

Into Temptation

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[0 : 00] Crowded House released that song in 1988. It's called Into Temptation. And I find it hauntingly beautiful. I thought Nick did a wonderful cover of that. But it shows this picture of a person faced with temptation. And they eventually succumb, they give in.

Neil Finn, who wrote that song, was inspired when he was at a hotel one night. And there was the rugby union team staying at the hotel and a netball team staying at the hotel. And throughout the night, he saw them pairing up. And at one point, when he was back in his hotel room, he heard the knock at the door. And he goes and opens the door. And it was the person next to him. And there was somebody opening the door, giving into temptation. And he actually depicts for us the seductive, that sin holds for all of us. The cradle, the bed is soft and warm. Giving into this temptation couldn't do me any harm. The temptation to sin has an ability to cloud our minds, even if we say we understand the consequences. Temptation has the ability to make us rationalize why we think this thing is the best thing is the best thing for me. And yet, guilt and remorse come for us quickly afterwards. I can't believe I did that again. She's not going to forgive me. How do I explain this?

How can I get away with this? How can I cover up this before anyone knows? Struggling with sin and temptation is part of life for all of us. None of us have overcome it, except for Jesus. And he calls us to live a life of holiness, pursuing perfection. Because in his death and resurrection, he is now making his people to be like him. Perfect, holy, without a spot, without a blemish. But I think I can get so used to my sin that I forget that's not how I'm supposed to be. I'm actually being made to be that perfect, holy one like Jesus. And yet every day we are faced with so many big and small choices to sin. Will I honor God? Will I follow him with my whole body, with my whole soul, with my mind? Or will I give in to that alluring call and give in to temptation?

Today in Psalm 141, David is going to model for us what to do when we are heading into temptation, and how to prepare our lives for this battle against sin, the devil, and our own sinful hearts, to show that we love God more than anything else. To help us, the Bible is a wonderful thing. Let me encourage you to be reading it every day. And just like I gave away a book last week, I'm here to give away another book. The Psalms are a really wonderful resource, and this is a daily devotion in the Psalms. If you want this book, come and get this book. I'm giving away books throughout this series.

This is a really helpful resource. If anybody wants this book, come and get this book right now. Come on, come and get this book. Who needs? Yes, Nolene's coming. Let's give Nolene a clap. There you are, Nolene. I will be following up with those people who've been getting those books to see how they're going. So as we have a look at Psalm 141 today, there's going to be five small parts that we're going to see. I don't have three points today. There's five, but they're short. Don't worry.

[3 : 54] To see how we are to battle with our sin. The first is our need for help, our need for wisdom, for friends, an understanding of justice and vindication, and then finally, our need for protection. So let me pray for us as we have a look at Psalm 141. Our Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the Psalms, the heart songs of the Bible. Father, help us to be people who love your Word, who read it and listen to you. But Lord, help us to be aware of who we are as fallen humans, that we are people faced with temptation every day. Father, help us to see the temptation as a chance, as a choice to love you and serve you and not ourselves. Amen. Please have your Bibles open.

You can use the St. Paul's app, or you can use the heart songs handouts on your seats. We're in verse 1. And David starts in a place of desperation. Verse 1, I call to you, Lord. Come quickly to me. Hear me when I call to you. David is clearly in great need, and he cries out to the only one who can

help him. And it's very audacious of what David is doing here.

He calls God to come to him. Now, of course, God is everywhere, and it's not as if God isn't where David is, but David is calling God to come to him like a master calls a servant, you know, come here, come here and serve me. And it's very strange that David would be doing that to the great God.

But it's clear that David is in a terrible spot. God, run to me. I am in a terrible spot. I need your help. If I am going to survive this period of temptation, I need you to come and help me right now. He's a person who wants to be faithful to God in the face of temptation, and he has this real sense of urgency. God, come and help me before it's too late. There's two paths before me. I want to choose to love you and honor you, but this temptation is alluring, and it is tempting.

Come and help me. And David, even though he calls God to come to him, he comes, David comes before God with nothing. He doesn't even have a sacrifice to offer or incense to burn.

