

8 Questions to Ask When Your Feelings Say Yes but Your Conscience Says No

Are you a weak Christian if you struggle with temptation?

by DeDe Martin *Discipleship Journal* Issue #78 November/December 1993

"You've been so preoccupied lately," blurted my friend. "Since you joined that Bible study we can't even have a simple conversation. What's bothering you?"



I knew what my problem was. It was desire. And it not only bothered me, it controlled me. I had joined the Bible study to learn more about Jesus and to meet other Christians. I got more than I expected. I was attracted to one of the group members, a friendly fellow who really understood me. We seemed to connect.

It's just a harmless friendship, I kept telling myself. Then came the glances that lasted a little bit too long, the hello hugs that sent chills down my spine. And soon the Bible studies became a blur. He invaded my thoughts and distracted my prayers.

My conscience told me I was headed in the wrong direction—the feelings that overpowered me weren't harmless. If left unchecked, they would cloud my thinking, dull my ability to hear God's voice, and more. Yet I felt so alive. As questions thundered through my head, I turned to God's Word for answers.

1. Why is my conscience bothering me?

I tried to convince myself that my feelings were innocent. This was a mere attraction—no big deal. Yet it was impossible to concentrate on the Bible studies. And I felt so far from the Lord.

Then I remembered that when I received Christ, the Spirit of the Lord came to live inside me. The Bible says, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13). This truth helps us understand God's Word, guides us in the direction of the Lord, and convicts us of sin. Was the Holy Spirit telling me something now?

I began to pray. As I took a deeper look into why my conscience bothered me, I saw the truth. My feelings were more than an innocent attraction. I was struggling with physical temptation.

2. Am I a weak Christian because I struggle with temptation?

I felt like a failure. I thought I was a strong believer, a person who could resist temptation with the blink of an eye. I thought I was past giving in to the weakness of the flesh. But in the Scriptures I learned that wrong desires and temptations afflict everyone (1 Cor. 10:13). We aren't weak because temptations come our way.

Temptation is part of the human condition. Even the Apostle Paul agonized about his struggles as he wrote to the Romans: "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me . . . waging war against the law of my mind" (Ro. 7:21–23). Paul's conscience proved that he knew perfectly well when he was headed in the wrong direction.

3. Can I turn my weakness into strength?

Paul couldn't stop temptation from coming his way. "What a wretched man I am!" he cried. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Ro. 7:24). But he didn't try to help himself; he looked outside of himself for help. "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses," Paul said, "so that Christ's power may rest on me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

I was beginning to see that when temptation confronts me, my strength as a Christian has nothing to do with confidence in my ability to resist. My strength comes from God's ability to deliver me.

4. Is there anything I can do to end the struggle?

Although I learned that ultimately my strength to combat temptation comes from the Lord, I also learned that my will affects the outcome. Obedience and trust is a moment-by-moment process.

When the Lord led me to this verse, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life" (Dt. 30:19), I realized that asking Jesus into my heart was only the first of many choices I would make as a Christian.

That's God's plan. He sets both blessings and curses before us to strengthen our trust in Him. Each time we choose obedience, we give a little bit more of ourselves over to Him. We have the opportunity to watch Him work in our lives, and our trust in Him begins to grow.

I thought about the victories God had given me in the past, like the choice I made not to live with an unbeliever. Three days before my rent was due I said no to a prospective roommate. We worked together and we got along fine. But I'd heard her talk about the weekend parties, the drinking, and the boyfriends who spent the night. I told her what God's Word said, and that His Word is for our own protection. But she wouldn't listen. I couldn't pay the rent myself, but I knew I couldn't compromise.

On the day the rent was due, a girl from church called. She needed a place to stay. Not only did she have enough money to cover what I was short, she insisted on making the whole payment. Obedience brought blessing.

Now I was faced with another choice. How would I deal with the feelings I had for the Bible study member?

5. What will happen if I listen to my feelings?

King David stood on the palace roof and looked down at Bathsheba. He could have fumed from the temptation and looked to the Lord. Instead, he focused on his desires. He listened to his feelings (2 Samuel 11).

When he chose to follow his feelings, David also chose the consequences. Since he wasn't dwelling "in the shelter of the Most High," he became more vulnerable to the snares of the Enemy (Ps. 91:1, Ps. 91:3). When the traps were set, David fell for each one.

