

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT TESTS, TEMPTATIONS, AND PROBLEMS?

Before you begin this lesson, ask for God's help in understanding His Word and for wisdom and strength to apply what you learn in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Begin memorizing *1 Peter 4:12* and prepare to recite this passage before the next lesson.

Jesus gave us His plan for reaching the world through being and making disciples. Read the "Great Commission" passage in *Matthew 28:19-20*. What two elements are included in making disciples?

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Jesus said that we are both to baptize (with evangelism implied) and to teach or train others. Telling others about the Gospel is the way believers reach the world, and is included as the first part of making disciples. The second part is to train believers to live victoriously, that is "teaching them to observe" *all* that He commanded.

To see some of what He commanded, scan through the topics Jesus dealt with in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew Chapters 5 - 7*). He talked about how to face and deal with anger, persecution, reconciliation, lustful temptations, relationship problems, retaliation, divorce, hatred, and worry, among others. He prepared His disciples to deal with and endure the problems of life, knowing that these problems could discourage them or sidetrack them from their mission.

These are examples of the "battles of life" that we still experience today. People sometimes start out the Christian life strong, with the best of intentions of living totally for the Lord. But then certain things happen that tempt them to stray from their commitment. Conflicts occur in the family, there may be clashes with the boss, illnesses may occur, finances may run short, the children may not behave as well as they should, other time pressures may crowd out devotions, and so on.

The wonderful thing about God's Word is that it goes directly to the heart of these issues. God designed us and provided the "user's manual," the Bible, for how we can live with the peace and joy He intended us to have, regardless of the circumstances. Do we still sin? Yes. We already know this by considering how many times we fail to love God's way. Is it always easy to live God's way in spite of our feelings? No. But the Bible and the Holy Spirit provide the resources we need to have hope and victory in these difficult situations. We need to recognize that tests and temptations are a regular part of life and then apply God's practical principles in the power of the Holy Spirit to have victory.

### A. The Christian's walk

1. Let's start by finding out what God says about our walk (some versions use "live" instead of "walk") as a Christian. There are many passages in the New Testament about the believer's walk in Christ. Read *Ephesians 2:1-10*. What do *verses 2* and *10* say about our walk?

2. *Verse 2:*

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3. *Verse 10:*

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Before we came to Christ, we walked according to the ways of this world. But God made us alive together with Christ (*verse 5*). He transformed us, enabling us to walk by faith (*Galatians 2:20*), and even prepared the good works for us to "walk in" (*Ephesians 2:10*).

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What does *Ephesians 2:4* say that our motivation for good works should be?

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Our motivation for good works is His great love and mercy toward us. Our works are in response to God's love, not an attempt to pay Him back. We can never pay God back for the priceless gift of salvation. We serve the Lord out of deep gratitude. Perhaps an illustration might be helpful.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A woman had a very unloving husband. Every day before he went to work, he would make a long list of tasks she was to complete before he returned home. No matter how hard she tried to complete the tasks, she never was successful. So, every night he would scold her for what he considered a very poor performance. Her life with this husband was very hard.

After a time, the husband died and a few years later she married another man who was kind and loving. They had a wonderful relationship and she was very happy.

One day as she was cleaning their home, she came across one of the lists of tasks that her former husband had written for her to do. As she looked at the list, she was amazed to discover that while she could not complete the list for the former husband no matter how hard she tried, she was now accomplishing *all* those things for her new husband.

The key application of this illustration is that before salvation, it was impossible to keep the Lord's commands consistently. When you are saved, you have a loving relationship espoused (engaged) to the Lord. Following Him is not a matter of merely following a set of rules. Following His commands is not an exercise in legalistic do's and don'ts. It is not a way to earn our salvation or to gain favor with God to balance out our sin. It is a loving response to what God has so amazingly and marvelously done for us. It is now a matter of loving obedience in the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

2. What does *Galatians 5:16* say about our walk?

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God says that we are to walk by the Spirit so that we will not carry out the desire of the flesh. But even though we have been crucified with Christ, and have a new power to resist sin that we did not have before, our fleshly desires are still with us. What does God say in *Galatians 5:17* about our daily struggle with sin?

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The Spirit and the flesh are set against one another, and it does not take very long for our flesh to show itself. We are tempted to respond to our own spouse with impatience, to be angry with our children, to argue with the boss, and to be fearful about financial matters or an illness. We can exhibit, even as believers, behavior that is very similar to the deeds of the flesh referred to in *Galatians 5:19-20*. There are many ways that our old manner

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of life comes out, even though we are new creations in Christ. We still sin. Our worldly inclinations are still there.

