).

- **Pursue Christ Alongside a Faithful Community:** Do not try to walk the Christian life alone; surround yourself with godly friends.

20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Pr 13:20, ESV).

- **Take Every Thought Captive:** Discipline your mind to reject unauthorized, destructive thoughts immediately and bring them into obedience to Christ. Bible reading and scripture memorization can aid us at this point.

*4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.
5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Co 10:4–5, ESV).*

- **Refocus our affections:** When the heart’s affections shift towards Jesus, the internal desire of the things of this world decreases, and external temptations have less pull. The bait is no longer effective!

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (Col 3:1–2, ESV).

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: None of this works if you have not placed faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot, and we will not, be successful in our flesh, in our own power, at resisting temptations.

When we place our faith in Jesus, God sends the third person of the Godhead—the Holy Spirit—to live within us. He begins day by day changing our desires and realigning our loves and passions. We cooperate with Him in the process, but without Him, we can do nothing good and we will become frustrated, continually falling to the same temptations.

I have provided these practical, biblical helps, but they are contingent on first being born again. Moral behavior and willpower alone are never enough; **true victory requires spiritual regeneration!**

If you are here today and find yourself exhausted by trying to white-knuckle your way through temptations, always in your own strength, and regularly failing, the solution isn't trying harder—it is surrendering to the Savior.
