

## The Great Escape

### Sermon Series: Otherworldly

1 Corinthians 10:12-13; James 1:13; Proverbs 22:3

**Introduction:** In case you haven't realized it yet, it's no longer normal to be a Christian in our culture. Welcome to your new place in a worldview minority.

According to data from 2019, 65% of Americans identify as Christians. I can hear you thinking, pastor, 65% sounds like a majority to me. Let me qualify this statistic by saying that the results of this type of research are based upon how a person self-identifies. So, among let's say five people who identify as a "Christian," you could have:

1. Someone who says they're a Christian simply because they were raised in a Christian home.
2. Someone who generally agrees with Christian values but rejects core tenets of the faith like the resurrection.
3. Someone who rejects the authority of the Bible but considers themselves a "Jesus follower."
4. Someone who considers themselves a Christian but also holds various beliefs that are in conflict with a biblical worldview (reincarnation)
5. Someone who holds to the tenets of the Christian faith and is an active follower of Jesus.

**This is important because our beliefs inform our thinking, and our thinking informs how we live. Do your beliefs, your thoughts, and actions line up with what it means to be a Christ- follower?**

There are two sides to everyone's life. There is the visible side and the invisible side. There is the side that everybody sees and the side that nobody sees.

The invisible side of life deals with a problem that we all face every single day. It doesn't matter whether you are young or old, rich, or poor, intelligent, or illiterate, a believer or an unbeliever. The failure to wisely handle this problem has broken up more marriages, destroyed more families, derailed more ministries, and cost more pain than anything else. I am talking about temptation.

We are in a sermon series called "Otherworldly." As a Christian we must face

the reality that we are in this world, but not of it.

Our life is a series of decisions we make. Every decision winds up being either a wise decision or a foolish decision. You can make your decisions in one of two ways: based on what you think is best or based on what God knows is best.

God has given us His Word and His Spirit to help us to navigate through all the decisions and difficulties of this life, so that we can live like we are from another world, a heavenly kingdom.

We began this series talking about **DECISIONS**. **Key Take Away was, the wisest decision you can make is to seek God's wisdom for every decision.**

Two weeks, we talked about **TIME**. **Key Take Away Today: The most valuable use of your time is spending most of your time on what is most valuable.**

Last week, we talked about **MONEY**. **Key Take Away: You must master your money before you can manage your money.**

Today, we are going to deal with that third area that can determine whether you spend your life on a joyride or a guilt-trip. It comes down to how you handle temptation.

**STORY:** I heard about a lady, and she was in a diet club with some other ladies and trying to lose weight. And she came to the meeting one day and she was upset. She said, "I just had a terrible weekend." And they said, "Well, tell us what happened." She said, "Well, I made a cake for my family over the weekend, and it was their favorite cake.

I didn't eat any, but they ate half of it. And then, on Monday," she said, "all I could think about was the cake. And I kept staring at the cake. And I thought, well, surely, I can just have one little piece. And she said, "So I cut a little piece and I ate that. And it was so good that I had another piece, and I ate that. And soon I ate the whole half of the cake."

And she said, "I just feel so bad that I gave in to that temptation." And she said, "I

just felt so horrible. I knew my husband was going to be so disappointed in me." And then, one lady said, "Well, what happened when your husband found out?" She said, "Well, that's the beauty of it. He never did find out. I made another cake and ate half of that, so he still came home to half a cake!" Tempted and failed!

Someone once said, "I can resist anything except temptation." How do you do when you're tempted to lust to satisfy the desires of your flesh? How do you do when you're tempted to lie to save face? How do you do when you're tempted to cheat to get some money, or to get ahead in school. Tempted to gossip to build yourself up and put somebody else down?

**Let me define what I mean by temptation. "Temptation is the opportunity to fulfill a natural God-given desire in an unnatural or ungodly way."** Another way of putting it is, **"Temptation is the opportunity to fulfill a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way".**

Thankfully there was a man in the Bible that understood, as well as anybody, the unbelievable power of temptation, who faced it and fought it, and overcame it to the point that God used him in an incredible way. He shared his secret with the church 2000 years ago that I want to share with you.

**Read I Corinthians 10:12-13: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (ESV) PRAY**

**The title of today's message is, "The Great Escape."**

In this passage, Paul was writing to believers in the ancient City of Corinth. When you think Corinth, think Las Vegas. It was a city known for two things: idolatry and immorality. Every time you walked out the door temptation was ready to take you by the hand and lead you where you didn't want to go. The Apostle Paul had one simple message for that church and for our church.

