

L.I.F.T.2

Learning Intolerance For Temptations

Key Passages for this series:

Matthew 4:1-11, the temptation of Jesus

Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world"

1 Corinthians 10:13, "no temptation has seized you except what is common"

2 Corinthians 10: 3-5, "take captive every thought"

Hebrews 4:15, "one who has been tempted in every way, yet was without sin"

James 1:2-4, "consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds"

James 1:12, "blessed is the man who perseveres under trial...receive the crown"

James 1:13-15, "each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away"

1 John 2:15-17, "do not love the world or anything in the world"

Lesson 1: November 20, 2005: New Theme introduction: Learning intolerance for temptations.
Key verse was from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Lesson 2: December 4, 2005: "What are the different temptations to look out for?"
--Learning what the battles will be

AND "How do I know which ones will affect me the most?"
--Learning what your weaknesses are

Lesson 3: December 11, 2005: "Do I need intolerance for all temptations?"
--Learning not to take strength for granted

Lesson 4: December 18, 2005: "When will I know if I have intolerance for temptations?"
--Learning how to identify your spiritual awareness

Lesson 5: January 8, 2006: "Making New Year's Temptation Resolutions"
--Learning how to set goals for dealing with sin

Lesson 6: January 15, 2006: "What if I need help dealing with these temptations?"
--Learning how to find accountability

Lesson 7: January 22, 2006: "Why is it so hard to not give in to temptations?"
--Learning perseverance in trials

Lesson 8: February 12, 2006: "How did Jesus not sin if he was tempted in every way?"
--Learning how to stand up under trials

Lesson 9: February 26, 2006: "Why do I keep messing up if I am intolerant of this?"
--Learning that intolerance means run away

Lesson 10: February 26, 2006: "Have you learned intolerance for temptations?"
--Learning what will set you apart from the world

Lesson 1: November 20, 2005: New Theme introduction: Learning intolerance for temptations. Key verse was from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Introduction: As I was thinking about a new theme for LIFT, I came up with several different ideas of what we could study. Refer to the PPT (SunPM 11-20) for the detailed intro.

Lesson: What does it mean to learn intolerance for something?

It is important to recognize your need for preparation as you begin to realize the world that you live in is trying to get you to betray your religious beliefs for what feels good and is popular. Every message that surrounds you today is trying to get you to buy something or join something or be a member of something. It's your job to be able to recognize which things are harmful to you and which things are not. Some things will lead you into places of destruction and others will not. The difficult part is recognizing the difference.

Learning intolerance for temptation is an effort to get you to learn how to identify the areas of your life that are being bombarded by Satan's attacks and then fight them with the power of the cross of Christ. Temptations surround you as you live your life everyday. Many people don't even notice them because they are such a part of your society. Being unable to recognize when temptation is lurking around you is a dangerous position to be in. If you can't see it when it's close, how do expect to fight it when it attacks? Being intolerant of something, especially temptation, means that you not only recognize when it's around, you can't stand it. For example, I am intolerant of bad music. When I hear a song on the radio or a CD that has off-key singing or bad harmonies, I turn it off because my ears can't stand to listen to it. The same principle should be at work in our spiritual lives as we battle Satan's temptations.

When you walk through the halls at school or when you're watching television at home and you see or hear something that is inconsistent with the message of Christ—cussing, sex, nudity, horrible acts of violence—you shouldn't just be able to tune it out and not notice it. It should send off warning signs in your mind that you are being influenced by something that could lead you into sin, which is called temptation. The key passage for this series is from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, which ends with Paul urging the Corinthian church to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Your goal as a Christian is to take each and every thought that goes through your mind and submit it to Christ. As you do this, you should notice that the things of this world stand out more because they aren't a part of your thought process, only Christ is.

When your mind has conformed to the world's standards, the things of this world seem normal, including things that are sinful in God's eyes. As you begin to see with the eyes of Christ, the fun and excitement that seems to be going on all around you is seen for what it really is: discontentment, sinfulness, idolatry, greed, lust, and lacking fulfillment. Becoming intolerant of sin means you can recognize it, first, and then know how to avoid giving in to it. Without being able to do both of these things, you'll only win half the battle, which means you end up losing in the end. Knowing how to identify temptations without knowing how to escape them is just as meaningless and knowing how to escape them without knowing how to see them coming. These lessons are designed to help you learn and develop a complete intolerance for temptation.

