

Winning the Inner War

*How to
Say No to a
Stubborn Habit*

Erwin W. Lutzer



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WINNING THE INNER WAR

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FOREWORD

I am happy to commend Erwin Lutzer's book *Winning the Inner War* for the following reasons:

It is biblical. The author does not give easy answers to the problems arising from stubborn habits because he believes they have spiritual causes and therefore need spiritual answers found only in the Scriptures. Accordingly, he looks carefully into the biblical teaching relevant to the subject.

It is practical. Each chapter concludes with a suggested application. The reader is encouraged to take practical steps to apply what he has learned to his experience. This may take the form of a personal inventory, prayers for specific insight, or aids to developing study habits and relationships, which will assist in achieving victory over the stubborn habit.

It is spiritual. There is no shortage of books in the self-improvement category and there are plenty of customers for such books. At first glance this book may appear to be yet another, but this is not the case. While some readers may want to break a habit to improve their figures or sweeten their breath, the author leads people to become what God created and redeemed them to be.

It is pastoral. Many case studies from the author's personal ministry are used to illustrate his principles. From these studies, the reader can discern a fine blend of compassion and firmness. The firmness has its roots in the authoritative Word of God and the compassion springs from the heart of one who struggles like all humans.

It is controversial. Readers will be stimulated to thought and discussion on a number of matters raised by the author. For example, stubborn habits become sinful habits by the second

paragraph of the preface. Are habits sinful or stubborn? The author's assertion that "self" and "the flesh" are the "same incurable desire to put our interests above God's" will undoubtedly lead some people to wonder about loving neighbor as we love self. The careful reader will also reconsider the balance between human responsibility and human susceptibility to such things as heredity and environment. All these topics need careful thought and the author's statement will help greatly.

—*D. Stuart Briscoe*

PREFACE:

A Hand from Heaven

Seneca cried, "Oh that a hand would come down from heaven and deliver me from my besetting sin!" His plea has been echoed throughout the centuries. We've all wished for the same miracle.

Sinful habits begin innocently enough, but if we don't master them, they will surely master us. We have all experienced the cycle: enjoy a forbidden pleasure, feel guilty, determine never to do it again, take pride in brief moments of self-control, then fail once more. Each time we repeat the pattern the ruts are cut a bit deeper, the chain pulls tighter.

Excusing our behavior because "we're just human," we become pessimistic, even defiant, and soon find ourselves victimized by a sin that refuses to budge. This behavior pattern becomes so familiar that eventually we don't even want to change. As we settle into an uneasy smugness, we come to feel at home in our anger, lust, worry, gluttony, laziness, bitterness, and selfishness—except for our small and occasional efforts at correction.

Can we really be delivered from the one-step-forward and two-backward routine? At times I've thought the answer was no. Despite my sincere attempts at yielding myself to God, I retained certain weaknesses (*sins* is a more honest word) that I concluded I would simply have to live with. After all, *no one* is perfect!

But I knew my private failure was no credit to Christ, who won the victory on the cross. Did He not promise that we could be *free indeed*? Through many failures and a few victories I've discovered that the most persistent sin can be dislodged. We can

be free from sins, even the ones safely tucked away in the crevices of our souls.

