

*"Father, we thank you so much that in Christ we have been set free from the penalty of sin. Lord, all of us who know you as Savior, are free in this life. We are free and on our way to eternal life, and Lord, we are so grateful for that promise, and yet, Lord, there are some of us, if not many of us, who struggle, Lord, with temptation; who struggle with doubt. We struggle with fear; and some of us even feel in prison to sin. I just pray God, especially for that person who has come today who is longing to be set free from a temptation, from a sin that enslaves them. I pray they would find that in this series, Lord, as we teach from your Word. For we pray this in your precious name. And all of God's people said, "Amen".*

Hey, if you are a guest with us today, we welcome you to Christ Fellowship. My name is Rick, and I serve as the lead pastor here. If this is your first time, you really caught us at a great time, because today we are launching a brand new series that is entitled "Tempted", of all things. It is really a part of our ongoing series through the Book of Genesis. If you have your Bibles with you today, I want to encourage you to open them to Genesis, chapter three. If you don't have a Bible, there is one in the seat rack there in front of you. If you don't want to do that, it will all come up on the screen.

By way of introduction today, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated when I was in the sixth grade. I was eleven years old. Now, at that time the school that I attended in South Carolina was segregated but was sort of in the process of becoming de-segregated. But at that time, the only black person in my school, the only African American was actually my sixth grade teacher. Her name was Mrs. Johnson. Now folks, I've got to tell you, I loved Mrs. Johnson. For one thing, she was the only teacher in my grammar school year that ever actually visited my home in the apartment complex where I grew up. All the other teachers before her would visit other kids in other neighborhoods, but none of them ever came into the apartment complex where I lived. Maybe it was too scary, or too risky. But Mrs. Johnson came and knocked on my door. I'll never forget it because she brought me an African violet. She found out that I was kind of into plants, and so she brought me an African violet. I also recall her telling my little mom, my single mom, "I think Ricky has academic potential." I had never heard those words before, and I've got to tell you, I thought "Wow! I've got academic potential!" Now, she was probably telling all of the other kids that, but boy, did that boost my confidence.

But my point is this: The day of Dr. King's funeral, Mrs. Johnson cancelled all of our school work. None of the other classes did that, but she did, and our class watched that funeral all day long. I remember the networks all played Dr. King's speeches, and even as a sixth grader, I thought, "Wow! This guy is powerful." The content of what he

was saying was so strong. But check this out: There was one statement in this one speech that Dr. King would make, and every time they would play that speech, every time Dr. King would say this, Mrs. Johnson would cry. Tears! And I remember as sixth grade children, we wondered why she was so upset. But this was the phrase that every time during the day when they played it, tears would come to her eyes. This is what Dr. King would say that would make her cry. "Free at last. Free at last."

*"When we allow freedom to ring; when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to feel that day when all of God's people, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last."*

There is passion in those words, and why did those words make my teacher cry. You know why, don't you? It is because there is something in you and there is something in me, there is something in all of us that longs to be free. And folks, when bondage is pushed backward, and when freedom rings, that is a cause for rejoicing. It is a cause for celebration.

Now Christ Fellowship, let me turn a corner and bring that truth over to this series called "Tempted", because folks, nothing has the power to make slaves of us, to put us in bondage, any more than a temptation from which we cannot get free. I don't have to tell you that temptation is a very powerful force. Sometimes its power is underestimated until we try to break free from that bondage, and then we are kind of shocked at how powerful and how enslaving a temptation can be.

In fact, I said last week that many of us spent our lives circling the same sin, day after day, week after week, month after month, and for some of you year after year. You think to yourself: "I have prayed about this sin. I have cried out to God about this temptation." Then you think, "I've got victory over that temptation", and then, only to find out you fall to that temptation again. You think to yourself, "What is wrong with my stupid self that I cannot break free from the bondage of that temptation?" You think to yourself, "I know these thoughts are destroying my mind. I know that pornography is undermining the intimacy of my marriage. I know this drink is destroying my future. I know these shady deals in my business are causing my conscious to assault me." Worst of all, because you can't get free from the bondage, you start thinking that you are condemned by God. Folks, when you start to think that God has condemned you, which He hasn't, but when you start to think that, you do what Adam and Eve did. You begin to run from God. You begin to hide from God. That is exactly what Satan wants you to do in the first place.

