

## ***Praying Beyond Our Temptations – Dan Hitz***

*This article is part-one of a two-part series. It explains how we can use our sexual temptations as a gauge to point out areas of brokenness in our hearts, and seek the Lord for His answer to our deeper needs. The article was adapted from a workshop Dan will be teaching at a Gender Matters conference presented by Desert Stream Ministries and Union Center Christian Church in Endicott, New York. Part-two, "Understanding our Attraction Profiles", will be in next month's newsletter.*



Continued sexual temptations –heterosexual or homosexual – can be a source of guilt and condemnation for many Christians. Many of us react in shame and try to suppress our temptations by squashing them back down in our hearts. Rather than suppression, a healthier way to deal with temptations would be to acknowledge them and submit them to the cross. In that way, we can learn to use our temptations toward sexual sin as a gauge to show us that there are areas of brokenness in our hearts where we need the Lord's touch. We must continue to resist sin, but we can learn to resist sin in a more productive way.

Let's review a few basic truths about temptations. Temptations themselves are not a sin; however, many Christians suffer from condemnation because they have temptations. We may wonder why we still have temptations and sometimes sin if we are "new creations in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17). Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way we are yet never responded to those temptations by sinning. If Jesus was tempted, how much more will we who have trained our hearts, minds, and bodies to respond to sexual sin be tempted to engage in that sin, long after we have given our hearts to Christ? Ephesians 6:16 tells believers to hold up their shield of faith to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one". The flaming arrows of temptation will come to try to reignite the illicit passions that once burned freely in our hearts. Having a Savior who was tempted in every way we are, but never sinned should give us hope that He understands our temptations, knows the targets they are aimed at in our hearts, and conquered our specific sin on the cross.

Many Christians come under intense condemnation because they have engaged in sexual sin *after* giving their hearts to Christ. The Apostle John was writing to Christians when he wrote, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). The Lord doesn't want us to wallow in shame and condemnation when we sin, He wants us to confess our sin, repent, and walk in the forgiveness of His sacrifice on the cross.

Our temptations can be used to deepen our relationship with the Lord and learn how to fight the sins we formerly surrendered to. Judges 3:1-2 in the NKJV reads, "Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it.)" We see here that the Lord purposely left some enemies of Israel around so that they would have to learn to fight God's way. They would only have victory as they practiced obedience. In our own lives, the Father understands our struggle with sin. He invites us to share our hearts with him as we learn how to battle our sin His way. Isaiah spoke the Father's heart when he said, "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18) Here we see that freedom from sin comes from a willingness to share our hearts with the Father who in turn works through relationship to cleanse our sinful hearts and make us pure and holy.



How do we learn to use our temptations as a gauge to help us go to the Savior in relationship, so that He can heal the wounded areas of our hearts? I call this conversation "praying beyond the temptation". In times of increased temptations, we learn not to suppress the temptations by squashing them back down in our hearts. Instead, we learn to acknowledge the increased temptations for what they are and submit them to the cross. Through conversational prayer with our Savior we ask Him for help in understanding our deeper areas of need and increased vulnerability. It helps to recognize that the habitual sin that we formerly

gave ourselves to (or are currently struggling with) was (is) an illegitimate attempt to solve a legitimate emotional need. For example, we are all created by God to need and receive proper emotional nurturing from our mother and father. If this doesn't happen in our lives, we have a mother and/or father wound. Our legitimate need for

love was not fulfilled and emotional pain developed. Many of us have tried to fill that deep void in our hearts through pornography or through illicit relationships in the arms of another man or woman. We tried to “numb” our pain through sexual sin. That didn’t work and the pain remained. We need to go to the Savior who is the only one that can heal our unmet legitimate need for love in a holy, legitimate way.

Praying beyond the temptation involves some very basic steps. 1. When we realize that we are more vulnerable to a specific temptation than usual, we acknowledge that temptation and submit it to the cross. 2. At the cross we share our hearts with the Lord and ask Him what the legitimate need in our hearts is that we are tempted to resolve in an illegitimate way. Simply put, what emotional pain are we trying to numb through our sin? 3. In conversational prayer, we wait on the Lord and ask Him for His holy solution to our emotional pain. 4. When necessary, we repent of any sin we have engaged in or any negative inner vows or strongholds we have been holding on to. Inner vows are decisions like, “I’ll never let anyone get close enough to me to hurt me like that again”. These vows keep us trapped in a vicious cycle of negative self-protection. Strongholds are habit structures of thinking that shape the way we think, feel, act and react to life. Holding on to bitterness is an example of a negative stronghold. A life of submission to Christ and prayer is an example of a positive stronghold. Negative strongholds cause us to remain more vulnerable to temptation and sin than we would be if we lived a life in deeper submission to Christ. 5. As we live our lives in relationship with the Lord and apply His answers to our legitimate needs, our excessive temptations dissipate, our spiritual strength increases, and we are better equipped to resist the regular temptations that do come our way.



What does this look like in a practical life application? Many years ago I found myself fighting increasing temptations that weren’t in my usual *attraction profile*. An attraction profile is a summary of the typical physical, emotional and behavioral characteristics we are usually tempted by. I was being bombarded with lustful thoughts of aggressive encounters with other males. Instead of taking my own advice and calling my accountability partner for prayer, I tried to suppress the temptations and push them back down in my heart. After two weeks of strong temptations I finally stopped to pray. I acknowledged the specifics of the temptations and submitted the temptations to the cross. I acknowledged to the Lord that I was fighting lustful images of aggressive sexual encounters with other males. I asked Him to show me why I was fighting this specific type of temptation. In other words, I asked Him what the legitimate need was that I was tempted to resolve through these illegitimate fantasies. He showed me that I was anxious and struggling with many things relating to my perception of my masculinity. I was new to this ministry and fearful that I could not do the job. I was struggling financially at home and having some challenges with some of my kids. In essence, I was feeling inadequate in my own masculinity and was struggling with temptation to numb the emotional pain through fantasies of aggressive encounters. I was looking for a strong masculine force to do what I felt I could not do, and rescue me from my trials. I repented to the Lord for not standing as the man of God that He declared me to be and looking for someone else to do for me what only He could do through me. The truth was that I did not know how to do what He was calling me to do, so I needed to ask the Lord for help. He then showed me a picture of a strong, muscular right arm – His righteous right arm – carrying a little image of me. The Lord spoke to me and said, “I will be your strong, masculine force to carry you through these trials. I will show you how to do what I am asking you to do.” Within fifteen minutes of acknowledging my temptations and submitting them to the cross, I received an answer from the Lord that set me free from the temptations that I had been struggling with for two weeks. The Lord healed a legitimate need in my heart to be nurtured and empowered by my father. The thought of my Heavenly Father being my strong masculine force to carry me through the difficult challenges in life has helped me to persevere many times since that day.

Praying beyond the temptation is a powerful tool in our journey out of sexual brokenness and into sexual purity. It deepens our relationship with the Father and touches many areas of our heart that have contributed to our sexual struggle. It blesses us with the mercy of our Father God to change our hearts and make us more like Jesus. Sometimes we can pray through these issues on our own. Sometimes we need the help of a trusted Christian brother or sister. If you are in a time of increased temptation and would like help, call Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan at 586.739.5114. We offer individual prayer ministry, professional counseling, and support groups. Reach out today and grow in your relationship with the Lord.