[6 : 30] Usually what would happen in the temple is there would be sacrifices offered, incense burnt to please the Lord. But David doesn't have these things. So he sets his hands before God in prayer and lifts them up like incense. God, this is all I've got. I have nothing else. Hear my prayer.

It's a cry for help based on God's character, that God is gracious and helps not because of what we offer him, not just because we sacrifice time or money or what we can give him, or in the Old Testament system, an animal. God will help because God is loving and caring. It's a cry for help based on who God is.

I wonder how good we are at crying out to God for help. How good are you at asking for help from God? Culturally, just the Aussie maleness of me. I like to appear strong, as if I don't need help from anyone.

I can do it on my own. But do we think there is shame or dishonor or appearing weak if we ask for help for someone? It can be easy to think that we are somehow impervious to temptation. Do you know what?

I'm being tempted right now. I don't need help. I can do it on my own. I can cope. David, who was anointed to be king and then becomes king, the king is the one who is crying out for help in desperation.

[8 : 15] Jesus himself, God's son, cries out to God for help in a desperate scene when he's in the Garden of Gethsemane. In times of temptation, let's be like David and know we need God's help and cry out to God.

Because just as 2 Corinthians 3 reminds us, our help comes not from us. Our help comes from the Lord. We desperately need God's help because we are in a battle. I wish that once we became Christians, once people become Christians, the battle is over. It's smooth sailing. It's really easy from that point. I'm following God. The hard part's over. I'm on his side. And the reality is that is very true. Once we are on God's side, he has already won the battle. Jesus has died for us. He's taken our sin. But there is still a war waging around us for our souls against sin, the world, and the devil until Jesus returns.

We are secure in our salvation, but it doesn't mean there are things that want to drag us down. My own heart can give into temptation to sin all on its own. I don't necessarily need the devil to influence me. So a very real battle is within our own hearts. We see temptation around us, and our hearts want those things. The world around us also influences us. It doesn't want us to follow God. One of my favorite TV shows is a TV show called Gruen. I'm really excited because it's coming back on TV in a couple of weeks. And it's all about advertising. And it talks about the tricks that people use in television, in magazine advertising, in billboards, all to make us crave things to buy them. It turns us into consumers instead of being people satisfied by God. It's a massive industry of people who are trying to make us into just consumers, let alone the rest of the world's temptations. So we have temptations from within us, just from what we see around us. There is temptations out there in the world where the world is trying to influence, not to follow God, but to give in. And we also do battle against the devil. He is real, and he doesn't want us to find our joy and our satisfaction in God. If he can't stop us from following God, which he can't do, because we are secure in Christ, he can certainly attempt to make us poor Christians, to make us unsatisfied Christians, Christians who don't share our faith. He can attempt to influence us.

When facing his own sin, a pastor from the US called A.W. Tozer learned to talk back to the devil. It's a book of sermons I have of his. If you'd like to read his sermon, I Talk Back to the Devil, I can lend that to you. He said in this sermon, he learned to say to the devil, yes, devil, sin is terrible. And

I remind you, devil, that everything good, forgiveness and cleansing and blessing, everything that is good, I have freely received from Jesus Christ. When God forgives us, when he forgives a person, he doesn't think, I need to watch them again just in case they sin.

But he starts again as though they have been recreated and there was no sinful past at all. That is the basis of the assurance that God offers Christians. Tozer said, the devil will taunt you with the fact that you have stumbled in your faith and perhaps more than once.

[12:12] The devil wants us to live in a state of discouraged chagrin and remorse. But we have been set free and we can call out to God to help us in the battle that we face against our own sin, against the world around us and against the devil.

So our first part of call when we are facing temptation is to do what David did, to cry out for help. The second thing, David asks for wisdom in the face of temptation.

Verse 3, God, close my mouth because I'm going to say something stupid. I'm going to say something I will regret.

Maybe you've had that moment in the past where you've just watched as the words have slipped out of your mouth and your brain is watching them come out of your mouth and you can see them just destroy the person in front of you and you can't do anything to get those back. God, close my mouth so I don't attack this person, so I don't share this gossip, so I don't hurt them. You know, this person over here, they've been attacking me and I really want to put them in their place, Lord.

I really want to share this juicy piece of gossip. I want to say hurtful things because they've been hurting me. But God, come quickly over here. Slam your hand over my mouth before it is too late.