Lesson 2: December 4, 2005: “What are the different temptations to look out for?”
--Learning what the battles will be
“How do I know which ones will affect me the most?”
--Learning what your weaknesses are

Lesson: You’ve got to know what you’re looking for...right?

When you get to the age of 15, you begin to enter the world of automobile training. The first step in the process is to get your learner’s permit. What this means is that you can drive as long as there is a licensed driver in the car with you. But before you can obtain this permit, you must complete a series of tests, mainly vision and knowledge. After completing these tests, you can begin operating a motor vehicle. Once you’ve turned 16 years old and graduated to a normal license, which requires a driving test in addition to another vision and knowledge test, you can begin to drive on your own. The process of teaching a person how to drive is extremely important not only for their own safety, but also for the safety of everyone on the roads. If a person were to get behind a two ton machine and attempt to drive it on the interstate without any prior training, guidance, or experience, a terrible accident could occur. By training people about the fundamentals of driving, lives are being spared and accidents avoided.

Everyday you enter a world full of potential accidents that we call sin. While not all sin is a result of an accident, we are mainly focusing on non-intentional sin. For those who are trying to live their lives for Christ, sin is a result of not being prepared or equipped to handle the temptations coming their way. It is a proven fact that older people have experienced more things and are more prepared to handle them than younger people. However, this does not mean that you must sit around and wait for every temptation to come your way in order to be prepared for it. That would be foolish. You must take the time to be prepared to handle the temptations you know are out there and then continue to learn new things as you grow older. Going off into the world with no training on how to battle temptations is certain spiritual death. So where should you begin if you want to be prepared for this battle?

It begins with knowledge. One of the first tests to get a learner’s permit is a knowledge test. It is an examination over the rules and laws of the road. If you are to survive in the spiritual world, you must know the dos and don’ts of spiritual warfare. Most importantly, you have to recognize the spiritual road signs that tell you which direction you’re heading in—towards temptation or away from it. Are you going the wrong way down a one-way road? You have to know where the enemy resides and go the opposite way. You’ve got to know how to recognize the signals that will let you know when danger is coming your way. How do you do this? We have to go back to the scriptures to let them identify what the stumbling blocks are. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:31 and 5:3, 5, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 are great places to go for lists of things referred to as “the sinful nature.” Galatians even says that the acts of the sinful nature are “obvious,” as if we could recognize them by their characteristics. James gives some of the most helpful advice possible in fighting the battle against temptations and Satan’s schemes: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:7-8) The greatest knowledge is the kind that can only come directly from God. If you are striving to be closer to him and come to a deeper understanding of what he wants for your life, God will come closer to you. If you resist the devil, he will flee from you. These words are eternal. They are very true. By coming closer to God, you become more like Christ, which means you become more aware of temptations around you.

There are Christians who try to fight the battle against temptation by themselves. They are the ones who will be fighting the battle against temptation for as long as they live. Others, however, have won the battle against certain temptations in their lives. These people have recognized that they cannot do enough or be strong enough to win the battle against temptation so they have given up. Not given up fighting, but have given it up to the Lord. He has begun to carry their burdens for them so that they can focus on what really matters, which is their relationship with Jesus. Does this mean that they no longer struggle with temptations? No. It means that they rely more on the power of Jesus to get them through it than on their own abilities. It does mean that certain things that were temptations to them at one point may not be an issue for them anymore. With God on your side, you can win the battle against some temptations. Others, however, will never go away. You can only find hope in the fact that Christ is helping you win the battle on a daily basis.

Once you have learned what the different temptations are, you must take it to another level by recognizing which ones are bigger battles for you personally. Everyone struggles with different things. Some guys struggle with drugs; some struggle with sex. The ones that struggle with drugs may not struggle with sex and vice versa. You must come to an understanding of what your personal weaknesses are in order to build up extra awareness and safe guards. If you know that you cannot get on the internet without accessing adult content, you need to recognize your weakness and either get rid of the internet or install content filters. Knowing your weaknesses will help you become more aware of where you need the most help. Accountability is a great tool that can help you overcome some of your weaknesses. We'll discuss that in more detail later.

