

### After the Dove, Beware of the Snake



By Ben Godwin

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon Him. Then, God the Father spoke in an audible voice, “This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” What a spectacular display of the power and presence of God! Notice what happened next—the snake showed up. Jesus was led into the wilderness to endure forty days of intense temptation by the devil.

When God moves, the devil moves too. He tries to undermine what God is doing and steal our spiritual momentum. Remember, it is not a sin to be tempted. It just means you’re human (welcome to the club). Shakespeare said, “Tis one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall.” Martin Luther observed, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”

We all have an Achilles heel, some area of weakness the enemy tries to exploit. A bumper sticker reads, “Lead me not into temptation, I can find it myself.” It is different strokes for different folks. Some people are tempted by alcohol, drugs, or gambling. Others are lured by lust, pride, or jealousy. Still others are prone to lying, stealing, or outbursts of their temper. Satan knows how, when, and where to push our buttons.

Notice the timing of temptation. Satan attacked Jesus after forty days of fasting when He was hungry, weak, and alone. The Tempter hits us the hardest when we are the most vulnerable:

**After a big victory:** It was after Elijah prayed fire down from heaven on Mt. Carmel and confronted the false prophets that he had his biggest battle with depression. When Jezebel put a bounty on his head, he hid in a cave and, thinking he was the only true prophet left, asked God to kill him. He didn’t really want to die, he was just discouraged. After a big victory we are vulnerable because we tend to let down our guard. We think we have it made in the shade and become overconfident and complacent.

**After a big defeat:** Don’t you imagine when Peter denied Jesus, the devil tried to drive him to the brink of suicide just like Judas? You see, he uses our mind as a punching

bag. When we fall, he wants to keep us down with dark thoughts of condemnation. He plays on our emotions and tries to convince us that we are worthless. He tells us we should quit serving God and that life is not worth living. Remember, he is a liar and you can “Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

**When we are idle:** There’s an old saying, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” When did David commit adultery? 2 Samuel 11:1 informs us that it was “At the time when kings go out to battle....” Instead, he stayed behind at the palace and relaxed. Then he saw Bathsheba bathing and his heart lured him into sin. We need to occupy our time with productive things. Amos 6:1 warns, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion....” Stay so busy for God that you don’t have time to backslide. Too much idle time opens the door to temptation. That’s why church, sports, music, art, and other wholesome activities are good for kids to keep them occupied, off the streets, and out of trouble.

**When authority is absent:** “When the cat’s away, the mice will play.” Notice the Israelites built and worshipped the golden calf when Moses was gone on Mt. Sinai. There is a principle at work here—behavior observed changes. Some people only do what is right when leaders are around. Employees tend to work harder when a boss is looking over their shoulder. Students study more when teachers are near. Children behave better when parents are present. Citizens obey the law more when police are in view. Why? It’s the accountability factor. Temptation beckons when authority is absent, but if we live knowing God always observes our behavior, it will profoundly affect our choices.

**When we are desperate:** Desperate people do desperate things. When Esau was desperate, he did something irrational—he sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. His brother Jacob was all too happy to swindle him out of it. When people go through difficult things like a divorce, the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or a financial setback, they are especially vulnerable. When we are hurting we just want to feel better fast. So the Tempter is there to offer us a quick escape. Sometimes hasty decisions only compound the problem. Let your desperation spur you toward God not away from Him.

**When we are alone:** Notice the serpent tempted Eve when Adam wasn’t around. Why? A predator knows how to isolate its prey from the herd for easy pickings. There is a reason Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. Solomon explained, “Two are better than one...for if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10) That’s why it’s vital to belong to a church family that loves and supports you. We are stronger together.

Someone said, “Opportunity may only knock once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.” Friend, you have a target on your back. Be alert. The enemy is lurking, setting traps to ambush you. Jesus reminded us to, “Watch and pray, lest [we] enter into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41) You may be enjoying smooth sailing for now, but rest assured the Tempter will be back. After the dove, beware of the snake.

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This article was recently featured in Ben’s column in the *Daily Mountain Eagle*, a newspaper based in Jasper, Alabama.