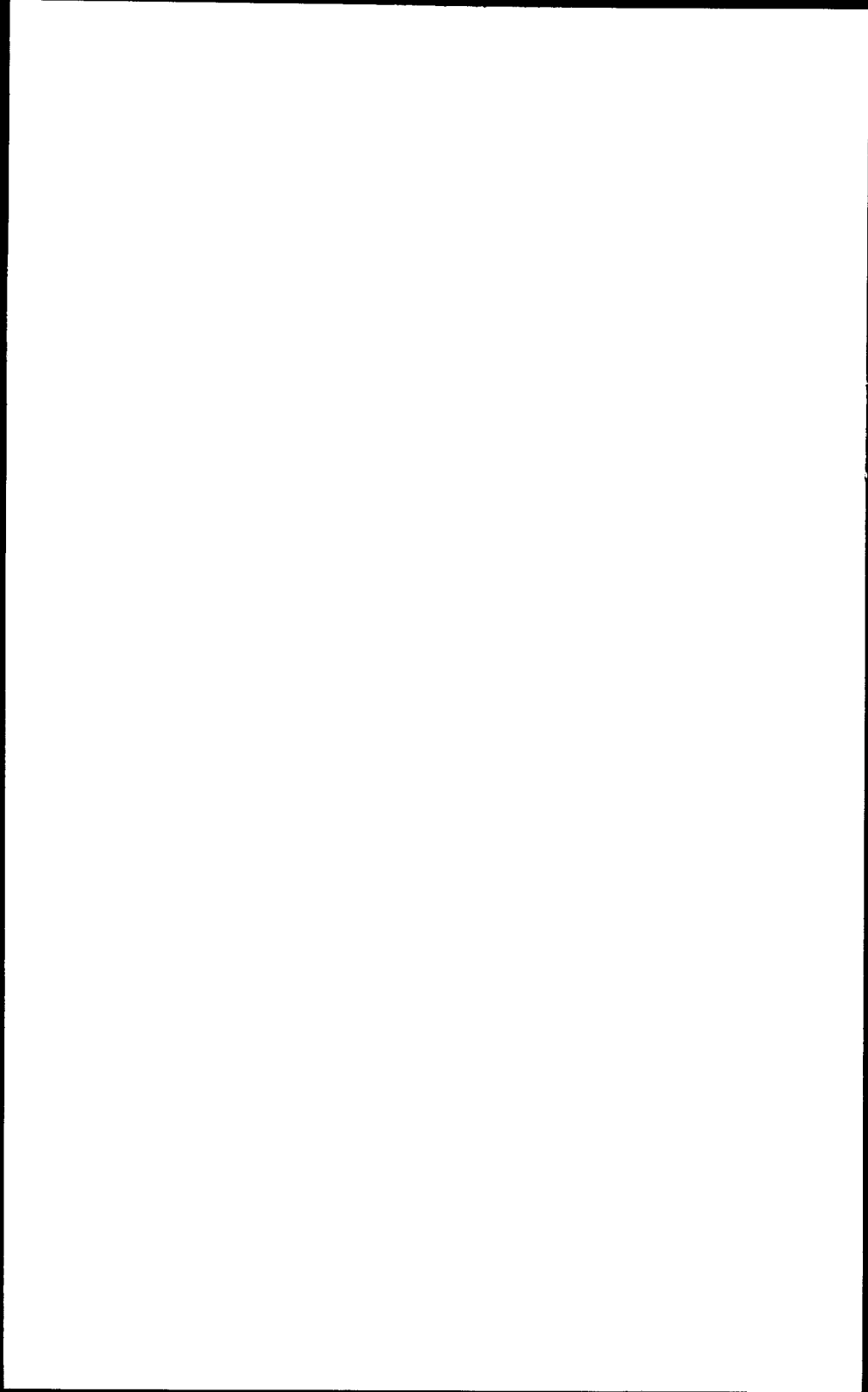
Imagine a city that is constantly being attacked at a vulnerable point along one of its walls. The enemy habitually exploits the same weakness—with startling success. Don't you think that the inhabitants would rebuild the defective fortification in preparation for the next assault? Yet countless Christians repeatedly succumb to the same temptations without a constructive program for strengthening their defenses. They have accepted failure as a way of life, reasoning, "That's just the way I am."

God has a different plan—for which He has given us a message of deliverance and hope. True, there are no easy miracles. Our success is neither instant nor automatic. Slick and easy solutions lead to false expectations which, in turn, spawn disappointment and unbelief. Applying biblical principles takes time and discipline. But steady progress is possible. Even long-established and sinful behavioral patterns can be replaced by wholesome attitudes and actions.

Seneca did not know that his wish had been granted. God has come down from heaven to deliver us from our besetting sins. This book presents a step-by-step route to the freedom Christ has brought to us.

Let's explore it together.