[13:39] God, hold me back from doing something dumb. This takes wisdom and the self-understanding to see the temptation to hurt a person with words and to desperately cry out to God before it's too late.

It's not just words. This could be any sin. God, hold my hand back. God, stop me. So God, please help me really practically. David is calling for really simple, practical help.

Close my mouth. Stop my tongue. But not only that, give me wisdom. Give me wisdom to change my heart. Verse 4, Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil, so that I take part in wicked deeds, along with those who are evildoers.

Do not let me eat their delicacies. David sees what is in his heart and know it's his heart that needs to change. As Jesus would say a thousand years later, that it's out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

So God, you know, if he just closed David's mouth, his heart would still feel anger, resentful. God, I need you to change my heart. There are a number of parts to verse 4.

[14:57] First, he calls on God to help him not to be drawn to evil. It's very reminiscent of the Lord's prayer, lead me not into temptation. Change my heart from being drawn to evil, so I don't take part in wicked deeds with people who are wicked.

David, when he asks for wisdom for a new heart, asks for wisdom about the people he spends time with. We are all influenced with those people that we spend time with in negative and in positive ways.

My kids always come home speaking strange words. The kids these days, I don't know their lingo. I must be far too old. Even their rules for playing handball, I'm totally convinced these kids don't know how to play handball properly.

They come home just being influenced by the kids around them. But friendship groups can also develop sinful and devastating habits. Some friendship groups find their identity in bullying others physically or with their words.

They develop a culture where it's okay to hurt others because that's what friends do. The desire to fit in with co-workers or colleagues or friends and families and teammates is alluring.

[16:19] Temptation to compromise living a life following Jesus is easy to fall to when there is a friendship group, when there is people that we are trying to fit in with. You see the impact of cancerous culture in many places.

In sport at the moment, we've seen the impact that a cancerous culture had on the Australian cricket team. They had a win-at-all-cost attitude, even if it meant they started cheating.

The AFL recently has been dealing with a number of sexual harassment issues. Organizations get accused of bullying, abusing people from the CEO down, sexual misconduct.

David cries for wisdom. God, close my mouth, change my heart, and give me wisdom for those people I spend time with because I don't want to keep being influenced by them and falling into the same temptation.

And it is so tempting. David cries, Do not let me eat their delicacies. Whether or not he's talking about food, there is something delicious about standing with others and pursuing evil.

[17 : 34] I used to play a card game called Cards Against Humanity. I don't know if you've heard of it. It's a very fun game because it's very rude, very offensive.

And the more offensive it is, the funnier it is. And that's the way this game is designed to be. And when I played it, it was almost like a secret sin. We would carefully pick people that we played with. Oh, you know, we'll play with him. We won't play with him. But when we started joking that you had to leave your Christianity at the door to play this offensive card game, I realized it was wrong. I was loving a delicacy that had me enjoying sin and depravity. The joy of delighting in sinful, degrading humor was drawing me to wickedness.

And it was really hard to stop because it was really fun. It was really fun to play this game with other people. But because of God's grace, he pointed out how unhelpful it was.

[18 : 42] I've stopped playing that card game, but I needed God's wisdom to see that I was justifying wickedness and sin just because it was delicious.

But it was becoming a cancer to my soul. This is true of any temptation. We can so easily justify why this particular sin is okay and not see that it's actually poisoning our hearts.

This is something that we need to be aware of when we are with our non-Christian friends, non-Christian family members. We don't necessarily just want to separate ourselves and go, I can't hang around with you anymore.

We're not called to go and hide in a cave and exclude ourselves, but to not give in to temptation and to be witnesses of God's goodness to us.

So David has cried out for help from God. He's called for wisdom, practical wisdom to close his mouth, wisdom for his heart and for who he spends time with.

[19 : 50] And now, instead of pursuing evil with friends, he calls for godly friends. Our third point today for needing good friends.

Have a look at verse 5. Let a righteous man strike me. That is a kindness. Let him rebuke me. That is oil on my head.

My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers. Now, you might be thinking, I'd prefer a wicked friend than a righteous friend if a righteous friend is going to come along and punch me in the face.