The next step is taking the vision test, which is the second requirement of getting your learner's permit. You have got to be able to see the temptations coming. This begins with having the eyes of Christ. Not being able to see when temptations are coming your way is like driving at night without your lights on. It's stupid and dangerous. However, so many Christians drive without their spiritual lights on. They go through life not being able to see more than a few feet ahead. Then when some temptation comes at them quickly, they are unable to adjust and fall into sin. So many people who appear to be strong Christians are spiritually unaware of what is going on around them. Yes, they know all the right things and can quote all of the commandments and John 3:16, but they can't see temptation when it is standing right in front of them. This is one of the primary differences between someone who is becoming a mature Christian and someone who is still a baby. The mature Christian not only knows what the temptations are, they can see them coming and avoid them. The infant Christian knows the temptations that come their way and thinks they can handle them all or that they don't struggle with them, which is foolishness and certain spiritual death. Vision is not only necessary, it is vital.

You must make the effort to not only have the knowledge of what temptations surround you and what your personal weaknesses are, but also to develop a vision that can see them coming. Without being able to do both of these things, you are still going to fail. Don't forget the words of James, "Come near to God and he will come near to you." It is important to recognize your own insufficiency in the battle against temptations. Only with Christ's power can you make any advancement against the powers of Satan and learn intolerance for temptations.

Lesson 3: December 11, 2005: “Do I need intolerance for all temptations?”

--Learning not to take strength for granted

Is it necessary for you to arrive at a point spiritually where you are intolerant of every temptation? Why would you need intolerance for something you don't even struggle with? For example, if you have never had a problem with smoking, would it be necessary for you to develop intolerance for smoking? These are difficult questions to which many Christians need answers. It is a rising problem in the culture in which you live to take your strengths for granted. Even spiritually mature people have problems with this, which leads them into sins they have never even thought about. The most common problem that attacks people unsuspectingly, which will illustrate the point I am trying to make, is premarital sex. You might disagree with me on this, but many people take this strength for granted. When you've never been in a dating relationship and, therefore, never had the opportunity to be challenged physically, it is difficult for you to know that you struggle with sexual temptations. You might even think you don't struggle with it at all. However, it is something that will test you at one point in your life. If you realize that you need intolerance for temptations you may have never experienced, you will be at an advantage when it comes to fighting these battles. But those who take their “strength,” which is really ignorance, for granted, will end up finding themselves in a tempting situation without any knowledge of what to do and might not be able to find their way out.

So the answer to the question is “Yes.” You definitely need intolerance for every form of temptation whether you think you struggle with it or not. Proverbs 16:18 tells us that “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” It is not hard to see why, either. When you think that you are above a certain temptation or that you don't need to worry about it, you have a prideful attitude. Some people might even think that God has blessed them with the ability to not struggle with certain temptations. This is a complete lie. It doesn't matter how spiritual you are or what church you go to, you are still susceptible to every form of temptation that is out there. If Jesus himself was “tempted in every way” (Hebrews 4:15), you should expect nothing less. The author of Hebrews explains this to us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, **just as we are**—yet was without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Since you are obviously going to be tempted in every way, it is necessary that you prepare as if you are going to be tempted in every way. No one goes into a battle assuming that his enemy isn't going to try everything he possibly can to win. Soldiers go into battle expecting everything possible, even trickery and cheating. Your battle with Satan has to be with the same level of intensity. Remembering what has been discussed already (not trying to battle the temptations yourself, but instead striving to become like Christ) will help you prepare for this battle. Satan wants nothing more than to catch you off guard. Scripture even says, “Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) What better way to catch an unsuspecting Christian off guard than to throw something at them they aren't expecting. That's why Peter says, “Be alert!” Those who think they don't struggle with premarital sex and have never been in a dating relationship all of the sudden find themselves dating someone who is pressuring them for sex. “What should I do?” “I didn't think I struggled with this. Now look what I've done.” It happens all the time. You must be prepared for everything. Never take your strength for granted. All it will do is let Satan know where your weak points are. If you stay alert, prepare for every form of temptation, become more like Christ, and eliminate pride, Satan will have a difficult time bringing you down.

Lesson 4: December 18, 2005: “When will I know if I have intolerance for temptations?”
--Learning how to identify your spiritual awareness

Whenever you're trying to accomplish a new task or learn a new skill, it's important to know when you have achieved your final goal. Without knowing whether or not you have achieved your goal, it is impossible to know when to move on to other things. It's also important to recognize when you need additional help in certain areas. When it comes to learning intolerance for temptations, the same concept applies. Knowing where you are in your spiritual battles can help keep you from spending time on things that aren't as much of a struggle as other things. Also, when you learn how to identify your spiritual awareness, you can discover which temptations are the most difficult for you and focus more prayer towards those.