—*Erwin W. Lutzer*



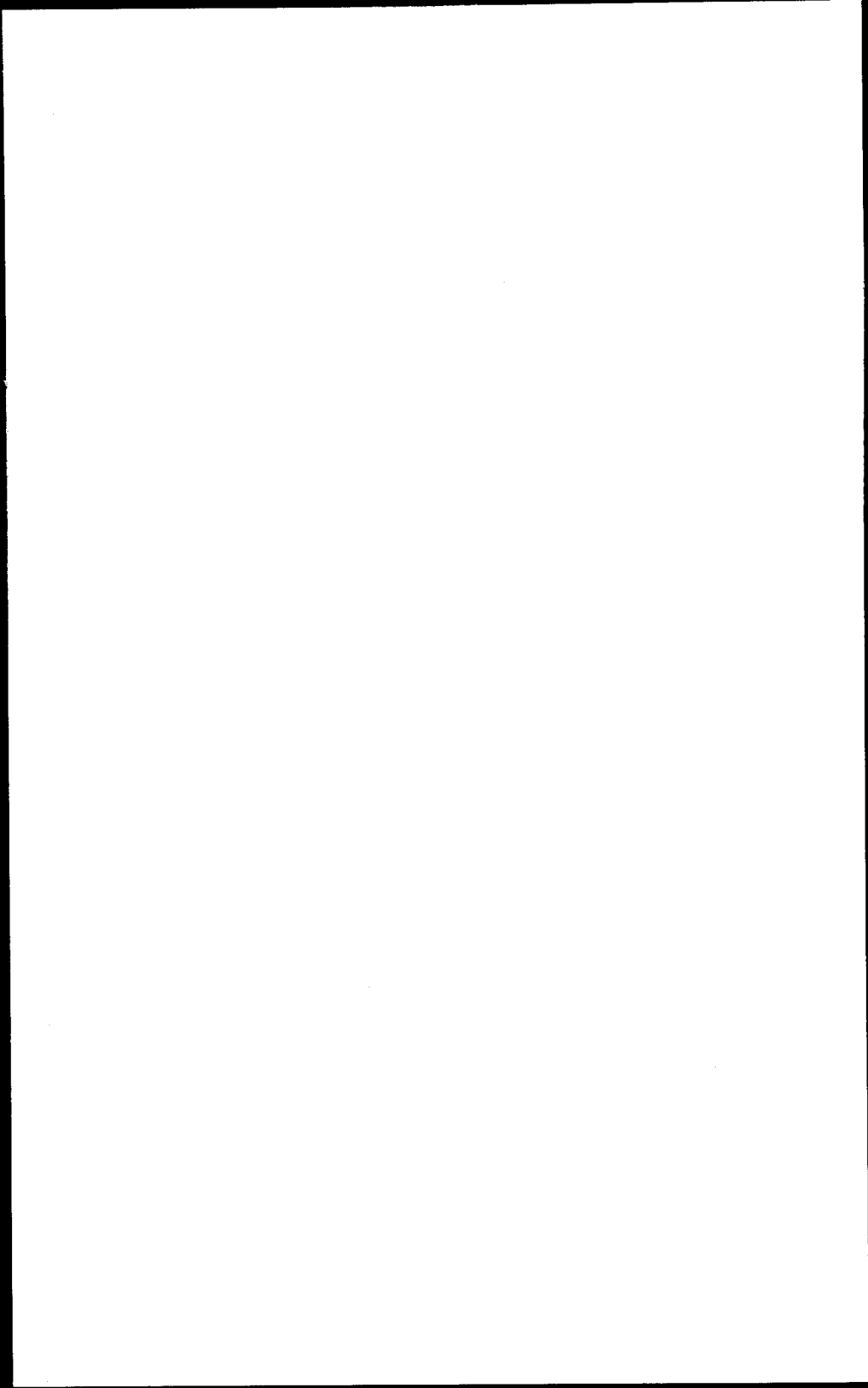


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CHAPTER 1

Why So Much Temptation?

“**W**hy is lust so powerful?” Burt asked, crushed by the weight of his guilt. He had fallen into sexual sin. “How can I trust myself? . . . I don’t want to live an immoral life. I promised myself I wouldn’t do this but here I am again.”

His question deserves an answer. Why is temptation so attractive, unrelenting, and powerful? Why doesn’t God adjust the degree of our temptations so that the scales would be tipped more generously in our favor?

