

## HEALING THROUGH OBEDIENCE: WINNING THE BATTLES

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING: - This is a very practical teaching aimed at imparting specific strategies for dealing with our three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

1. We are in a two part series on overcoming temptations to sin addictions. This week we deal with the battle to overcome sinful behavior, and next session we will talk about having a sustained victory over it.
2. We call this “The Battle” because that is what it truly is. Almost certainly, you've experienced it as a battle, a fierce one, in which you sometimes win and sometimes lose. It is a fierce battle because we are at war with three enemies who have been familiar to the Church almost from the beginning. We are battling the world, the flesh, and the devil.
  - a. The battle we face against the world is almost certainly a more difficult one than was faced by our parents or grandparents who lived in a culture that, by and large, supported Christian values. We live in a post-Christian era. The values of the world are no longer the values of our Judeo-Christian heritage. For the most part those who control information and entertainment--the educators, writers, film and TV producers, even many top people in mainline churches--hold values that are contrary to Christian teaching.
  - b. The battle against the flesh hasn't changed. It is as old as man. And for us, when we talk about battling the flesh, we are not just talking about the straightforward plain old temptations--they are strong enough--but we are talking about the deep psychological and emotional needs that drive us--sometimes in our areas of vulnerability, sometimes in other ways.
  - c. And of course, there is the devil. He is real, believe me. In the introduction to his great book, The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis says that Satan has two strategies that work equally well for him: He gets people to either believe he doesn't exist, or he gets them to believe he is everywhere and is responsible for all our problems. It is more likely you fall into the former category than the latter.
    - (1). He works by two primary methods: deception and accusation. Through deception, he leads us to believe that we can meet our needs in ways that ultimately never satisfy. Through accusation, he weakens us by tearing us down. Recognizing his lies, and declaring that we are who God says we are will be key to overcoming addictions.

- (2). If you do not recognize that there is a devil, a real, personal force who desperately does not want to see you overcome your addiction, your progress will be much slower than it needs to be. If you don't acknowledge his work, you cannot appropriate the victory that Jesus had over him through His death and resurrection.
3. Using the analogy of the battle, I want to suggest five ways in which an army can lose a real war, and then I'm going to apply them to our situation in the battle we are in--so that we don't have to lose the battle. Assume you are the commanding general of the army of the little kingdom of Abstinence. Here are five ways you can lose the battle, and possibly your kingdom:
  - a. You were totally unaware that an attack would be coming, so you were totally unprepared.
  - b. You had won a big battle, and then you let yourself be lulled back into complacency. You didn't see the counterattack coming.
  - c. You knew that you might be attacked, but you had no battle plan. You were thrown into total confusion when the attack came.
  - d. In the midst of the fiercest battle, you simply lost heart and gave up.
  - e. You are overwhelmed by a stronger force, and although you have allies, you fail to call on them.

Now, let's look at these five situations as they might apply to our struggle with temptation, and try to discover principles that could keep us from making the mistakes that the general from Abstinence made.

4. First, we should always know that an attack could come at any time. The principle here is that **WE ALWAYS WILL BE TEMPTED.**
  - a. Scripture tells us that, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)
  - b. Jesus was tempted. After his most memorable temptations--in the wilderness--the Bible says that Satan departed from Him "until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13). Satan would come back. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are. Although this doesn't necessarily mean He was tempted by every type of addiction, it would certainly seem to mean that He was tempted in some areas similar to our own.
  - c. The reason it is important to accept temptations as a normal part of the Christian life is that

if we don't, if we feel that somehow we were singled out for special suffering, we can--using the military analogy--develop poor morale, or more specifically, fall into self-pity. Self-pity is almost always fatal for the overcomer. "It's not right; it's not fair," often provides the tiny bit of justification that we need to give into the sin.

- d. There is good news here, however. Although we will always face some types of temptations, our experience has been that repeated victories over a certain sin tend to diminish the strength of that temptation. In fact, over time specific addictive temptations can disappear altogether.
5. The second situation in which the general lost the battle was that he became complacent after he had won a victory. Our principle here is that **ADDICTIONS TAKE ON A LIFE OF THEIR OWN**. This is true both when everything seems to be going well and also when we have achieved some real healing of the underlying issues that caused our addiction.
- a. Our vulnerability may come with the let down after something good has happened. The letdown is a form of pain and we have learned a way to respond to pain. We will be tempted to fall back into that way whenever we feel pain of any sort.
  - b. Also, years of acting out, or turning to our substance of choice, have established certain stimulus-response patterns that are almost like electrical circuits that have become wired into us. A certain image appears, or a certain thing happens, and we respond by using--involuntarily.
  - c. These old stimulus-response patterns will die out, but it takes time. It is almost as if we have to starve them to death.
  - d. This is a good place to make a point that is quite obvious, but often so difficult to have sink in deeply, that temptation is not sin. We all know that, but constantly I find people condemning themselves because they feel tempted. Temptation becomes sin only when we willingly take it in and start to play with it--to enjoy it.
6. The third battle losing situation is when we know that we could be attacked, but we have no battle plan. The principle here is that **THE INITIAL RESPONSE IS USUALLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE**. The odds are never more in our favor than they are at that first flickering of temptation. We make an instant decision either to reject the temptation or to entertain it. Entertain it is an appropriate expression; we invite it in, serve it a few drinks, offer it something to eat, and enjoy its company. You know how much more difficult it is to get rid of a guest you've invited in than it is to just not answer the door.
- a. Temptation usually sneaks up on us; we're often not prepared when it comes. In fact our

initial natural responses are notoriously unreliable because they are based on how we feel at the moment. We need to be prepared. We need a strategy, a plan. Our preparation needs to be two-fold.