**Key Take Away: When you experience temptation, you eliminate temptation by escaping temptation.**

I. You will be Tempted.

Paul begins with a warning in verse 12. ***"Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."***(I Corinthians 10:12, ESV)

There is a principle right here in this statement. If you think you are too big for a certain temptation you are already too small to handle it.

Before these Corinthians had come to faith in Christ, many of them had worshiped idols. Many of them had gone to the Temple of Aphrodite and indulged in sexual immorality. Many of them went to the feasts and festivals and drank excessively. They had this idea that now that they had surrendered their lives to Christ that now they could handle these temptations.

How many times have we all done the very thing that we never dreamed we would ever do? How many times have we ever said, "I never thought I would be in this position? I never thought I would allow myself to get into this situation." Let me give you an Otherworldly principle. The areas of life where you think you are the strongest may be the places temptation attacks first.

A study by Temple University revealed that a burglar's likely entry point into a home is the front door. They will only use a back door or a window if it is necessary, but the easiest point of entrance is the front door. It is the place where you think you stand the strongest that you might fall the quickest.

What we all need to understand is every day when we walk out the door we are going to be tempted. It would be good if we prayed a prayer something like I read one time.

**Dear Lord, so far today I am doing great. I haven't gossiped, lost my temper, lusted, been grumpy, nasty, selfish, or greedy. I haven't whined, complained, cursed, or eaten any chocolate. I haven't charged anything on my credit card. But in a minute, I will be getting out of bed and then I really need your help. Temptation is a fact of life.**

1. Temptation does not come from God.

Temptation **does not** come from God. The Bible makes that very clear in James chapter 1 and verse 13. The Scripture says, ***"Let no one say when he is tempted,***

***"I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." (ESV)***

God is not the author of temptation. God is over everything. And although God doesn't cause temptation, God uses temptation. He uses it to help us grow, but He's not the cause of it. The Bible calls the devil "the tempter." He is the one who tempts with evil. Trials come from God.

A simple way to remember the difference is trials are to test us while temptations are to trap us. Trials are meant to **strengthen** our faith while temptations are meant to **weaken** our faith.

## 2. Temptation is not a sin.

There are people that get the idea that once you surrender your life to Christ temptation becomes a thing of the past. The truth of the matter is that when you truly decide you are going to get serious about Jesus, you will probably face more temptation than you ever did before you become a follower of Christ. The moment you become a follower of Jesus you are put on Satan's most wanted list as the newest public enemy #1.

It's not a sin to be tempted. People struggle with the fact that some thoughts that go through their head are evil and horrible, and they wonder, "where did that come from." It's very important to understand that when you're tempted to do something that is not a sin.

The difference between temptation and sin is found in Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 3. Scripture says this: ***"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."*** (NIV)

## 3. **Temptation is common to all of us.**

That's why the Scripture says, ***"Therefore, if anyone thinks he stands."*** If you think, Well, I'm okay. I can stand. I'm immune to this, ***"take heed lest you fall. No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man."***

Temptation comes to the strongest Christians. Don't ever get the idea that you are alone in your struggle with a particular sin.

The wording "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man" is not just saying that the temptation we face is common among us but common in us. The three words, "common to man," are actually one word in the Greek, which means that these temptations are human-like.

You could interpret the passage as, **"There's no temptation taken that's not simply part of the fabric of being human."** That's not to rescue us from despair but to rescue us from pride.

You can't look at anybody else and say, "I'm so glad I don't wrestle with that sin." You don't wrestle with it only by the grace of God.

We need something beyond ourselves that can tame the "evil desires" of the human heart and give us new affections. That, in essence, is what we are praying for when we pray, ***"Lead us not into temptation."***

Paul is saying that temptation is the oldest trick in the book. It comes with the territory. It is a part of every person's life. Temptation generally is common to everybody, and specific temptations are common to each of us. In fact, the Bible is full of every conceivable temptation that you can imagine and practically everybody struggled with it including some of the greatest people of the Bible: Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, AND even Jesus were all tempted.

Everyone who has ever lived has been tempted, but not everyone is tempted in the same way. Temptation affects different people in different ways for different reasons. What tempts you may not tempt me.

STORY: A woman had just started a diet and was having a difficult time staying away from tempting treats. She had to go into town and remembered that her route would take her past the bakery. And so, she prayed, "Lord, if you want me to stop for a doughnut, let there be a parking spot in front of the place." Sure enough, she found a place to park right out front...on her *seventh* time around the block!

Paul's point is there is nothing wrong with you if you are tempted because everybody is tempted. No matter how well you know Christ or how much you grow in Christ, you will face temptation.

You will be tempted, temptation does not come from God, temptation is not a sin, temptation is common to man...