The Christian life does seem to be needlessly difficult at times. Surely God—the One who possesses all might and authority—could make it easier for those of us who love Him. Since so many believers succumb to one sin or another, often ending in ruin, it seems logical that God would keep a step ahead of us, diffusing the land mines along our path. If you are wondering how He could do this, consider these suggestions.

Satan Banned?

First, God could eliminate the Devil. In fact, if He had done that at the time of Creation, chances are that Adam and Eve would not have plunged the human race into sin. Most likely, our first parents would have obeyed God without pausing to consider the fruit of the forbidden tree.

Assuming Adam and Eve were free agents, why didn't God give them the opportunity to choose without outside interference? The serpent was beautiful, seemed to speak with authority, and promised a better life. As far as we know, Adam and Eve had not been told about the existence of Satan, and so were quite unprepared for this abrupt encounter. If the serpent had been barred from the Garden, Adam and Eve would have been more inclined to obey God. They might have chosen not to eat from the forbidden tree.

The presence of Satan in the Garden and his activity on our planet tips the scales in favor of evil choices. I'm not saying we must follow his sinister suggestions, but if he were banned from the earth, we could resist temptation much more easily.

Much of the evil in the world, including our own struggles, can be traced to the interference of unseen spiritual forces. If God were to annihilate the Devil, or at least confine him to the pit, we could take giant steps in our walk with the King. No more of the one-step-forward, two-backward routine! Our battle with temptation would be minimized and we'd be more inclined to resist the enticement of sin. Why doesn't God obliterate Satan?

Dampened Passions?

A second suggestion to minimize the casualty toll in the Christian life would be for God to dull the arrows of temptation that harass us from inside. James wrote, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (James 1:14). Could not God dampen those passions to make moral purity more easily within reach?

You and I were born with a sinful nature, which combines response to outward stimuli with its inner twisted passions of greed, selfishness, anger, rebellion, and lust. Every honest Christian admits to being overcome by one or more of these desires at some point in his or her spiritual pilgrimage. Surely

God, who knows our frailty, could dampen those passions just a bit. Then we'd be more likely to be victorious, and a credit to our Redeemer.

We've all heard someone say, "I know what I ought to do, but I just can't. I've tried, asked God to help me, and have still failed." Paul wrote about his own struggle, "For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:15). The church reformer, John Knox, wrote these words before he died: "Now, after many battles, I find nothing in me but vanity and corruption. For in quietness I am negligent, in trouble impatient, tending to desperation; pride and ambition assault me on the one part, covetousness and malice trouble me on the other; briefly, O Lord, the affections of the flesh do almost suppress the operation of Thy Spirit." If this man of God had such struggles, is there hope for the rest of us?

Rearranged Schedules?

Even if God did not banish the Devil or dull our sinful passions, couldn't He guide us away from the places of temptation? Then we could be protected from circumstances that would provoke us to sin.

Didn't David sin with Bathsheba because she happened to be taking a bath next door while the king was resting on the rooftop? It seems that God could have arranged for her to take her bath two hours earlier, or an hour later. Surely a sovereign God would have no difficulty in rearranging the schedules of His finite creatures.

Didn't Achan sin because he saw a Babylonian garment left unattended after the siege of Jericho? Didn't Abraham lie because there was a famine in the land and he feared for his life? Didn't Samson divulge his secret because of his attraction to the charming Delilah?

God does not shield us from circumstances that provoke us to

sin. Remember, it was the Holy Spirit who led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). We are to ask God to preserve us from situations where we might be vulnerable to sin. Yet we must admit, God does lead us into circumstances that potentially could provoke us to sin.

Of course, I'm not saying that God causes us to sin; nor does He tempt us as Satan does. James wrote, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one'" (James 1:13). We can never blame God for what we do. If we sin, it is because of our sinful nature; therefore we are responsible. But God does *test* us; He also allows Satan to tempt us. Quite unintentionally on our part, we find ourselves in situations that are an outward stimulus to sin.

A woman trying desperately to break the habit of smoking said that she was making progress until she was transferred to an office where everyone smoked. In an atmosphere drenched with the smell of tobacco, she fell back into her former habit.

After meeting a former boyfriend, a married woman discovered that she was falling deeply in love with him. Consequently, she began to think she had married the wrong man, and felt trapped. Now she asks, "Why did God, who knows how weak I am, allow us to meet again?"

