

5 Keys to Resisting Temptation

by Adam R. Holz

Discipleship Journal Issue #116 March/April 2000

Maintaining purity in the midst of a sin-oriented culture is a challenge. How can we resist temptation? I don't think there's a single answer. But I do believe there are a number of practical keys to avoiding sin.

Transform your thinking.

If we hope to resist temptation consistently, we must replace worldly thinking with God's thoughts, found in His Word. His ideas of right and wrong, His promises, and His teaching must saturate our souls. Romans 12:1–2 says,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Regular exposure to truth is the only thing that—with the power of the Holy Spirit—has the capacity to combat the alluring lies of our culture about what will really satisfy us.

Exercise self-discipline.

Self-control in other areas of life will help us resist temptation. We may need to examine our sleep, eating, work, and entertainment habits. If major areas of our lives are out of control, sin becomes a more attractive option. Disciplines such as silence and fasting can help us bring our appetites under control. These practices, however, are only one piece of the puzzle. Paul cautions against expecting harsh treatment of the body alone to deal with the deep issues of the heart (see Col. 2:20–23). But he also recognized the need to control his body and discipline himself for the sake of righteousness. "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Be accountable.

If you're struggling to resist temptation, share your struggle with others. James recognized the healing power of prayer and confession among believers: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas. 5:16). When we choose to be accountable, we're making a commitment to tell others the truth about our sin. We have to be honest about our sin before we can begin to battle it effectively.

Rely on God's faithfulness.

God promises that we will never face a temptation we cannot resist:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it.

—1 Cor. 10:13

This important promise undercuts any tendency to rationalize our sin by saying, "That's just the way I am." God has promised strength to be obedient. Too often we surrender to the first whisper of temptation instead of relying upon the strength God has provided to resist it.

Recognize dangerous habits.

Do you channel surf late at night? Do you walk down the candy aisle at the supermarket when you're struggling to rein in your appetite? Do you rush to get the mail, hoping to see the Victoria's Secret catalog before your wife does? Do you regularly hang out with people who make light of your desire to grow in purity, who dismiss you as a prude? Be honest with yourself and, if necessary, with someone else about the ways you flirt with temptation. For some of us, that will mean taking a closer look at the way media and entertainment choices expose us to temptation (see "Culture Clash"). We may also need to look carefully at how certain relationships influence us. Seemingly innocent and small decisions can affect our lives significantly.

We also need to recognize that we are particularly exposed to temptation when we're out of our normal life rhythms. For example, traveling, illness, and working overtime can leave us more vulnerable to temptation. We must make plans in advance to protect ourselves during these vulnerable times.