#### 4. God Can Be Trusted

Listen to the next three words. **"God is faithful."** God is faithful to what? He is faithful to His word. God is faithful to who? To those who are His children. What is His promise to His children? **"God is faithful. and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability."** (I Corinthians 10:13, ESV)

You can't blame sin on God. You can't blame sin on the devil. You can't say, "The devil made me do it." The devil can't make you do anything. We all need to take responsibility for our own lives.

**Illustration:** A man was applying for a particular job and was being interviewed by the Director of Human Resources. The Director said, "This is a big job and we are looking for a responsible person to fill it." The man said, "Then I know I am the right person for the job." He said, "How do you know that?" He said, "Because of all the jobs I've ever had if something went wrong, they said I was responsible."

People do not sin because they are tempted to sin. They sin because they want to. You don't give into temptation, because you can't resist it, but because you won't resist it. And we don't resist it because as James says, **"but each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lusts."**

At this point, I know two things about temptation. On the one hand, I am going to be tempted. On the other hand, God can be trusted to make sure that I will never face a temptation that is greater than my ability to handle it.

I know this is true, because God has already said, **"You will never be tempted beyond your ability to handle it."** How does God enable us to handle it? **"But with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."** (I Corinthians 10:13, ESV)

When you experience temptation, you eliminate temptation by escaping temptation. Remember again, the prayer of Jesus? **"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?"** God's plan is never to lead you into doing wrong, but to lead you out of it. The way He does that is by providing a

way of escape.

Every time temptation knocks on the front door of your life, God provides a back door of escape. Here is what we don't realize. God does not give us the *strength to fight* temptation; He gives us the *spiritual sense to flee* temptation.

We are never told to fight temptation. We are told to flee temptation.

***"So flee youthful passions."*** (I Timothy 2:22, ESV)

***"Flee from sexual immorality."*** (I Corinthians 6:18, ESV)

Fleeing temptation may mean you have to do different things in different situations. As the old song says, "You may have to get off the bus Gus. Make a new plan Stan. Drop off the key Lee and get yourself free."

5. How do you escape temptation?"

a. **The first way of escape is in your HEAD.**

Sin starts in the mind. The devil works on your mind to get you to sin. You think of the first sin that was ever committed by Adam and Eve. The devil tempted Eve. He came to her, and he said, "Has God said that you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" And she said, "from any tree of the garden we may freely eat, but from the tree in the midst of the garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we shall not eat from it nor touch it lest we die."

And he said, "You shall surely not die. For God knows in the day you eat from it your eyes will be open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

At that moment, ***Eve began to fixate on the forbidden.*** And the Scripture said, ***"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, that it was desirable to make one wise, she took of the fruit, she ate it, and she gave it to her husband with her, and he ate."***

The devil worked on her mind, and he got her to fixate on the forbidden. Sin begins in your mind. And you start to entertain things and indulge things and consider things that you shouldn't do. As you begin to consider that, you begin to let sin germinate in your mind, that can turn into sinful actions. ***"When lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin. And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth***



**death."**

There's an old adage that says this: "Sow a thought, reap a deed. Sow a deed, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny."

It all starts with the thought. So, the way of escape is in your head. You don't let those thoughts germinate in your mind. The Bible says in 2nd Corinthians chapter 10:5, ***"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*** (NIV)

Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ tends to be a little defensive. So, you go on the offensive by renewing your mind with God's word. Prepare yourself in advance, know what the word says, so like Jesus you can defeat temptations.

**b. The second way of escape is in your HEART.**

Scripture says, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." Set Him apart as Lord in your hearts. The Bible says, ***"But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh; for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."***

Who's going to be in control, YOUR FLESH, or the HOLY SPIRIT? What you feed grows and what you starve dies.

If we are going to make wise decisions during temptations, we must choose to be godly. The tilt of my heart must be towards God, even if I stumble and fumble and fall. There is no other option, I'm walking the narrow way.

Once you choose to be godly, there are promises that will apply to you that won't apply to anybody else. ***"...the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation..."*** (2 Pet 2:9 NASB).

**If you don't want to be godly then there is no search and rescue, no way of escape possible for you.**

You will be surprised how the pull of that temptation just dwindles and dies when you let the enemy know ... I will serve the Lord. That is called a single-minded person. That is why James says, ***“Let not man expect that he will receive anything from God if he is a double-minded person. He will be unstable in all of your ways.”***

Let me say this, when we sin, the devil’s most strategic weapon is to withhold consequences. When we do something that violates our conscience and nothing happens, our tendency is not to stop, but to keep going.