By the way, if you were not here last week, I want to challenge you with all my heart to go online and listen to last week's message. It is free, and it plays into what we are talking about in terms of temptation so much. But folks, my point is this: There is something in you and there is something in me, when it comes to this bondage of temptation, there is something in us that longs to cry out, "Free at last", free at last. Thank God Almighty, free at last." Even if you are not a Christian, even if you are not a God follower, you know, you are here today and we are glad you are here, but even if you don't even buy into this stuff, there is some things in your life you wish you could stop doing. There some things you are in the habit of doing that you know are destroying your future, that is destroying your family; that is destroying your faith, if you will, and you long to be free.

Folks, let me go ahead and tell you what my goal is in this series. I'm going to go ahead and show my card here. My goal in this series is two parts. It is to set us free from the power of temptation. Folks, here is what you need to know when it comes to resisting temptation. This is my proposition: When it comes to being able to resist temptation, it's not about trying harder. Many people try harder to overcome this sin. It is not about trying harder. That won't work. It's not about trying harder, it is about training smarter. Let me say that again: It's not about trying harder. It is about training smarter. In fact, I want you to turn to your neighbor and say to them: "It's not about trying harder, it is about training smarter." You say, "Blackwood, what do you mean 'training smarter'? Well, folks we are going to find out in this series as we go back to the beginning, back to the Book of Genesis. I want to go ahead and tell you, today is going to come off less like preaching and more like teaching, because my goal today is to just lay a theological foundation when it comes to temptation. You are not going to walk out of here today saying, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last." You are going to have to come back, okay, for the next six weeks, and I believe that over the next six weeks some of you are going to say, "I'm going to shake off those shackles and say, "God Almighty, free at last."

With that in mind, I'm going to give you two simple thoughts today about temptation. Number one: Temptation resistance demands resistance training. You say, "What do you mean by resistance training?" Well, put your thinking caps on for a moment, because for those of you who go to the gym, you know that lifting weights is resistance training. Now, I don't lift weights, but I do pushups, about a hundred a day and sometimes more than that. But pushups is also resistance training. Folks, here is the goal. The goal is to train your muscles to get stronger; to be able to push back by training them to resist your weigh. Now, this whole series is going to be about

resistance training. Only we are not going to be training our muscles. Instead of training our muscles to resist weight, we are going to train our minds to resist temptation, to push back on temptation. You see, what if every time a temptation hits you, what if your mind was already trained to resist that temptation? What if every time a temptation surfaces, what if your mind was trained to be able to push back against it? Folks, that is my goal in this series.

We can get into a habit of resigning to temptation. We can get into a habit of just being resigned to it. You don't fight it; you don't push back; you don't resist it. But what if your mind had been trained to resist that temptation? Listen to James 4:7: Here is what the Bible says: *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* Transverse: If you are resigned to him, you will resist him, he is going to just hang on to you and keep you in bondage. You might be saying, "Rick, I have tried to resist him. I have tried hard." Some of you are just saying, "I don't know what else to do. I have tried and tried as hard as I can." Let's go back to the first statement: "It is not about trying harder, it is about training smarter." Listen to Hebrews 5:14: Speaking of strong believers, the Bible says this: *"Who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."* The word "train" there is a translation of the Greek word *gymnazo*. I always tell you that the New Testament was originally written in what is called koine Greek and then from Greek it was translated into English, or Spanish, or French, whatever. But that word "trained" is a Greek word called *gymnazo*. What word do you think we get from *gymnazo*? Yes, gymnasium. Some of you go to a gymnasium to train your muscles to get strong so that they can push back against weight. In the same way we go to the Word of God to train our minds to be strong so they will be able to push back, so they will be able to resist the force and the power of temptation.

Let me welcome all of our campuses who are joining us today. We are all together every time we launch a brand new series. We all get to come together, all over Miami Dade. It gives me a chance to talk to everybody, so Miami Dade, Christ Fellowship all over this county, I love you. God is doing great things through Christ Fellowship. We are grateful for that. Amen?

Here is what you need to know. Temptation resistance demands a ready mind. You say, "Meaning what?" Meaning you can't be trying to figure out what to do when temptation arises when temptation arises. Right? You've got to have your mind retrained on how you are going to respond to it. So, we are going to get started. I want to give you three responses that I want to become intuitive with you, that every time a temptation rises up, this is going to be not a reaction. This is going to be an intuitive response. So, I want to give you three responses. (a) When temptation strikes, the first

thing you want to do is stop. With that in mind, let's pick up the narrative, beginning in Genesis 3:1. The Bible says, *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree of the garden?"* Stop right there because in the coming weeks we are going to unpack all of the details of this narrative.