So, how is it that a person knows when he or she has become intolerant of a particular temptation? Is it possible for a person to be taught intolerance of a particular sin? Can a person convince themselves that they are intolerant of a type of temptation? When will you know that you have developed intolerance for temptation? The passage that we'll look at comes shortly after the one in Hebrews that we used in our last lesson. Hebrews 5:14 tells us, “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Becoming intolerant of temptations is something that happens over a period of time. It is not something that is taught; however you can be taught what temptation is and how to avoid it. You must understand that knowledge doesn't prove anything unless acted upon. This is the key to understanding where you are spiritually. It is the action of avoiding the temptation altogether that reveals whether a person is intolerant of it.

There are different ways to go about handling temptation. First, you can obviously give in to it by jumping right in without a second thought. Secondly, you can flirt with it for awhile convincing yourself that it is not going to hurt you and then give in. Thirdly, you can do the same as before except come to your senses and not give in to it in the end. Fourthly, you can recognize the path that took you down the road to temptation and avoid it altogether. Coming to the door of temptation and knocking to see if it will answer and then running away is not intolerance of temptation. That is called a last second bail out. The writer of Hebrews attributes the skill of distinguishing good from evil to those who are mature Christians. Maturity is the process that allows a person to grow, experience, and learn things that set them apart from the less experienced. When it comes to temptation, a mature Christian has been down those roads before and has probably failed many times. However, with the help of God and their desire to become more like Christ guiding them every step of the way, they have learned to identify the traps and snares of Satan, which then enabled them to avoid the destructive paths of temptation.

Being aware of your spiritual development is a vital tool in developing maturity in Christ. You must always be pushing yourself toward more deeper and more challenging truths. Without knowing what your spiritual strengths and weaknesses are, it is increasingly more difficult for you to make any progress towards becoming a mature Christian. The process itself is difficult; however, the results are infinitely worth it. While you never achieve complete maturity in Christ because there is always room for improvement, you can become a mature Christian. When you reach maturity, you will recognize things about your spiritual life that you've never noticed before and realize that there is so much more growth ahead. Learning intolerance for temptations occurs all along the path of maturity, but it is not the path itself.

Lesson 5: January 8, 2006: “Making New Year’s Temptation Resolutions”
--Learning how to set goals for dealing with sin

What is the point of making resolutions if they’re just going to be broken anyway? I mean who really keeps their New Year’s resolutions? Have you ever known anyone who has gone a whole year actually doing what they said they would do back in January? These are all criticisms that people make about the whole resolving issue that happens each and every New Year. People decide that something is going to be different and they pledge, usually to themselves, to make some changes in their lifestyle. Personally, I don’t think I can remember one resolution that I actually succeeded at in my entire life. Much less, I don’t think I can remember a resolution that I have made, besides the ones I made for this year. This doesn’t present a very good case for anyone to want to make a New Year’s resolution. I have to admit that it is a difficult thing to do. What makes it so hard to keep, much less to remember to keep, our New Year’s resolutions?

One of the primary problems people have with New Year’s resolutions is that they don’t officially write them down and commit them to memory. But this is not the only thing that gets in the way. The bigger problem occurs when a person chooses what their New Year’s resolution will be. If you’re like the average person when it gets to be the Christmas season, you increase your eating habits significantly. This will then bring along the guilt and frustration of a few extra pounds. After this comes the resolution. You want to lose some weight, and since you didn’t finish losing that weight from last year, you want to lose extra this year. So instead of deciding on a reasonable 5 to 10 pounds, you go all out and resolve to lose 30 to 100 pounds. Well, as soon as the food binge subsides and you return to your normal lifestyle, you realize that your weight isn’t as out of control as you thought and your body begins to look like you remember. Now you’ve already forgotten your resolution and will not revisit it again until the next year approaches.

The problem isn’t with losing weight. The problem is with the level of commitment to the goal at hand. When people do what is described above, it is a testimony to their lack of dedication to their desired goal. Whenever anyone resolves to do something they aren’t fully committed to, failure is a sure ending to it. People so often fail at their New Year’s resolutions because they typically make them at a time and place in their life when they are not seriously looking forward into the next year. They’re not thinking about the early mornings or late nights and all the hours of sleep they’ll lose if they read their Bible that much. And is it really worth it?

