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Temptation

As I talk to people in seminars, worship services, crusades, revival services, more and more of them confide that they're experiencing temptations that surprise them. Men and women tell me the same things. They claim that they're currently confronting temptations they never expected, that have caught them off guard.

That's understandable. Consider how advertisements spread the Hugh Hefner philosophy across our nation, implying that "if it feels good, do it." Consider the billions that Hollywood spends to endorse that same philosophy. "If it feels good, do it." It's all around us. We're being subjected to temptations that we could have never predicted.

Should we feel guilty? No! It's not the temptation that's sin—it's the *yielding* to the temptation that is. Needless guilt only wears us down and steals our victory.

Keep in mind that we'll never be tempted with more than we can combat. God will give us the grace and power to resist temptation. Of course, we might well have to endure some tough battles with temptation. God doesn't promise us that it will be easy, but He does promise us that He will guide us to triumph if we allow Him. He will bring us through.

On our own, it's not always easy to determine whether we're facing something that will be good for us or something that will be bad for us. We're inclined to think that if a temptation sounds good, it must be right for us; if it sounds bad, it's probably bad for us. That's not necessarily valid, and I can give you personal proof.

One of the biggest dilemmas of my life right now, as I

find myself aging along with everyone else, is my retirement. I get really concerned about it. I ask myself how I will ever be able to retire without a retirement package.

The last time I had my taxes calculated, my accountant informed me, “The tips that you give out on a monthly basis are more than you can expect from your monthly retirement.” (I guess I’ll have to give up tipping.)

My wife and I do not have good medical insurance, in spite of the fact that we pay a portion of it ourselves. I tell myself not to fret, but in moments of weakness, I do. I get concerned when I imagine my wife in a situation in which she would have to pick up any hospitalization expense, the house expense, the living expenses.

Does it surprise you that evangelists worry about things like that? It shouldn’t. We get concerned. We get tempted.

Sometime back I received a telephone call from the administrator of one of the colleges I had attended when completing my graduate work. He offered me a position on his staff, explaining what my responsibilities would be—and then offered me a school van, a credit card, and great benefits.

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**Finally she spoke. It was one simple question:
“Have you talked it over with the Lord?”**

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When the call came in, I had been praying, *Lord, please open up a way to help me with my retirement and my insurance.* At that time I was 1,000 miles from home at a camp meeting. I had been praying about this matter, and then came the phone call.

Needless to say, the man got my attention. I figured

that the offer had to be of God, and I promised to give the gentleman my answer by 10 A.M.

Then I called my wife. I rambled on excitedly about the job offer, the van, the credit card. She said nothing. So I added, "I might not be a full-time evangelist anymore, but I could still preach on the weekends. We'd have the best of both worlds." She said nothing.

"Nancy? Nancy, are you still there?" I asked. "Did you hear the part about the retirement plan, the pension, about the hospitalization?"

Finally she spoke. It was one simple question: "Have you talked it over with the Lord?"

I started to object, telling her how the Lord and I live so close together, how I breathe prayers at dawn, at noon, at night.

"You had better pray it through," she advised me.

When my wife puts it that way, I know I had better pray! Down on my knees I went.

I told the Lord of my job offer and asked for His guidance. The response my brain registered was, *Richard, I'm not through with you as a full-time evangelist yet.*

And then I remembered—there's no promotion outside the will of God. Eyes have not seen, ears have not heard, nor has it come into the mind of Richard the things that the Lord is putting up for me if I'm obedient to His will.

I thanked Him for my understanding of His message, and I dared ask, *Does this mean I'm to be a full-time evangelist for the rest of my life?*

Again my brain registered a response: *Richard, that's not for you to know at this time.*

You see, if the temptation presents itself and it sounds good for us, we can't automatically assume it to be right for us. Even Christian workers can err when presented with tempting offers. It's so easy to think good opportunities to be of God. But please use caution. Take the time to be certain.

Only God's offers can lead us to victory. We must be thankful that we have His grace to help us differentiate the good from the imitation.

As long as we journey in this world for Christ, as long as we walk in His presence, temptation will confront us. In my youth I heard it crooked. I thought a complete consecration to God—of body, mind, and spirit; past, present, and future; family, friends, and finances—resulted in entire sanctification. I assumed that sanctification would remove or bar temptation from a Christian's life, but the years have proven me wrong.

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There will be joy at the end of the tunnel as we realize that we've made it through the valley, up the hill, all the way through the tunnel once again.

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In fact, we have the testimonies of saints in the Bible to substantiate that the closer we move with Christ, the greater the temptations become, both in frequency and intensity. Think about it. As we grow in grace, our resistance to temptation increases. Therefore, Satan himself must pull out the big guns of this temptation.

Scripture tells us that even Jesus Christ was tempted, yet He was without sin. He is our Creator, Leader, Savior, Sanctifier, and yet even He did not escape this world without temptation. I will not escape without further temptation. You will not escape without further temptation. In reality, temptation is as close to us as the air we breathe, as the food we eat.

There is a passage in James 1:2, often misunderstood, that tells us, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." Can you imagine Jesus or the

apostles cheering, laughing, being joyous when confronted with horrendous temptations? I think not.

However, we *are* prompted by the Scriptures to count it all joy. We are advised not to rejoice at the temptation, but to *count it all joy*. This can only signify that after we work our way through the temptation and the honing process, the grinding process, and the refining process, joy awaits us at the end. There will be joy at the end of the tunnel as we realize that we've made it through the valley, up the hill, all the way through the tunnel once again.

It would be a horrible mistake to ignore the devastating evidence of temptation. Temptation is to be seriously reckoned with, for it coaxes the human heart to sin, to self-destruct.

Remember: it took only one sin to wreck an entire universe, a paradise. It was the sin that continues today to be the most popular, the most prevalent, and the most seldom considered sin in human experience: that of putting a person's will in opposition to God's will. In the final analysis, that's the definition of all sin—the placement of a person's will against God's will.

Consider that newly created couple who resided in the Garden of Eden. They did not face the temptation to drink alcohol, to rape, or to commit adultery. They were not tempted to engage in any of the many degrading acts that take place today.

However, they were tempted to say *yes* when God said *no*. The temptation in itself was not sin. It became sin when they yielded, when they made the decision to oppose God's will. It wrecked not only their lives but also their family's lives and every family's life throughout this entire world from then to now. It was that sin which opened the door to the sin and chaos we know today.

In a very real way, the effects of that sin continue in every disillusioned person, broken life, disappointed heart, blackened character, shattered family, divorce court,