But for now, here is what you need to know. When a temptation surfaces, your first response needs to be: Stop! By that I mean to pause for a moment and put space, to put margin, between you and the temptation. Listen to Hebrews 5:14 again. It says, *"Who by constant use have trained themselves again to distinguish good from evil."* The word "distinguish" there is a translation of the Greek word *diakrino*, and *diakrino* literally means to put space between things. People who have learned to overpower temptation, it's not because they are better than you, it's not even because they have more self-discipline and willpower than you. People who learn to overcome temptation, learn that when temptation surfaces, they stop. They learn to do that. They put margin between themselves and that temptation. Margin is what you instantly need when temptation rises. You say, "Why?" Because your next step is you are going to need to think. So, you need to have an instant reply when temptation surfaces, that you should stop. You need to put space, you need to put margin between you and the temptation. But watch this: As opposed to stepping back from the temptation, Eve unfortunately actually moved towards the temptation.

Look at verse 2: *"The woman said to the serpent."* She is now talking to Satan. She is now talking and teasing temptation. In other words, instead of stepping back from the temptation, she engages the temptation. Instead of putting margin between her and temptation, she is now leaning into the temptation. Folks, with every move that Eve makes towards the temptation, she is being led down a path. By the way, let me tell you something. Temptation is not a benign, harmless idle curiosity. You think that at the moment, but it is not. Temptation is always a path, and it is a path that is leading you somewhere. Namely, it is leading you away from God, specifically as far away from God as Satan can possibly reach. Every time you move toward that flirtation, every time you move toward that flirtatious man on the job, every time you make a move toward internet pornography, for some of you, every time you make a move toward a drink, every time you make a move toward a drug, whatever your temptation is, every time you make a move toward it as opposed to away from it, it is easier for Satan to pull you on down the path. On the other hand, every time you resist that, every time you push back on that temptation, you grow stronger. Your resilience to that temptation will get stronger and stronger and stronger. So, when you are confronted

with a temptation. We want to have our minds pre-trained to respond. What is your first response? You stop instantly. We know to do that.

Nest, think. Stop and think. You say, "Think about what?" I want to give you two thoughts that I want you to intuitively think every time you face a temptation. Every God given command is for my good. It is for my good. Now, with that in mind, let's go back to Genesis 2:15. *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree of the garden."* God was saying to Adam, 'all of these trees are yours to enjoy: Every bit of fruit. Have at it! No holds barred. Enjoy it! But, verse 17: God was saying to Adam, and to Eve, 'all of these trees are yours to enjoy. Every bit of fruit. Have at it! No holds barred. Enjoy it! But, verse 17: *"You must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."* Why, God? Why can't we eat from it?" Because when you eat from it, you will certainly die. Stop there, because that is the very first command that God gave to the human race. And folks, every command that God has given to us, beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation, and every command all the way through, listen to this, it is always for your good. It is always for your protection. It is always for your provision. Meaning what? Meaning God does not dish out arbitrary commands. God is not in the habit of dishing out random commands just to see if you can keep them. God does not give commands to stifle your fun in life. That is what Satan would tell you. The truth is folks, God is not glorified when you are stifled, when you are not having fun. God is most glorified when you are enjoying life. When you say, "This is the life God gave me; this is the world that He gave me, and I love it. It is wonderful! God is glorified by that. So God is not trying to put rules on you to stifle you. God does give us rules and prohibitions and commands, but they are always for your good. They are always for your protection.

You know, what I love about God that makes Him different from parents, is that God always clarifies the command. Listen again to verse 17: *"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve. "Well why not God? Why can't we eat from that tree? Why won't you let us have that one?" Well, here is why. If you eat of that tree, if you eat of that fruit, you will certainly die.* When you were a kid, did your mom or dad ever say to you, "You can't do that. You can't go there. You can't do that." And you say, "Well, mom, why not?" or "Dad, why can't I do that?" Your dad or your mom may have said, "You can't do it because I said you can't do it." God doesn't do that. God doesn't give out random prohibitions. God doesn't give out random commands. God says, "You can't do that, and here is why you can't do it, Adam and Eve. That tree over there, I don't want you to eat of it because it is a killer. It's poison.