As you’re considering the resolutions you’ve made for 2006, think about where you are in your spiritual life. Specifically, look at the areas of your spiritual life where you’ve experienced failure over the last year. It is important to resolve to do things that you are actually convinced will make you a better person. Things like wanting to lose weight or being able to bench press more won’t do anything for the quality of person you are, but committing to improve an area of your spiritual life can truly make a difference in the type of person you are. “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things...” 1 Timothy 4:8. Take some time to sit down and seriously evaluate your spirituality over the last year. Now take out a piece of paper and write down a few things you can sacrifice to improve those areas. It takes between 12-14 daily repetitions before something becomes a habit and only takes forgetting 2-3 times to break a habit. Will you be committed to something more meaningful than just physical goals this year? Will you resolve to grow in godliness? You’ll find that by doing so you’ll become more capable of dealing with and overcoming the daily temptations that attack you.

Lesson 6: January 15, 2006: “What if I need help dealing with these temptations?”
--Learning how to find accountability

How many things can you do by yourself? What can you do literally 100% without the help of anyone else? (Besides normal bodily functions, i.e. breathing and thinking) Let's say you think you can take a shower without the help of anyone else. Well, my first question is what do you wash yourself with? Did you make the soap? No. So you actually need other people's help to take a shower. If you've figured out where this is going, then hold on while I finish my point. Is there anything you can do without the help of someone else besides the things your body does naturally? Our society has created an environment where we are completely dependent on the services and amenities that are provided by other people. My job as a youth minister could not be done without youth. I can't do my job by myself. Computer technicians would not have a job if there wasn't someone on the other end of their computer.

You are probably thinking that your spiritual life is lived in a similar way to your physical life, right? No, probably not. The direction people end up taking with their spiritual lives, which might describe what you have done, which I know I have done at many different times in my life, is they decide that their spirituality is a personal thing that doesn't require the help or assistance of anyone else. Contrary to our consumer society which is completely dependent on the work of others to survive, our spiritual lives become a solitary, lonely, isolated place where we know what's best and know exactly how to handle every given situation that comes our way!

If this is describing the way you feel about your spiritual life, you should be worried. You might know what I mean if you've already experienced that temptation that keeps beating you up on a regular basis. “But, I don't need any help! I can handle this on my own!” You keep lying to yourself because you've created a spiritual Matrix where you are hiding from reality. When you are confronted by a temptation that is too big for you to handle by yourself (which if you can't tell what one looks like, you will by the third or fourth time it conquers you), it's time to get some help. All temptations that you struggle with on a regular basis are too big for you to handle by yourself. You have two choices. You can choose to stay in the Matrix and believe only what you want to believe. Or you can take a step outside your false spirituality and see how much deeper your spirituality can go when you're being helped along by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. (Does that sound anything like something you've heard before?—not from the Bible.)

The reason you need help to get by in your spiritual life is because that's the way it was designed. Christ knew when he established the church that it was for our benefit. We need the community. James writes “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective...Remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (James 5:16, 20). We find through community the big A-word that is a key part of dealing with sin, especially secret sin, Accountability. Let's talk about how you can set up accountability.

Some people don't have a clue when it comes to choosing an accountability partner or beginning an accountability program. When it comes to something as secret and personal as the sin in your life, you better be sure you want to get into something like this because it could end up changing your life—and saving it, too. That was the disclaimer. Let's look at some of the key principles of choosing an accountability partner and setting up an accountability program for the first time.

Choosing your accountability partner is a very serious thing. It's not something that can be done lightly or without much thought and consideration. Before you can begin an accountability program, you must find a partner. Remember, that's the point. You can't do this by yourself. When you sit down to think about choosing your accountability partner, take into consideration the following: (1) You won't tell someone your personal secrets if you don't trust them, (2) You won't listen to their advice if you don't respect them, (3) You won't find much helpful advice if they've never struggled with what you're going through (same gender), (4) You won't make any progress if they're still struggling with what you're going through, (5) The whole process will fail if your partner isn't committed to calling and checking on you on a regular basis, (6) The whole process will fail if you don't tell your partner the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, (7) The accountability train won't go both ways. What this means is that you'll probably end up choosing someone who is older than you for an accountability partner. It also means that you'll have to choose someone who is reliable and trustworthy. In short, don't choose a friend as an accountability partner, choose a mentor.