The devil is setting us up. He withholds consequences the second and the third time and fourth time. Then suddenly ... bang! Our life goes up in smoke. Our reputation is destroyed. Our witness for Christ is ruined. Whatever we did may ruin our family, damage our health, end our ministry.

When we are traveling down a freeway there may be guardrails on the side of the road. And a few feet before the guardrails they have some indentations in the asphalt called rumble strips. I wandered into some the other day coming home from Raleigh and woke my sister Nancy right up.

Our conscience is like the rumble strip. We can pave over it so that when we start veering off through temptation; we go where the rumble strips should have woken us up, but we do not feel a thing.

There are some people who say, “Let’s just pave over our rumble strips. Let’s remove the guardrails so we have a sense of freedom.”

God is saying that He put a conscience in us to tell us when we are doing wrong, but also to tell us when we are doing right.

Samson was one that paved over the rumble strips. Look at his life. He compromised again and again until he compromised right into the arms of Delilah. He was head-over-heels for this woman. The only problem was she was in cahoots with the Philistines who wanted to kill Samson.

That is why it is so critical that if we are going to make wise decisions in the midst of temptation, we have to prepare in advance, beforehand.

A lot of people try and fight temptation with will power. That's not a good way to fight it. They try and fight it in the power of their flesh, in their own will. It won't work for the long haul. But, because the Lord's desire is to do the will of the Father and if He is set apart as Lord in you, those temptations begin to lose their appeal. The way of escape is in your head, is in your heart.

c. **And, thirdly, in your FEET.**

The Scripture says when we're faced with certain sins, we're to resist the devil when he comes at us. We're to fight the good fight of faith. And in the area of sexual immorality, the Bible never says fight it. It always says flee it. Flee youthful lusts. Flee immorality.

And we have a great example in Scripture where Joseph was the slave for Potiphar in EGYPT. And Potiphar's wife was very interested in Joseph because he was a very handsome guy. And God was with him. And God blessed him in everything that he did. And so, she was very attracted to him, and she wanted to have an adulterous affair with Joseph. He wouldn't do it. And one day, she grabbed him by his coat, and she said, "Come, sleep with me." And Joseph immediately wriggled out of his coat. And the Bible says he fled. He ran out of the house. He escaped. He got out of there. Left his coat behind, and she lied about him, saying "He tried to sleep with me."

That's how you deal with that temptation. You don't fight it; you flee it. The way of escape is sometimes in your feet. And there's one other way of escape.

- d. **Not only in your head, your heart, and your feet, but in your FRIENDS.** You need accountability, and I need accountability. You need to have someone that you can really talk to about your struggles and your trials and what you're tempted with and your problems. The Bible says, "***Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.***" Do you have a person like that in your life?

**CONCLUSION:** Hebrews 4:15 says, "***we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.***" (NIV)

Let's look at the temptation of Christ, but before we do, we need to talk about

an event that preceded his temptation in the wilderness.

In Matthew 3, Jesus was baptized by the John the Baptist. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove on him. And a voice from heaven said, ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”***

Notice God the father didn’t say, “Good! Now go and fulfill your destiny on Earth!” Or “This is my son, watch out Satan forces of darkness, He’s coming for you!”

He simply said, this is my Son. This is Christ’s identity. He is a beloved Son of God Most High.

And this is such a powerful reality that when Jesus is drawn into the wilderness this is the very first thing that Satan tries to call into question. He tries to tempt Jesus out of His identity and position. Look at what He says, “The tempter came and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God...’” Matthew 4:3

**When dealing with temptation, always remember who you are in Christ and whose you are.** You are a beloved child of God most high.

We can all agree that temptation is something everyone deals with. We also realize questioning our identity is a primary tactic of our enemy. And then we see that Jesus was tempted in three areas. **Provision, Protection, and Position.**

If you are tempted in the area PROVISION, of having your needs met remember these verses,

***“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 4:19

***“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”*** - Matthew 6:26

***“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*** - Psalm 23:1

A good Father supplies for the needs of his kids. The good shepherd will always supply the needs of His flock. We have a good, good Father, and Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and we can trust our needs will be met.

If you are tempted in the area **PROTECTION**, remember... ***“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*** - Psalm 46:1

The third and final temptation is for Jesus to worship Satan, and in doing so, He would receive dominion over all the kingdoms of the world. He would have a high **POSITION**. Jesus knew that He was already Lord of all, but for some people, the temptation for position and power is overwhelming.

We are often given a choice to worship something other than God to get ahead or receive worldly gain. When feeling tempted in this area, try to keep things in perspective; ***“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*** - Matthew 6:33