But David is seeking a friend who will love him enough to rebuke him, even when it hurts. And David says this is a kindness. The Hebrew word here for kindness is chesed, and it means loving kindness.

The love of a friend that says, James, what you are doing, don't do this. Don't chase that sin. Don't give in to this one. This is foolishness.

[20 : 55] It's one thing to have loving friends who will rebuke you, but another to actually hear that rebuke. David says, my head will not refuse it, but it will be like oil.

It will be a blessing on me. Pour out your rebukes on me. In our battle against sin, the world, and the devil, we have God in our corner who does come and help us.

And he does. And he also provides a community of believers for friends to rebuke and to point out our sin. Do you have a friend like this?

Do you have a person that you can speak truthfully, that can speak into you, into your life truthfully, with words of loving kindness, even when it hurts?

I have a couple of friends like this. I have a mentor like this. Alyssa, my wife, is one of these people as well. She knows me best. She sees through me, and I know that she's on my side.

[22 : 02] She knows all of my faults. Don't worry. You can ask her later. She can tell you all of them. But I also try and give her space to speak, to strike me with hard words of loving kindness.

But the reality is, it doesn't need to be a spouse. It can be a friend, someone you can trust, a Christian brother or sister, that you can ask to point out your sin, to speak up when you see me being tempted.

When you see me being tempted to chase evil brother, and you're speaking to my life, don't let me go that way. You wouldn't let me walk in front of a bus. Don't let me chase this sin. Steve is also

someone who knows me really well, and he sees really clearly, painfully, like that striking in the face sometimes.

A couple of weeks ago, he said to me, you know, James, when you get stubborn, you get this particular look on your face, and I can tell what it is when you're being stubborn. And words of loving kindness are never fun.

They can hurt, but they also help to keep us following God. We need them because Satan wants to tempt us, just like with Adam and Eve, to trick us into being satisfied with sin, and not the full goodness of what God has intended for us in Jesus.

[23 : 27] And so do you have a friend that you are giving space to, to speak into your life? And who is the person that you're speaking into, that you are knowing well enough to love them with difficult words?

David cries for help, for wisdom, and he asks God for friends, for a righteous person to keep him accountable following God.

And the last two points, much quicker, but the second last point is that God will see him be vindicated. And I don't think this is something we pray for often.

It's not often something in our context. But David, it appears, has been sinned against. And he wants to strike out at those who have sinned against him.

But he asks for God's help to close his mouth, and he is instead going to wait for God to judge them. He's waiting for God's vindication. Have a look with me at verse 6.

[24 : 28] Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. I don't think we speak like this very often, you know, if we're feeling aggrieved by the way a co-worker has treated us.

I don't think we would pray like David, that they would be thrown down from the cliffs. This is a different context, but we can learn from it. David is speaking for those who are David's enemies, and God's enemies trying to kill him.

And so David is asking that God would see him vindicated. That David is going to wait for God to work. He is not going to rush out.

He's going to wait for God to be about his business of justice. He doesn't need to defend himself. God will do that. And so we can learn that there is a value to patience, and that we don't need to strike back at other people because God is a good judge, and we are secure.

We don't need to defend ourselves like we can be tempted to. And finally, in verse 8, David asks for protection. Even when faced with temptation, David still keeps his eyes focused on God.

[25 : 50] God is the refuge, the safe place, not himself. It's easy when tempted to sin to fixate on that sin, weigh up the cost. Should I give in to this sin?

If I don't, do I want to? Instead of thinking about the sin, David is thinking about God. He's totally dependent to be kept safe from himself and from his enemies because he's depending upon God. When we cry out to God for help, when we ask for wisdom, to get righteous friends, to keep vindication in God's hands and depend on him from protection, it helps us to go a long way when we are faced with temptation because temptation does come for all of us.

John Ortberg, another Christian pastor from the US, wrote this book. It's called *The Me I Want to Be* and he talks about temptation like fishing. Not that fishing is terribly tempting for me.

It might be tempting for you. Maybe you were tempted this morning to go fishing instead of coming to church or being at church over the live stream. But Ortberg is talking about how dumb fish are.

