

Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Karen told me that when she was 3 years old, she stole a piece of Bazooka bubblegum from Piggly Wiggly's when she was there with her dad. On the way home, Karen foolishly put it in her mouth and started chewing it. Her dad asked her where she had gotten the gum from. Although she seemed to think stealing was ok (at the age of 3), she couldn't lie. So, she started to cry and told her dad she took it. He promptly turned the car around and made her go back into Piggly Wiggly and apologize to the clerk. She then had to give up a nickel of her own money to pay for the gum she stole. 52 years later, she still remembers that day like it was yesterday.

Why was she tempted to steal the gum in the first place? Especially since she had a little coin purse full of change she had gotten from the "Cotton Fairy" and from the "Cushion Fairy" - other stories for another time!

Another thing she did was walk from her house to Goldfines, an old department store in Grand Rapids. She was four years old and the trek was just over 2 miles. Her older brother, Jim, was supposed to be “babysitting” her and her other brother, Chuck. But, he clearly wasn’t paying much attention to them. Chuck asked Karen if she wanted to go to Goldfines and she questioned. “How will we get there?” to which Chuck replied, “We can walk!” So, she and Chuck started off on their walk to town. On the way, she fell and skinned her knee pretty badly. By the time they finally got to Goldfines, Karen was a mess. A crying, bloody 4 year old. As it turns out, when they got there, they saw their Mom and Dad in one of the isles. So, at first, in order to not get into trouble, they hid behind some racks. But, a sales clerk came up to them and asked them what they were doing. Upon seeing Karen’s bloody knee and tears, they asked if they were with anybody. Karen burst out, “My parents are somewhere in the store -

we saw them.” So, the sales clerk got on the intercom and paged Jerry and Peg Christensen. Needless to say, after being cleaned up and brought back home, Karen and Chuck were both grounded. Karen has never been a follower. She still to this day doesn’t know why she let her brother (who was always getting into trouble) convince her to walk to Goldfines with him.

Temptation. That’s what it was. Karen was tempted to steal and she fell for Satan’s bribe. She was tempted to follow Chuck, whom she trusted, (especially since he was almost 8), and she did. The allure of doing something she knew was wrong beat out the voice in her head that said, “Don’t do it.”

Temptation is a universal experience that everyone, regardless of age, background, or faith is subjected to. I am sure many of you have heard of the Stanford Marshmallow study done back in the 1970's and repeated many times since. In essence, the researchers were seeing if kids could delay satisfaction by making them wait to eat a treat that was in front of them. If they didn't eat the marshmallow before the researcher came back in, they were given a second marshmallow. The researchers wrote, "The Stanford marshmallow experiment is important because it demonstrated that effective delay is not achieved by merely thinking about something other than what we want, but rather, it depends on suppressive and avoidance mechanisms that reduce frustration. They made up quiet songs...hid their head in their arms, pounded the floor with their feet, fiddled playfully and teasingly with the signal bell, verbalized the contingency...prayed to the ceiling, and so on. In one dramatically effective

self-distraction technique, after obviously experiencing much agitation, a little girl rested her head, sat limply, relaxed herself, and proceeded to fall sound asleep."

All of us were born with a sinful nature that rebels against God. Listen to Ephesians 2: 1-3: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath".

Understanding this allows us to understand that we, as sinners who fall to temptation all too often, are in good

company. Consider the “heroes” of the Bible: Abraham lied about his wife. Sarah lied to God. Jacob cheated his brother. Moses struck the rock in defiant anger. Elijah complained against God. David committed adultery and then had a man murdered to cover it up. Jonah ran away from God. Peter denied the Lord. These facts should not discourage us, but they should wake us up to look at our own selves.

Temptation, however, cannot be blamed on being a human, because in 1 Corinthians 10:13, we are assured that God provides a way of escape from every temptation. It states, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.”

God does not abandon us in our struggles but offers His grace and strength to overcome. Through prayer, meditation on Scripture, fellowship with other believers, and reliance on the Holy Spirit, we can find the strength to resist temptation and walk in obedience to God.

Temptation is the allure of sin, the pull towards desires that are contrary to God's will. Now, of course, with the young children in the marshmallow experiment and even Karen at ages 3 and 4 did not understand what temptation was. They were simply acting as children. But, when adults are tempted to do wrong, they understand what they are doing. Yet, in the midst of temptation, we are not left powerless. We may not want to sing quiet songs, bury our heads in our arms, or fidget with stuff around us, but what we certainly can do is pray!

We need to turn to the example of Jesus: Jesus faced temptation during His earthly ministry, as seen in today's gospel. This account goes into much deeper detail in Matthew's version, which explains how when in the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus with offers of power, prestige, and pleasure. Yet, Jesus resisted each temptation by relying on the Word of God. His example teaches us the importance of Scripture in overcoming temptation and the power of prayer in seeking God's strength and guidance.

Resisting temptation is not easy, but it brings forth blessings and rewards. James 1:12 reminds us that those who endure temptation will receive the crown of life promised by God. It states, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has

promised to those who love him”. Our faithfulness in the face of temptation strengthens our character, deepens our relationship with God, and brings glory to His name.

Temptation is a reality that we all must confront, but it does not have the final word. Through faith in Jesus Christ and reliance on God's strength, we can overcome temptation and live victoriously. You never have to sin. God will never lead you to a place where your only choice is disobedience. We always have a choice. When we do wrong, we can't say, “The devil made me do it.” Like Eve in the Garden, we choose to eat the forbidden fruit.

How will we fight back?

Ephesians 6:11 says we are to “put on the whole armor of God”.

Colossians 4:2 instructs us to be “alert in prayer.”

Ephesians 5:19 tells us to “speak to one another” in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

2 Timothy 1: 7 reminds us to call on the Holy Spirit in times of temptation: “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Psalm 91: 1-4 states, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”

The Word of God not only tells us how to live; it also gives us the power to make the right choices.

Martin Luther says when we face the devil, “one little word” will fell him. Jesus is that “one little word.” The cross proved our Lord is the victor over the devil for time and eternity.

Jesus. The most important shield against temptation is His examples of resisting the devil while out in the wilderness. If He could do it while hungry, tired and stressed, we can do it, too. Call on Him. Pray to your Father. Invite the Holy Spirit into your heart. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, Let us draw near to You, resist the allure of sin, and find refuge in your grace and mercy. As we do so, may we experience the abundant life that You have promised to those who remain faithful in the midst of temptation. But, also forgive us with your grace and mercy when we fail. Help us to learn from our mistakes, trusting even further in your love and redemption. In Jesus’ name, Amen.