After thinking about all of the people in your life who fit into the category of "mentor," approach the person you've decided and share with them what you would like to do. Don't let it shake your faith if the person you've chosen tells you he/she doesn't have time, at least they're being honest with you. Just move on to the next person who fits you best. Be upfront and direct about what's going on and tell the person that you need help dealing with some temptations and would like to meet on a regular basis to talk about it. Once you've found an accountability partner, you can begin your program.

The accountability program needs to consist of three important things. Without these things, the process won't be as effective or meaningful to you. Keep in mind that your accountability partner will be meeting with you for your benefit, not theirs. They are here to help you, so let them. The first thing that is extremely important is prayer. Each time you meet with your partner, you need to pray together. This makes you both remember that it is God who is our healer and comforter, not ourselves. The second thing that is incredibly important, which was mentioned earlier, is truth. If you meet with an accountability partner and then lie to them, you are setting yourself up for death! (Read James 5:20 again) Frequency is the third factor that is very important to your accountability program. You need to set up times to meet on a regular basis and stick to them. These should preferably be in person, but if you can't meet one day, phone calls and text messages work okay. The reason it needs to be in person is because it's so much easier to lie to someone when you're not looking at them. And the reason these meetings need to occur on a regular basis is in order to establish consistency and reliability. When you know your accountability partner is reliable, you'll be less likely to compromise when you're alone. You'll know that tomorrow will come and he/she will call you to check and see how you've been doing...you don't want to lie...so you walk away and are victorious over temptation. Well, it might not work that well every time, but that's what you're desire should be.

Constantly be in prayer about setting up an accountability program with someone you trust. This will be the only way you'll be able to deal with certain sins and temptations in your life. With God's help and the church surrounding you, you can be victorious. "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the SIN that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Lesson 7: January 22, 2006: “Why is it so hard to not give in to temptations?”
--Learning perseverance in trials

One of the most difficult things a Christian has to deal with is the reality of constant defeat. “Why is it that I cannot keep myself from sinning in this way?” People ask themselves this question everyday. The most likely reason is that their accountability program isn’t working. You should always be aware of the effectiveness of your program to see if you need to make changes or find a new accountability partner. But even with a good accountability partner, some people simply cannot shake off the sin in their lives. This is when it comes down to the power of Satan to keep you in bondage against your will. What you have to do is rely on the Holy Spirit to deliver you through prayer and spiritual disciplines. Your desire should be to gain spiritual perseverance, like a runner trying to complete a marathon. Read these scriptures and think about what they are saying and how it applies to your battles with temptation right now.

I know your deeds, your hard work and your *perseverance*. I know that you cannot *tolerate* wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. (Revelation 2:2)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because the testing of your faith develops *perseverance*. *Perseverance* must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)...Blessed is the man who *perseveres* under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:14-25)

(continuing on from the passage in Revelation...)

You have *persevered* and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place...He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:3-7)

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. And when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Lesson 8: February 12, 2006: “How did Jesus not sin if he was tempted in every way?”
--Learning how to stand up under trials

One important thing to remember in discussing Jesus Christ is that he was fully God, yet he was also fully man. Read Philippians 2 for more details. However, even though he was fully God, that did not mean he wasn't capable of sin. If our Lord had never had the opportunity or ability to sin, his perfection wouldn't have meant a thing. He would have simply been an infallible being sent to the earth to observe, teach and die. Since he was indeed tempted, which we find specifically in Matthew's account in chapter 4 of his gospel, the case stands that Jesus was capable of sin, yet he never gave into his desires, not even once. The result of his perfectly lived life was the perfect sacrifice—necessary for the remission of sins of the entire human race—which he freely offered on the cross.

The question still stands, “How did Jesus not sin if he was tempted in every way?” If he was just as much of a man as you and me, why is it impossible for me to live perfectly, but possible for him? As we read in Romans 3:23, “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” I guess a better question to ask would be, “Why is it so hard for me to do what is right and not give in to temptation when Jesus lived his whole life and never gave in to one single temptation?” Just in case you haven't read the passage that states that Jesus was tempted in every way and was without sin, here it is: Hebrews 4:14-16. While you're at it, read Matthew 4.