His sin progressed from desire to action. He got Bathsheba pregnant and made sure her husband was killed in battle. The consequences didn't end there. God allowed them to marry, but their child died and David's other two sons grew up to hate him. David paid a big price for listening to his desires.

There's a price tag on every temptation. Materialism brings financial debt. Overeating results in weight gain. And pride comes before a fall (Prov. 16:18).

What about physical temptation? Had I considered the cost of giving in to my desire? There's always the risk of a transmitted disease, the threat of a broken family, and the probability of emotional scars. But even more devastating is the certainty of a spiritual wound.

Yielding to sin opens the door of our hearts to Satan. He would love to sift us like wheat (Lk. 22:31). And once our hearts are opened a crack he will work overtime, as he did with David, to get a greater grip on our lives.

I knew I didn't want to fall into Satan's grasp. And although avoiding a negative outcome may not be the best motivation for following my conscience, I was beginning to feel more determined in my decision.

6. How can I find the strength to be obedient?

I thought of the man who asked Jesus to heal his son of an evil spirit. The man said, "I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not" (Mk. 9:18). The disciples were followers of Jesus, yet they couldn't heal the boy. Privately they asked Jesus why. He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (v. 29).

I was amazed that although these men walked and talked with Jesus and saw His power, when trouble came they tried to handle it themselves. The disciples knew Jesus set men free. Why didn't they turn to their source of power? Even after they failed to heal the man's son, the disciples didn't turn to the Lord. The father had to bring his son to Jesus.

Was my position similar to the one in which the disciples found themselves? I walked with Jesus and talked with Him, but did I depend on Him? Did I trust in Him? Perhaps I was so preoccupied with my inner battle that I had forgotten it wasn't my war. I had lost sight of the fact that my job was to build my relationship with Jesus, to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). My job was to know Him so well that when trials came I would automatically trust Him. His job was deliverance.

Paul told the Galatians to "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16). As I looked to the One who could give me power over temptation (instead of keeping my eyes on my struggle) God gave me the strength to be obedient.

7. Must I change my feelings before I can obey God?

Two fishermen cast a net into the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me. . . . and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:18–19). Jesus asked them to turn from what they were doing and let Him take control. He didn't insist they trim their taste for trout or alter their attitudes about fishing. He just said "Come"—pack up the nets and He would do the rest.

Similarly, Paul wrote to the Romans, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Ro. 12:2). First comes the action (do not conform), then follows the attitude (renew your mind).

I knew what I had to do. As Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:12), I, too, needed to take a few quick steps of obedience. God was telling me to count myself "dead to sin but alive to God

in Christ Jesus" (Ro. 6:11). He wanted me to be obedient to the leading of my conscience and let Him take care of my feelings.

8. Do I believe in God's promises?

I realized faith was the bottom line. My confusion and distraction lingered because of the unanswered question: Do I really believe in God's promises enough to act on them?

The three men in the fiery furnace could not delay their decision. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were ordered to bow and worship the idol King Nebuchadnezzar had made. It would have been so easy to give a quick nod in the direction of the idol just to get the king off their backs. Surely God would have seen that their hearts weren't really in it. But they decided not to compromise. They believed in God's promises and they acted on them. They told the king, "The God we serve is able to save us from [the fire], and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:17–18).

That's the kind of faith I wanted—a faith that thrives on the promises of God. A faith strong enough to withstand the fiery trials of life and step out in obedience to the Spirit of God.

There was a lot I didn't know. What would happen if I stayed in the Bible study? Would I be able to resist the temptation? How would I know if God wanted me to stay?

In the face of all the unknowns, I realized I must cling to what I did know: I know that God loves me (Ps. 86:13). I know that He is "able to keep [me] from falling and to present [me] before his glorious presence without fault" (Jude 24). I know that "[His] grace is sufficient for [me], for [His] power is made perfect in [my] weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

I stepped out in faith on those promises.

Some time has passed, and I still attend the Bible study. But I'm no longer struggling. By the grace of God I've overcome the temptation. Oh, there are still rough days once in a while, days when my wicked flesh wants to rise up. But during those times I'm reminded of how much I need my heavenly Father, how important prayer is, how I need to know Him better.

Instead of dwelling on temptation, I look up now and I trust in Him. It's a matter of choice. And every time I make the right choice, I resonate to what Paul told the Romans, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Ro. 8:37).