3. Thankfully, God also shows how different we can be as believers, by being filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*) and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. List the characteristics of the fruit here, from *Galatians 5:22-23*.

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The extent to which we exhibit the fruit of the Spirit is an indicator of our walk with Christ. It demonstrates our love and gratitude in response to what God has done for us. As we develop a regular pattern of walking in the Spirit, of exhibiting the Spirit's fruit, we grow in maturity and are better equipped to help others. God allows trials in our life as part of the maturing process, as we will see in the next section.

### B. The daily challenge of tests and temptations

Every believer will encounter trials in life. Satan seeks to defeat you by tempting you to trust your own wisdom, to live according to your self-centered feelings, and to gratify the desires of your flesh. In contrast, God's will is for you to be an overwhelming conqueror in all of these trials for His honor and glory.

Your daily walk with Christ is filled with opportunities either to walk by your fleshly desires or to walk by the Spirit. Just as Jesus prepared His disciples for this battle, God wants to prepare you (to equip you) to have victory. So let's see what God says about the nature of trials, tests, and temptations.

1. Read *1 Peter 1:6-7*. What is more precious than gold?

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- a. The word in this passage for "test" or "refine" means to be proved, such as metals are tried by fire and thus are purified. The word "prove" does not mean to show to be true or false as in "prove it to me," but it is used in the good sense and means to "show forth." The emphasis in this passage is to prove someone good and acceptable.

- b. Read *1 Peter 4:12-13*. What does God say about trials in this passage?

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- c. Can you think of any trials that you have been "surprised" by in your life?

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What does this passage tell you about that trial?

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You should not be surprised when trials come, even when they are intense and seem fiery. Consider the following illustration.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Years ago when Amy Carmichael was ministering in India as a missionary, she went to a goldsmith to find out how gold was purified so that she could understand how God “tests” or “proves” us. The goldsmith placed in the pot old jewelry, gold bars, and ore, which all seemed to have varying degrees of purity. She watched as the gold was being melted in a pot placed over an intense fire. As the material in the pot heated, smoke began to rise from the pot. The goldsmith explained that if she would look down into the pot, Amy would notice scum floating on the surface. The scum, he explained, is called “dross” and must be burned off. At one point, Amy asked the goldsmith how he would know that the gold was purified. He answered that the gold would be pure when he could look down into it and see a perfect reflection of his face.

In the same way, God tests or proves believers so that they may reflect the image of Christ in their lives.

Looking beyond the illustration of Amy Carmichael’s writings, remember that the goldsmith is not finished with the gold, even when it has been purified. He then molds, forms, pounds, and etches the gold to make it into something useful and beautiful. God does not necessarily remove us from a circumstance, but while we are being purified, He continues His work in our lives to make us useful vessels for His service.

We are going to study more about tests and temptations, but right now, you may want to pause and give Him thanks for the difficulty you are now facing and how He is using it in your life.

- 2. Read *James 1:13-14*. Who is *not* the source of temptation?

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In this passage, what *is* a source of temptation?

13. \_\_\_\_\_

A temptation, which does not originate from God, is an enticement for you to disobey God’s Word and to gratify your fleshly desires. When you yield to temptation, you inevitably experience consequences.

- a. It is important to note that temptations, in and of themselves, are not sins. We know this because we read in *Hebrews 4:15* that Jesus was tempted, but did not sin.
- b. Read *1 John 2:16*. What are the three areas of temptation listed here?

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- c. There are many types of temptations. Can you give an example in each of the above categories?

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Every difficult circumstance that comes into your life can be seen as a test from God or as a temptation to sin (either through your own flesh, the world, or through Satan). So in every difficulty, your choice is either to stand firm and grow in Christlikeness or to sin and suffer the consequences. To respond biblically to the circumstance, you do not need to focus on trying to determine if it is a test or a temptation. Rather, in every difficulty you have an opportunity to practice Christlikeness by obeying God's Word, thus giving honor to Jesus Christ.

- C. What was the most significant truth you learned in completing this lesson?

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- D. For the next lesson:

1. Before starting the next lesson, be sure to recite *1 Peter 4:12* to someone.
2. Study Lesson 3 and answer the questions. Do a little bit of the lesson each day.
3. Check your answers in the back of the booklet.

In Lesson 3, we will look at an example of a problem that develops in the life of a student and see that problem from a scriptural viewpoint. We'll also learn more in Lesson 4 about the hope we have in seeing and responding to tests and temptations God's way.