What you need to realize is the difference between Jesus and you. Not the fact that Jesus was divine and you're not, but the human differences between him and you. These might end up shedding some light on why it's so difficult for you to do what is right. First you should understand what temptation is and how it leads to sin. Read James 1:14-15. You see that temptation comes from desire. You cannot be tempted by something you don't care about or are not interested in at all. Smoking was one of those things for me. I always thought it was disgusting so when someone offered me a cigarette, it was a non issue. Realize that Jesus did have desires just like you and me. In the account of Jesus being tempted by Satan, we see three things that tempted Jesus. One was food. The next was his trust in his father. Finally, he was tempted with power, which was also a way out of his father's plan. These three things were temptations to Jesus because of his current situation, his relationship to his father, and his divine purpose. In other words, he was hungry; he was the son of God; he was to die for the sins of the world. These were custom tailored temptations just for Jesus. I don't expect to be tempted with an offer to worship Satan in exchange for dominion over the world, but I am tempted by Satan's offer of popularity and recognition.

Take another step and see how Jesus responded to these three temptations. That's right. Every time Jesus responded with a scripture. He was a student of his Father's word. Knowing the Bible was a way out of the temptation for Jesus. Because he had confidence in the words of his Father, he knew he would be better off relying on them instead of Satan's words.

Let's look deeper into that idea with a verse from 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” If Satan is the one tempting, not God (James 1:13), but God has the power to control the strength of the temptation and offer an alternative to it, who is the one with the real power here, God or Satan? It's obvious that God has the final word when it comes to the temptations in

our lives. Remember that it is not God who tempts us, but he is always watching out for us and provides an alternative to (way out of) the potential sin that could take place.

For Jesus, when he was being tempted in the desert, knowing God's word was his way out of the temptation. What is your way out? When you get into that temptation situation, do you see the way out that God has provided for you? Jesus recognized that God had the real power, not Satan. So when it came to the temptations, even though Jesus may have had a desire to give into them, he knew he would be better off by following God's plan instead of Satan's. Maybe you're not quite to the point where you see God working in your daily life. Noticing the paths out of temptation could take some time and definitely requires a certain level of maturity. If you're not quite to that point yet, what options do you have? Looking back at the verse from 1 Corinthians, we read that God not only provides a way out of the temptation, "...he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear..."! What this means is that it doesn't matter if you can see God working in your life, and it doesn't matter if you can readily identify the working of the Spirit in your specific situation. What matters is that you always have the option to NOT give into the temptation. What this means is that no matter how impossible the temptation seems, you don't have to sin! To put it another way, God is not putting you into a boxing match knowing you're going to lose. You always have a shot. There's always hope.

As you move through your life and begin to recognize the doors that God has opened to let you out of temptation situations, you'll begin to realize that he is in ultimate control of what is going on in the spiritual war around you. However, if you don't choose to side with the winning team, you're never going to get out of the sin that is weighing you down. If you're in a place right now where Satan seems to have you tied down on all sides, stop and pray for God to open your eyes to see the path that Jesus would take if he were in your shoes. Because "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

It has been done. Perfection has been achieved. All we have to do is figure out how he did it! (Answer: He relied on God) Neither you nor I will ever achieve perfection, but we can begin to master the sin in our lives by relying on God's ultimate power, knowing he is helping us through our temptations, and then looking for the way out he has provided.

Lesson 9: February 19, 2006: “Why do I keep messing up if I am intolerant of this?”
--Learning that intolerance means run away

If you are like most teenagers, you developed most of the habits you have now when you were a little kid. How you brush your teeth, what you do before you go to sleep at night, how you eat spaghetti, etc. These were habits that you formed a long time ago and are still influencing the way you do things today. Is this a bad thing? Of course not, but it will make you think about some other habits that might not be so good. What are other habits that you have formed over the past couple of years that are influencing the way you live your life, things that matter more than how you brush your teeth? Typically, the shows and movies you are willing to watch on TV is a habit that you've already formed. You have habits for almost everything you do on a regular basis. Guys learn at early ages certain habits that influence the way they treat women for the rest of their lives. Girls acquire habits when they're young of focusing on appearance and making sure everything about them looks attractive. Your habits shape who you are and dictate what you do everyday.