[27 : 02] You throw a lure, a fake bait into the water saying, hey fish, come and swallow this. This is not the real thing. You think it will feed you.

It won't. It's just going to trap you. It's just a matter of time before your enemy reels you in. And you'd think that the fish would see the lure, the fake bait, and think it's not even real food.

Why eat it? You think they would see their other friends go flying out of the water, never to be seen again. But they don't. You think it's a little bit, I think it's a little bit ironic because, you know, fish live in schools and yet they're pretty dumb.

Anyway, I got one laugh from my wife. I'm pretty happy about that. Pray for her. But are we much smarter than fish? Sin and temptation are dangled in front of us.

And we can't help but bite. Even though it's not the real deal, it won't satisfy, but just enslave us like a hook through the cheek.

[28 : 07] Temptation promises freedom. Take this. Do this. Look at this. This will bring joy. And it might, but it's very short-term fake.

And inevitably, it makes us slaves because there is always a hook. Real freedom, the way God made us to be, is not the ability to have everything we desire, but to not be enslaved.

Real freedom is to not be enslaved to our temptations. We are more than our desires, more than our stomach, more than lustful eyes, more than angry hands, more than hurtful words.

We are so much more than that. Ortberg said that the battle against temptation is a noble fight. But if we simply try to repress a desire, it will wear us out.

We need to have a very clear picture of what kind of person we want to be. We need to have a clear picture of the person that we want to be. Let me read from Ortberg.

[29 : 12] Job put it this way. He's talking about his own issues with sexual temptation. Let me read a little bit earlier.

One day, I wrote down all the reasons why I would like to handle sexuality in an honorable way.

What might it do to my wife if I didn't? How my children would be affected?

What would happen to my work and ministry? How it would feel to be haunted by guilt and failure and the inability of sexual gratification to last? Job put it this way.

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. I deliberately seek to not look at a woman who is not my wife for the purpose of deriving sexual gratification.

Suppose I'm at a health club and out of the corner of my eye, I see a woman and think that if I look over at her, maybe I'll be able to experience a little sexual pleasure.

[30 : 13] The next thought that comes because of what Job said is, I don't have to look. I can not look. The thought that follows is, instead of missing out on a little thrill by not looking, I will have a power I didn't have, a power I didn't know I had, I can be free.

And that freedom produced by the Spirit feels good. David has a clear picture of who he wants to be. A man that honors God with his words, that he's influenced by the right people.

He has a clear picture of the man he wants to be. And he, just like Ortberg said, can choose to not sin. All because we have freedom because of Jesus Christ.

What steps do we need to take to win the battle against sin, the world, and the devil? To be able to be people who say, I cannot do that sin because God has set me free.

I have six short steps to help us in this battle. First of all, just like Ortberg and David has done, to have a picture of who we want to be in our mind.

[31 : 36] And to use descriptive words. I'm going to give you a moment in a second to do this. Imagine a picture of who you want to be. It could be somebody who is a faithful husband.

That's one for me. It could be somebody who honors God with their words. Who is the picture of a person that you want to be? What is the version of yourself that honors God?

Secondly, pray for God's help as you journey to be that person. Pray for God's help. Third, what is the first step in that direction?

What is the very first step? Fourth, as you journey, what are the temptations that you are going to battle? Be aware of the temptations you will face in the future.

Fifth, find a friend to help you keep, to keep you accountable. And lastly, as we journey, always remember the God who loves you, who has forgiven you in Jesus, and that we can have assurance because of his love.

[32 : 42] To imagine a picture of who God is making you to be, pray for God's help on that journey. What is the first step? What is the first step? What is the next step that you are taking to grow as a Christian?

What are the temptations? What are the battles that you are going to face? Get a friend to keep you accountable for those battles, and remember that God loves you. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you that you are good and loving, and that you are faithful to us. even when we are faced with sin and temptation to run away from you, to hurt ourselves and other people.

Lord, thank you for this reminder from David to call out to you from help. God, please make us people who willingly run to you for help.

Lord, help us today and tomorrow as we, as fallen people who are being made more like your son, face temptations. Help us to honor you in those situations, Lord.

[33 : 49] Help us to see that we can choose not to sin. We ask this in your son's name and for your glory. Amen.