



# How Can I Overcome Temptation?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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How can I overcome temptation? Satan is actively working in this world to deceive and lure people away from serving God. He tempts people by appealing to their fleshly desires in hope that they will decide to fulfill their physical desires in ways that fail to please God. When they do, they commit sin. And, sin results in spiritual death (see James 1:14-15). But, the Bible speaks plainly about the possibility of overcoming temptation and pleasing God. So, let's consider how the Bible teaches that each one of us can overcome even the most powerful temptations used by the devil to lure us away from serving God.

## **Follow Jesus' Example**

Jesus was God living as man (see Matthew 1:23). And, as man, He experienced all the things that are common to living on this earth – including temptation. Yes, the devil even attempted to lure the Son of God away from obeying the Father's will. The only difference was that Jesus did not sin. Never once did He violate the law of God. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

So, Jesus experienced temptation in all of the same areas we are tempted in. Therefore, the fact that Jesus did not commit sin is significant in providing evidence that it is possible to overcome any temptation. There is no point of temptation that is impossible to overcome.

The most notable passage that records Jesus being tempted is Matthew 4:1-11. Having fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was hungry. Satan seized this opportunity and tempted Jesus, saying, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (verse 3). This temptation would have appealed to Jesus to use His power of being the Son of God to fulfill His physical hunger – and so prove that He is the Son of God. Yet, Jesus responded by saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (verse 4).

The second temptation in Matthew 4 shows the devil taking Jesus into Jerusalem and setting Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down.

For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone’” (verses 5-6). This temptation was based on a misapplication of what is written in Psalm 91:11-12. Satan was tempting Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by putting God to the test. Yet, Jesus responded, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (verse 7).

The third temptation in Matthew 4 shows the devil taking Jesus up on a very high mountain and showing Him all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory in a moment of time. The devil said to Jesus, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (verse 9). In exchange for worshiping the devil, Jesus was offered the full glory of all the kingdoms of the world – and He would not have to suffer to have them (like He would in order to establish His). Yet, Jesus responded, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (verse 10).

At the end of these three temptations, Matthew records that the devil left Jesus and angels came and ministered to Jesus (verse 11). Clearly, Jesus had been successful in overcoming these temptations. But, how was He successful? First, Jesus knew what God expected from Him. If Jesus had not known what God expected from Him, how could He have properly responded to the temptations? Second, Jesus quoted Scripture to answer the temptations. God’s answer to these three situations was good enough for Jesus (as He answered each temptation with a different quotation from Deuteronomy that was applicable to the situation). Third, Jesus said “no” to each temptation. Jesus chose to exercise self-discipline to please God rather than please His own fleshly desires. Following Jesus’ perfect example in overcoming temptation will enable you to also overcome temptation.

## **Resist The Devil**

As demonstrated in Jesus’ example, a central component to overcoming the devil’s temptations is simply to say, “No!” God’s word does not present some kind of magical formula to resisting Satan’s temptations. It is simply a matter of will and determination. Listen to James 4:7: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Consider three points from this verse relevant to overcoming temptation.

First, we must submit to God. To submit is to yield our desires to God’s desires. In order to do this, we must first dedicate ourselves to learning what it is that God desires from us. We will learn these things whenever we study His written word (the Bible). When we do, we learn about things God does not want us to be doing as well as things God does want us to be doing. Then, even though we may want to do something God has forbidden, we must yield our desires to God’s. And, when we may not want to do something God has instructed, we must yield our desires to God’s.

Second, we must resist the devil. There will be times that we are really pulled in a direction away from doing God’s will. Satan is working hard to deceive us into thinking that it will be worth it to please ourselves rather than listen to God. Still, regardless of the temptation, this is a matter of self-control. Just like Jesus said “no” to His fleshly desires in order to please God, we must say “no” to our selfish desires so that we can please God also.

Third, when we are diligent in resisting the devil, God promises that he will flee from us. This is exactly what happened in Matthew 4 after Jesus resisted the devil's temptation. However, we must never think that the devil will flee from us if we are not diligent in resisting him. Also, it should be pointed out that this does not promise that Satan will leave us and never tempt us again. Instead, it is only a promise that God does not permit Satan to tempt us endlessly and relentlessly whenever we are being diligent to submit to God and resist the devil.

### **Take The Way Of Escape**

Here is another promise that God has made concerning the devil's temptations. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

First, all temptations we face are "common to man." Ever since the first time mankind was tempted in the Garden of Eden, Satan has worked to lure people away from God through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:15-17). Though these temptations get "repackaged" over time, they all have these common denominators. So, we should find comfort and strength to overcome temptation in the fact that Satan is not going to be able to find some other way to tempt us beyond the ways he has always used to tempt us (including the ways he used to tempt Jesus).

Second, "God is faithful." God is completely trustworthy. Therefore all of His promises are absolutely certain. This includes the promises that He makes about temptation. So, because God is faithful, we can be assured of the things Paul identifies in this verse – as well as His assurance that we can overcome temptation when we submit to Him and resist the devil.

Third, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. Our trustworthy God has assured us that we will not be tempted by something we cannot possibly overcome. Therefore, in every temptation, we must recognize that God is fully aware of what we are capable of. And, whenever we are tempted in any area, we must be assured that God recognizes we are capable of overcoming that temptation. If we were not, He would not allow us to be tempted in those ways.

Fourth, God provides a way of escape from every temptation. Whenever we are tempted, we must trust in the God who is completely trustworthy (faithful) and know that there is a path to victory. God never allows us to be placed into a lose-lose situation in which the only way out is through sin. There is always a way that is available to do what is right. Though it may not always be the most attractive answer to the situation, the most popular solution to the problem, or the easiest path, a path that leads to a right relationship with God always exists!

### **Put On The Whole Armor Of God**

The Scriptures (on multiple occasions) picture our lives on this earth as being involved in a spiritual war. We are fighting a fierce enemy (the devil) who has many weapons in his arsenal to defeat us. Ultimately, this battle is being waged between fulfilling the desires of the flesh or fulfilling the desires of God.

Fortunately, God has not left us unprotected in this war. Ephesians 6:11 says, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Notice carefully that it is possible to “stand” against this fierce enemy. But, this requires that we put on every piece of armor God has provided for us. It is simply irresponsible for us to expect that we will be able to stand if we have not put on the entire set of armor God has given us. And, please note, that we must put on all this armor *every day* – and leave no gaps in the armor!

What is the armor God has given us? It is identified in Ephesians 6:14-18. Each piece of spiritual armor is compared to a piece of armor that would have been used by a Roman soldier. We must put on belts of truth by knowing and applying what God wants from our lives. We must put on breastplates of righteousness by only choosing to do those things that God approves us doing and determining to live in a way that is right with God. We must have shoes/sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace by being prepared to respond to temptation with the word of God that offers peace to those who live according to its instructions. We must take up shields of faith by having unwavering trust and confidence in God. We must put on helmets of salvation by being filled with anticipation for the hope of eternal life in Heaven that is promised to those who faithfully serve God. We must use the sword of the Spirit (the word of God) by using God’s word to defend against Satan’s lies and to advance the cause of Jesus Christ. And, we must be fully committed to praying to God for help and strength throughout our conflict on this earth. If we will do these things, the God who is entirely faithful promises that we will be able to be victorious over the devil!

## **Conclusion**

God promises that it is possible to overcome temptation. Though Satan is a fierce opponent who wants to destroy our souls, God is stronger! And, if we will follow God’s instructions by imitating the example of Jesus, resisting the devil, taking the way of escape that God provides, and putting on the whole armor He provides, we can overcome temptation and please God!

### **Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series**

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