When it comes to dealing with the temptations in our lives, some habits lead us down the same paths of temptation day after day. At the same time, you may have formed a habit that helps you fight off other temptations. The “Just Say No” campaign was very successful in keeping kids off drugs and teaching them healthy habits of staying away from harmful substances. But primarily, people struggle with repetitive temptations because they are involved in some sort of habit that is leading them to the same places and causing the same results over and over. “Why is it so hard for me to get this under control?” Struggling Christians ask themselves this question all the time. They say things like, “I’m a Christian; I shouldn’t still be struggling with things like this!” You might be at this point with something in your life. If not, the time will come. What you do when that time comes is what really matters.

Repetitive temptations are the ones that Satan knows he can easily use against you and does very often. He got you into a bad habit of giving in, you kept justifying it, and now it's a habit. So what are you going to do about getting rid of it? You've been trying to become intolerant and think you've made some progress. It's now to the point where it really bothers you every time you give in to this temptation, but you just can't seem to break the habit. We've all be there. What you need to do is something drastic. If you think you've become intolerant of something, but are still losing battles in that area, I hate to break it to you, but you are still tolerating that temptation. It may cause you more guilt now that you realize how bad it is for you, but you haven't become intolerant. How drastic are you willing to be to become intolerant of that temptation? Are you willing to flee from it? 1 Corinthians 6:18 tells us to “Flee from sexual immorality...” This is not a joke. It's not just talking about sexual sins, either. This concept holds true for drug abuse, cussing, lying, stealing, cheating, drinking, immoral movies, etc. What you must do is separate yourself from the things that are bringing you down. In short, you must form some new habits. It takes a long time for most people to break old habits by replacing them with new ones, usually up to 30 days and sometimes longer than that. But you can do it. Take whatever measure you must to ensure that Satan will not win another battle in that area of your life. And remember, you shouldn't work alone when it comes to fighting Satan. In the next and final lesson for this series, we will discuss the one vital component that will help you develop intolerance for those temptations that seem to kick you over time and again, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Lesson 10: February 26, 2006: “Have you learned intolerance for temptations?”
--Learning what will set you apart from the world

As we finish out this series, you must be asking yourself the question, “Have I really learned intolerance for temptations?” Well, maybe you have and maybe you haven’t, but you haven’t finished learning how to do this just yet. There is one vital component that you must have in order to learn intolerance for temptations. It is the only component that matters. If this component is paired up with other components, it will never be as effective as it is by itself. The equation should not be one plus one is two. The equation for learning intolerance for temptations is one plus zero is one. However, many of us like to add ourselves into the equation. We take the one vital component and add ourselves and get two. Usually you could say it is a good thing to be involved in your life, but when it comes to spiritual warfare and learning intolerance for temptations, none of us are any good at it. You need to leave this business to the One who can handle it. This vital component that will assist you in your efforts to learn intolerance for temptation is the Holy Spirit. Listen to what Jesus says about the Spirit in John 14:

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:15-18)

The Spirit lives inside you. However, in order for it to be most effective, it must work alone. You can’t try to influence the Spirit to do things it doesn’t want to do. That’s what happens when the equation is one plus one is two. You must subtract your own desires and cravings (by fleeing from temptation—look at the previous lesson) and allow the Spirit total control over your life. This begins by becoming a Christian, which takes place through confession and baptism. Once you’ve received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you have to give him some room. What people typically like to do is just hang around and put in their two cents. When this happens, the Spirit is quenched and your personal spirit wins. This is when you’re caught giving in to temptation. On the other hand, when you allow the Spirit of truth to work in your life, it will do amazing things. Read these verses:

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:25-27)

Do you really believe that you become possessed by some supernatural spirit and it actually teaches you things? I hope so! That’s Jesus’ promise to us as Christians. If we will obey his commands, he will ask the Father, and we will be given the Holy Spirit. Working alongside God, you will be able to develop intolerance for any temptation that comes your way. Over the course of this study, we’ve looked at many different aspects of dealing with temptation. They are all important parts of this journey to intolerance, but the most important thing is that you strive to obey Christ’s commands with everything inside you, remain open to the Holy Spirit so that it can work in your life, and follow its guidance as it leads you to the Father. Being one with the Father only happens when you subtract yourself from the equation. Remember, one plus zero is one, but if you’re already a two, pray to God “Lord, there’s two fighting for control right now, please minus me, so there will be only you.” (Two – Me = You) Learn Intolerance For Temptations.