It will destroy your future, and it will destroy your life.” You see, God gave Adam and Eve that command because He was trying to protect the future. Every command is always about protecting your future, it’s about protecting your faith, and it’s about protecting your family. Let me say that again: Every God given command is designed to protect your future; it is designed to protect your family, and it is designed to protect your faith. So you need to think every time you are faced with something. God says “No”. You need to say, “He says no for my good, to protect my future, to protect my family, and to protect my faith.

Here is the second thing you need to face: Every temptation is designed by Satan to steal my future, to steal my faith, to steal my family. You see folks, here is one of the reasons I think we can’t get traction when we are trying to resist temptation. We don’t realize what is really going on. One of the reasons we can’t get traction when we try to resist the temptation is because we don’t really realize what is at stake. At least we don’t know what is at stake in the moment. But folks, the truth is, there is always more at stake than we might realize in the moment. Your future is at stake. Your family is at stake. Your faith is at stake. But in the moment you may think it’s no big deal. In the moment you may think, “I’ve done this before. So what if I lie. So what if I fudge on the contract. So what if I don’t give full disclosure. So what if I cheat on the test. So what if I lust. So what if I flirt with that woman over there. So what if I look at that stuff on the internet. You think it’s no big deal. It’s a one time thing. It’s a one time look. You may think it is no big deal. If you are a protestant you may think “I’ll just read 1st John 1:9”. If you are a Catholic, you may say, “I’ll just go confess to a priest.” If you are a Calvinist you may say, “I was predestined to do that. I couldn’t help it. It’s no big deal.” The truth is folks, temptation is always a big deal. There is so much at stake every time, and what is at stake is your future, your faith, and your family. That is what we are going to hammer at as we move on: your future, your faith, and your family.

With all of that background, let’s look at the anatomy of a temptation. We are going to unpack this over the next few weeks. Let’s look at this temptation. Watch what happens. The Bible says, “*Now the serpent was more crafty.*” By the way, the word “crafty” there actually mean attractional. It means something beautiful. Satan always loves to use things that attract you, not that repulse you. I’m always kind of humored by how Christians react at Halloween. “Oh, Halloween, the devil” as if Satan is into ghosts and goblins and spooks, and he wants to go “Boo”, and scare us away. That is what he wants you to think. He wants you to think he is a big ghost and a goblin, and he’s a spook with horns and a pitchfork. He is not any of that. Satan is into what is attractional, what is beautiful, what is alluring. We need to be aware of that. That is

why he goes into this snake because at that time we got cursed as snakes after this and snakes are ugly and we get repulsed by them. Before this it was one of the most attractional animals that God had made. So Satan enters into a snake and Satan is going to use this snake as a medium to get his message across, to get his lies across. By the way, Satan is a master at using all kinds of media to get his message across. It can be the TV, it can be the internet, it can be a documentary. Satan can use all kinds of media to spread lies.

Here is the first lie that Satan ever told. Here it is. Verse 1: *"Now the serpent was more crafty and more attractional than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* In other words, translation: "Eve, should you interpret what God said so literally? Should you interpret your Bible literally? Should you interpret what God said literally?" Let me tell you something. Let me give you the answer to that. "Yes, you should." But I don't like to use the term literal. That sounds so fundamental. I like to use the word "normal". We interpret the Bible normally, like you would any other document. You interpret it according to its normal, historical, grammatical form of interpretation. You take words at their face value. Satan is saying, "Should you interpret God's words so normally? And we say, "Oh yeah. We interpret it just like any other document at face value." What he is also saying is this: "Should you take God so seriously?" Do you know what our answer is to that? "Yes!" Do you know why? Because God says what He means, and means what He says." What God was saying here is "Eve, Adam, this fruit is deadly, this fruit is a killer. This is serious. Take this in its normal, historical, grammatical form. I say what I mean and I mean what I say." Eve seemed to get that didn't she? Watch what she says in verse 2. *"The woman said to the serpent: Now, she should have put distance between her and Satan. She should have said, 'Hey, I'm going to let God talk to you. I'm out of here.' But she didn't. She engages him. She says this: "We may eat from the tree in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'* Eve seemed to know intuitively that God says what He means and means what He says. Eve knew God's Word well enough that she could quote it back to Satan, and that was a good thing. But, here is where she messed up. Rather than putting distance between her and Satan, between her and the temptation; rather than putting margin, she leaned into the temptation. Not only that, she didn't know the scope of what was going down at the moment. She thinks just about this moment. She thinks it's about disobeying God at this moment and it's no big deal. Folks, it is never about just this

moment. It is always about your future. It is always about the future. It is never just about the moment.