A homosexual admitted that he had begun his sexual relationships with other men when, at the age of twelve, he was seduced by an older homosexual. So began a long struggle with abnormal behavior. Could not God have protected him from his experience?

Alcoholics, trying to stay dry, often slip back into drunkenness because of pressure from peers who are addicted to the bottle. So it goes.

And what about the more subtle sins of the mind? Yes, Christ taught that evil originates in the heart, but many of our struggles

with evil thoughts are provoked by our environment. All around us are stimuli that draw out the worst in us. Without taking us out of the world, God could lead us to circumstances less conducive to evil passions, covetousness, and anger. If at least some of the chuckholes were removed from our paths, the possibility of blowouts would be lessened.

But God has not shielded us from the places or the power of cruel temptations. Satan has access to our lives; our sin nature is unrestricted, and often without warning we find ourselves in situations that contribute to outward or secret sin.

So we are back to Burt's question—why is temptation so powerful?

Some Reasons for Temptation

A Test of Loyalty

As might be expected, God has a purpose in allowing us to be tempted. To begin, *let's remember that temptation, with all of its frightful possibilities for failure, is God's method of testing our loyalties.* We cannot say we love someone until we have had to make some hard choices on his behalf. Similarly, we cannot say we love God unless we've said no to persistent temptations.

Take Abraham as an example. God asked him to slay his favorite son. He was strongly tempted to say no to God. The altar he built was probably the most carefully constructed one ever made. As he worked, he surely thought of numerous reasons why he should disobey God: Isaac was needed to fulfill God's promise. Sarah would never understand. And above all, how could a merciful God expect a man to slay his own beloved son?

Of course, you know how the story ended. Abraham passed the test; the angel of the Lord prevented him from stabbing his son and provided a ram for the sacrifice. Notice God's evaluation of the incident: "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12).

How do we know Abraham loved God? *Because he chose to*

say yes when all the powers of hell and the passions of his soul were crying no. This fierce temptation gave Abraham a striking opportunity to prove his love for the Almighty.

Let's return to some of those situations we mentioned earlier. What about the woman who seemingly could not resist falling in love with another man? Or the alcoholic tempted by his friends to revert to his old habits? Or the young man surrounded by the wrong crowd? Why does God not shield us from these circumstances? He is allowing us the luxury of difficult choices so that we can prove our love for Him. These are our opportunities to choose God rather than the world.

Do you love God? I'm glad you said yes. But what happens when you are confronted with a tough decision—such as whether you should satisfy your passions or control them? Our response to temptation is an accurate barometer of our love for God. One of the first steps in handling temptation is to see it as an opportunity to test our loyalties. If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15). Each temptation leaves us better or worse; neutrality is impossible.

That's why God doesn't exterminate the Devil. Admittedly, the presence of wicked spirits in the world does make our choices more difficult. But think of what such agonizing choices mean to God. We prove our love for God when we say yes to Him, even when the deck appears to be stacked against us.

What it boils down to is this: do we value the pleasures of the world or those that come from God? The opportunities for sin that pop up around us, the sinful nature within us, and the demonic forces around us give us numerous opportunities to answer that question.

Transformed Passions

A second reason God does not make our choices easier is because *temptation is His character development curriculum*. Sinful habits are a millstone about our necks, a blotch on our

lives. But that's only half the story! Our temptations, struggles, and yes, even our sins are used by God to help us climb the ladder of spiritual maturity. If you see your sinful struggles only as a liability, you will never learn all that God wants to teach you through them.

There is a saying of Goethe, the German poet, that talent is formed in solitude, but character in the storms of life. God wants to do something more beautiful in your life than simply give you victory over a sin. He wants to replace that sin with the positive qualities of a fruitful life.

Temptation is God's magnifying glass; it shows us how much work He has left to do in our lives. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God let them become hungry and thirsty; on one occasion they were without water for three days. They became disappointed with their slow pace of travel; they were impatient with Moses' long rendezvous on the mountain. Why didn't God meet their expectations? Listen to Moses' commentary. God did all this "that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut. 8:2).