- (1). First, we need to have developed attitudes--ways of thinking--that will immediately come to mind if we are to make that right initial decision. Here are some truths about temptation, that if they sink into your conscious and subconscious mind, are likely to give you that right initial response. Some of them we have already discussed.
  - (a). Temptation is normal. I should expect this.
  - (b). Temptation is not sin. I haven't done anything wrong because I find this behavior attractive.
  - (c). If I resist this, it will go away.
  - (d). My mind is the battleground, and if I let this thing into my mind, I'm going to have a difficult time getting it out.

If you think this list is helpful, copy it and keep it somewhere where you can draw on it when you need it, or make a list of your own beliefs that will serve as your first line of defense when temptation attacks.

Who is it that tries to tell you the opposite of each of these truths? Rebuke him.

- (2). The other way we can be prepared for the attack is to have specific strategies that you find work for you. More about this later.
7. The next way of losing the battle, is to just grow weary, lose heart and give up. It's just too hard, and I'm tired of the battle. The Principle here is from II Chron. 20:15: “. . .FOR THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS BUT GOD'S”.
- a. Ultimately, it is His strength that will get us through. He enables us to prevail. It is true; we are powerless. The moments in which we recognize our weakness can either spell our downfall or can bring us to our greatest victories. It is often at these moments that we truly come to Jesus and experience his love and mercy--his life changing love and mercy.
    - (1). Awareness of our powerlessness is the key to victory in 12-Step programs
    - (2). Speak of the powerlessness to God, not just to yourself using it for justification.

- (3). If you are in a prolonged period of such weariness, call on another believer to help you. Tell him or her how you are feeling and have him or her pray for you.
  - b. Rebuke Satan; the voice of defeat is often his. Quote Scripture to Satan: “No temptation has overtaken me. . .”
  - c. Remember, if you resist, the temptation will go away.
  - d. Also remember: If you resist successfully, it will be easier next time; if you give in, it will be more difficult next time.
8. Now, remember how the general had powerful allies, but he lost the war because he did not call on them? We have two of the most powerful allies there are--the person of Jesus Christ, and the word of God. The principle here is that “I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.”
  - a. Jesus:
    - (1). He is totally on our side, and He is always willing to come to our aid in time of difficulty.
    - (2). Calling on Jesus is a practical help for a number of reasons:
      - (a). In calling on Jesus, we are turning our minds from things of the flesh to what is holy.
      - (b). Many of the underlying needs that drive our addictions are needs that He can meet in a holy and lasting way (as we have discussed before).
      - (c). He is real; He is a present help in times of trouble and He really wants to help you through this. Calling on Him is not some psychological technique. He is real!
    - (3). There are a number of ways in which we could do this.
      - (a). Simply start talking to Jesus, telling Him what you are going through, what the longings of your heart are, and that you believe He can meet every need.
      - (b). Meditate on the cross. See Him there dying for you because He loves you so much. See Him suffering there for every sin you have ever committed--past, present, and future.

- (c). When all else fails, just start saying over and over again, the name "Jesus."
  - b. We also have a powerful ally in God's written world. There is tremendous power in the world of God:
    - (1). James 1:14-15 - *"but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."*
    - (2). Romans 6:17 - *"but thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves to sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."*
    - (3). I Cor. 10:14 - *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*
9. This has been a lot of information; a combination of principles and practical suggestions. To win your own individual battles, you are going to have to use many of these. Let me review and summarize some of them.
  - a. Develop in yourself beliefs or attitudes that will come to your mind at that critical moment of temptation.
    - (1). This is normal. Temptation is to be expected.
    - (2). I have not sinned because I am tempted.
    - (3). I don't need \_\_\_\_\_ (your substance of choice)
    - (4). My mind is the battlefield. That's where I need to put up my first line of defense.
  - b. Surrender to the power of the Lord. Do it verbally.
  - c. Rebuke Satan--verbally and in the name of Jesus.
  - d. Call on Jesus.
  - e. Use specific Scriptures.
10. Many people develop their own techniques that work for them when they first encounter temptation.

- a. Frank Worthen suggested slowing down the process. Our mind works so rapidly that we often are not aware of the assumptions and decisions we are making. When you are in the midst of the struggle, ask yourself questions such as:
    - What is happening now?
    - What do I want to have happen?
    - What will happen if I give into this desire?
    - What do I want to have happen?
    - What choices do I have?
  - b. This may sound silly, but it can work. Bill Consiglio suggests a simple shock treatment. Wear a rubber band around your wrist, and when temptation hits, give it a good snap--to bring you back to reality. Shouting "No!" to yourself is another suggestion he makes.
  - c. Both Bill Consiglio and Gerard van den Aardveg \_\_\_\_\_ suggest taking what you are going through or are contemplating and exaggerating it to the point of absurdity. For example, imagine yourself as a sniveling, whining little child crawling up and demanding your immediate satisfaction.
  - d. Another way is what you might call damaging the idol. We tend to attribute extraordinary qualities to those things we are attracted. Try the opposite--even grossly. Imagine maggots crawling in the bottom of that bottle of alcohol. Or imagine that beautiful man or woman smells terrible, or that their genital area is covered with herpes sores.
11. These are just some of the ways of dealing with temptation and trying to win the battle; there are many more. Some will work for you, some will not. Some will work sometimes, but not at others. No one has developed a foolproof system that will work for everybody or that will work every time. Each person will have to develop what works best for him or her. Next week, we will talk about those changes in us that will enable us to keep our victories. The important thing to remember is that victory is ours through Jesus Christ.

*Thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 15:57)*

**SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE**

**1 Cor. 10:13 (NASB)** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR THE WEEK**

1. Read over your notes and experiment with the various techniques to find which ones work for you to avoid falling into temptation.