Listen to what Satan said to her. "You will not certainly die." It wasn't about death. It was about Eve's future. She thought it was about a piece of fruit at the moment. It was about disobeying God at the moment. You see, we do the same thing, don't we? You do the same thing. You think it's an image on the internet now. It's just a drink now, if you struggle with that. It's just the drug now. It's just the gossip now. It's just not full disclosure now. It's just shady business now. But as you are going to see, it is not just about an isolated moment. Temptation is always about your future. You see, what Eve didn't know was that when Satan was leading her down a path, it was a path of death. Satan was taking away her everlasting life. Do you realize that Eve was meant to be alive forever. Eve was meant to be alive today. Adam was meant to be alive today. They would still be living today if they had not sinned. They were led down a path. They thought it was just about a piece of fruit. They thought it was just about the moment. They were led down a path in which they gave up for the moment. For this piece of fruit they gave up everlasting life.

Listen, not only did Adam and Eve lose their own eternal life, but they lost ours in the process, didn't they? Isn't that the way sin happens? It doesn't just impact you; it impacts others as well. She lost everlasting life, and not only that, but when you are facing a temptation, you may be thinking it is only right versus wrong. It's only about obedience versus disobedience. Let me tell you folks, it goes much deeper than that. Temptation is always about who you will trust. Every time you face a temptation, you are forced to make a decision about who you are going to trust. Are you going to trust what Satan says, or are you going to trust what God says. Every time you face a temptation, it is an issue of your faith, and we are going to talk about that. Every time you face a temptation you either say, "I'm going to go with Satan." Satan says, "It's no big deal. God is so serious He is a killjoy. He doesn't want you to enjoy life. He doesn't want you to have any fun." You need to say, "I'm going to trust you on this." Or you trust God who is saying, "No, no, no. I'm not prohibiting you for that, because I don't want you to have fun. I'm your father, and like Him, I love you. Like Him I care for you. Unlike him, I've got a plan for your future. I don't want you to lose your future. I don't want you to lose your faith. I don't want you to lose your family. So, you either choose to say, "God, I think I'll believe you." And refuse to say, "I believe Satan." Every time you make a choice, Satan is saying basically, "I'm going to destroy your future." God is saying "I want to preserve your future."

Here is what I want to go back to. Every time you face a challenge, a temptation surfaces, what is the first thing you are to do? You are going to stop, and then create margin, space between. The next step is, you are going to think. What are you going to think? Every God given command is for my good. It is for my future. God is trying to protect my future, my faith, and my family. Every temptation is designed to steal my future, my faith, and my family.

One more thing: When temptation strikes, talk. Stop, think, and talk. Talk to God, not to Satan. Look at verse 2: *"The woman talked to the serpent."* She talked to Satan. There is a reason why I even have to say this, because there is a movement in Christianity that tells people to talk to Satan; to rebuke Satan; to challenge Satan. Let me give you some good advice. You let God do the talking to Satan. You say, "Well, Jesus talked to Satan." He's Jesus right? You are not. That's not a cue for you to start rebuking Satan, challenging Satan. In fact folks, did you know that in the book of Jude, the Bible says that Michael the Archangel - by the way, Satan is not Jesus' equivalent. No, it is Michael and Satan. They are equivalent. Jesus is higher than both of them, high above them. Michael is the Archangel. Do you know that the Bible says that Michael does not talk to Satan; does not rebuke Satan. You read it. Jude and 2nd Peter say Michael would not bring a railing accusation against Satan. Michael says, "Satan, God will talk to you." That is what you need to do when you face a temptation. You don't need to say, "Satan, I rebuke you. Satan, you are no good." You don't need to go into that world, folks. You need to just say, "God, you talk to him. You deal with him, God." You talk to God, and tell Him about the temptation. You talk to God, because God is on your side.

Let me tell you this. When you fail in a temptation, here is what I love about God. Here is what I love about our Father. When you fail you will never be met with closed arms. You will be met with open arms. Let me go back to last week. When you blow it, some of you are going to get out of here and day, Free at last, and then you are going to blow it. Let me tell you, that is not a cue for you to start walking away from God. No matter how many times you blow it, don't run from God; you run to God. When you blow it, when you fail, don't you run from Christ Fellowship. "I'm going to run to my church. I'm going to run to my family." This family will never leave you with closed arms. They will always meet you with open arms.