There it is again—God allowed the Israelites to suffer temptation to test their loyalties and to bring out their latent sinfulness. Temptation brings out the best or the worst in us. The Israelites didn't realize how rebellious they were until they got hungry. Temptation brings the impurities to the surface. Then God begins the siphoning process. Sometimes God teaches us these lessons by letting us suffer the consequences of our own sin. James wrote that we are enticed by our own lust. That word *entice* carries with it the imagery of a hunter who puts out bait for wild animals. The mouse can see no valid reason why he should not eat that piece of cheese. Since his knowledge is limited, he cannot predict the future and he doesn't understand traps. So he eats, and suffers a fatal outcome. Some of us, thinking we can predict the consequences of our actions, assign a more serious result to overt sins than to those confined to thought and imagi-

nation. But even the sins of the mind exact their toll, and ultimately we no longer control the sin; it controls us. In time God may dry up our fountains of pleasure and ambition so that we will turn to Him in repentance.

When we do, God leads us to something better. He wants to develop within us the rich character qualities called the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, and peace, to name a few. God's purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son. To accomplish this, our character deficiencies (*sins* is a better word) must be brought to the surface so that we can be changed.

Temptation means risk. The potential for devastating failure is ever with us. But precisely because the stakes are so high, the rewards of resisting are great. We cannot say no to temptation without saying yes to something far better.

Strength for Our Weakness

Finally, *God uses our sins to show us His grace and power.* The depressing effect of sin is offset by the good news of God's grace. Paul wrote, "The Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20).

Paul was given a thorn in the flesh so that he would remain humble. Perhaps it was a temptation he struggled to resist. He asked God three times for deliverance, but God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul, therefore, boasted about his weakness, knowing that it provided an opportunity for God's power to rest upon him. "For when I am weak, then am I strong" (v. 10). If you are beset by an especially obstinate sin, you may be on the verge of seeing God's grace displayed in your life. Although you may now be preoccupied with your struggle, you may soon be preoccupied with your God.

God strikes at the core of our motivations. He is not interested in merely applying a new coat of paint, imposing a new set of

rules. He wants to rebuild our minds and give us new values. The most important part of us is that which nobody sees except God. And He wants to begin His work there.

Think about that one particular sin of yours—the one that won't move off center stage. Maybe it's an obvious one: drunkenness, gluttony, or sexual misconduct. Or maybe it's a very private sin, the one in your mind: pride, anxiety, fear, or bitterness. Perhaps your imagination would make an X-rated movie look censored. Or you may have a personality quirk, a feeling of deep-seated inferiority, or an uncontrollable temper.

Whatever it is, God can deliver you from that sin. You and He can track it down, root it out, and exterminate it. Sin need not have dominion over you. You can be sure that God will never take from you something that is good. Rather, when you are ready, He will remove the evil and replace it with something far better. He will tear down your fortress so that He can build a palace in its place.

Are you ready for such a transformation? The next chapter will help you to answer that question.

SUGGESTED APPLICATION

1. Take inventory of your life by asking: What is my most persistent temptation? Why is it so difficult to say no to this temptation and yes to God?
2. Read the story of Christ's temptation in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11). List all of the reasons why Christ might have found it easy to give in to Satan's suggestions. Speculate as to what the consequences of such an act would have been. Contrast this with how the Israelites acted when they were hungry (Ex. 16; Num. 11). What can we learn from the contrast between Israel and Christ?

3. Before you read the next chapter, spend some quiet time in prayer with your special temptation or sin in mind. Ask God for wisdom in the following three areas:
 - a. that you will be able to properly identify the cause of your defeat
 - b. that God will give you wisdom in planning a specific course of action to overcome the problem
 - c. that you will have the persistence to follow that action to its completion.

4. Take a few moments of each day to thank God for what He is going to do in your life and, particularly, how He is going to show His strength and grace at the point of your weakness.

CHAPTER 2

The Ground Rules

Can God change people? Yes, He can, but He always does it on His terms. Before you can take steps toward positive change, there are three basic conditions you *must* accept. If you falter in accepting any one of them, you will not progress toward freedom from your sinful habit. What are these essentials?

The First Condition

First, *you must believe that God is good*. Because of the evils that exist in the world, the goodness of God is one of the most difficult doctrines to accept. Yet unless we wholeheartedly believe in it, we are paralyzed in our Christian growth.

It is not surprising that Satan's first move in the Garden of Eden was to cause Eve to doubt the goodness of God. Here are his words: "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). His point was, "God is restricting you because He doesn't want you to achieve your potential! You have the inherent right to be like Him, but He won't let you—He isn't on your side at all."

Satan convinced Eve to believe that God did not have her best interests at heart—that He would hold her back from developing her potential. Eve believed the lie.

Today, Satan uses similar strategy to make us dissatisfied with God's will for us. Our anger at circumstances and our rebellion

against God's commandments stem from our lack of confidence in God's goodness. The single girl asks, "How can God be good? If He were, He'd give me companionship. Doesn't He know how lonely I am?"

The playboy reasons, "Why should God restrict me from pleasure? When I'm hungry I eat; when I want pleasure I have sex. A God who cramps my lifestyle isn't good. And if He were, He'd see that I find somebody to really satisfy me."

The alcoholic complains, "If God were good He'd give me a decent job. After all, wasn't it financial pressure that drove me to drink? Why doesn't God get me out of this mess? God is good? Good for what?"

I counseled a woman who needed to confess the sin of bitterness. Her response, "If God loves me, why did He allow my parents to treat me like they did? A good God would never have allowed this to happen!" Did she get rid of her bitterness? No. She couldn't forgive her parents because she couldn't "forgive" God.

If you are a worrier, you doubt God's goodness. You are afraid God will bring circumstances into your life that are not in your best interests. If you are greedy and covetous, you doubt whether God is being fair with you. If you experience uncontrollable anger, you are rebelling against God's will for your life.

Look at that sin that you don't want to give up; growing in the roots of your stubbornness is your doubt about God's goodness. You do not trust Him to do the best for you, because *your way* is better.

Let's return to the story in the Garden of Eden. Notice how Satan focused on a restriction and used it to blind Eve to God's blessing. Yes, there was one tree she could not enjoy, but presumably there were hundreds she could. Did Satan point out the many trees she was permitted to eat from? Hardly. He focused on one negative and Eve forgot God's generosity and grace. So it is today. Satan will urge you to focus on one issue, one aggravation, one restriction. At that moment, he'll try to convince you

that God's way is not best, but takes second place to what he can offer you.

Do you doubt God's goodness? Are you fully prepared to accept that the will of God is perfect and acceptable? What would you think if God did take away that one desire, that one weakness? If He did deliver you from sensual thoughts, would you feel cheated? If He denied you the pleasure of marriage, would you feel ripped off? If you became victorious over cigarettes or alcohol, would you be resentful because you had been denied a bit of pleasure?

Perhaps now you are beginning to understand why you cannot begin to break your sinful habit unless you believe in God's goodness. The reason is simple: if you doubt God's goodness you will not want to change. You'll be convinced that God wants to rob you rather than enrich you.

I've discovered that the most frustrating problem in helping those who come for counsel is simply that most people do not really want to change. Of course, they are prepared to make minor adjustments—particularly if their behavior is getting them into trouble. But most of them are comfortable with their sin as long as it doesn't get out of hand. And often they'd prefer to have God keep His activity in their lives to a minimum.

What causes this lack of enthusiasm for getting rid of sin? We are afraid that some worthwhile pleasure will pass us by. We question whether God's way is indeed the best.

If you doubt God's goodness, you will not only resist change but will also fear it. A young man I counseled simply could not give his future to God for fear that God might require him to drop out of medical school. He doubted whether God's will for him would be the best.

Countless Christians resist surrender to God, frightened at what God might require. He might lead them to the mission field, let them remain single, or require that they give up their love of money or their pursuit of sinful pleasures.

When you doubt God's goodness, you hug sins tightly to your

bosom, afraid that God will rob you of your crutch, your pastime, your pleasure. Occasionally, you are stirred to give up your sin, but soon find you can't risk the loss.

But is your way really better than God's? Was Satan the good guy in the Garden of Eden? And God the villain? Jesus put the matter straight, "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10). To believe your way is better than God's is to take your place with Eve and believe Satan's lie. No matter how many pleasures Satan offers you, his ultimate intention is to ruin you. Your destruction is his highest priority.

On the positive side, if you accept the fact that God is good, two results will follow: (1) You can surrender to Him without reservations or fear of being cheated; (2) You will thirst for change, knowing that the watering holes of the world cannot compare with the refreshing water that Christ promises. Are you prepared to accept what you know, deep down in yourself, that God's plan is perfect? If so, you will be prepared to part with your sin, knowing that God will replace it with something better. You'll have passed the first test as a candidate for radical change.

The Second Condition

What is the second essential truth you must accept? It is *that you are fully responsible for your behavior*. All of us are born with a propensity to avoid blame. Children display a remarkable ability to shift responsibility to others. My wife and I have observed that our children can spontaneously, creatively, almost ingeniously invent excuses for their misbehavior.

It began in Eden. God asked Adam, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The question was straightforward, and could have been answered in one word, "Yes." But Adam responded, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:11-12).

Read those words again. What Adam really said was, "It's

Your fault—I'm stuck with this weak-willed woman You created." So Adam blamed both God and his wife before he admitted that he also was party to the deed.

Notice his logic. God created the woman, the woman ate the fruit, and then gave it to him. He believed that if God had not created Eve, or if Eve would not have disobeyed, he would not have sinned. Hence, he was not blameworthy. In accepting responsibility, Eve fared no better. She said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (v. 13). She wasn't responsible either. Someone has well said, "Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent; and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on!" No one was responsible; it was God's fault.

Was it? True, God created the tree, the woman, the man, and even Lucifer, who became the Devil. God could have created a garden without this forbidden tree and could have barred Satan from entry. Yes, a sovereign God could have done it all differently. But *Eve made a choice and so did Adam*. Thus they must bear the full responsibility for their choice. The serpent also gets his due—each made a choice, each deserves blame. In the Garden, the matter of human responsibility was settled forever: each individual must take responsibility for his choices.

Of course, we must be sensitive when speaking about these matters. Some people are disturbed because they have suffered physical and emotional abuse. Others follow a life of sin because of the warped values of their parents. To some extent, we are all products of our heredity and environment. But even allowing for this, we know that civilized society cannot long exist unless there is an assumption of individual responsibility for one's actions. We are all accountable, to family, employer, society, church, and ultimately to God. Every mature person needs to stop blaming and begin taking full responsibility for what he is—past, present, and future.

A prominent American said of Robert Kennedy's assassin, "I do not blame him, but the society that produced him." Will Rogers once aptly remarked that there are two eras in American

history—the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck!

We cannot exaggerate the harm that has come to individuals from the teaching of Sigmund Freud that those who misbehave are sick. We do not hold people responsible for catching the flu, measles, or having cancer. We have hospitals, not prisons, for the physically sick, simply because they bear no moral blame for their illness. The reprehensible Freudian implication is clear: if we are not responsible for physical illness, why should we be blamed for crime, a symptom of mental illness?

To say that a rapist, murderer, or thief is sick is to conclude that he should not be subject to punishment. After all, he simply caught a strange disease—he is the victim of forces beyond his control.

Recently, my wife and I watched a TV interview with a doctor who argued that the peculiarities of our behavior stem from our birth experience. If a baby is born in a noisy, bright, and seemingly unfriendly delivery room, he will develop hostility in his adult life. It follows that no one should be blamed for hostility.

If a teenager is in trouble, it's the parents' fault—they were too strict or too lenient. Or perhaps it was his environment—he was brought up in a wealthy home. Everyone knows that wealth spawns boredom and boredom breeds crime. Conversely, he is not responsible because he came from a poor home—poverty drives a man to drugs, sex, and crime. Even in a prison, it is hard to find a person who considers himself guilty.

The schools of modern psychiatry based on this unbiblical principle have fared poorly in helping with emotional problems. Such psychiatrists have become professional excuse-finders, sifting through the rubble of the past, the pressures of the present, and the anxieties of the future, searching for a doorstep where the blame can be placed.

How contrary to the Scriptures! The Bible calls each individual a sinner. We are fully responsible for our choices. Although that's a tough pill to swallow, it is basic to our hope that God can change us. After all, if we are responsible, we are in control of