

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

I WILL DECLARE WAR ON TEMPTATION | SET LIKE FLINT

AARON BROCKETT | JANUARY 12, 2025

It's good to be with everyone today. And while we are settling in, I just want to take a quick moment to acknowledge where our heads and our hearts have been all week. We've just been watching the news develop on the west coast with all of the fires in L. A.

I've had a number of you reach out to me and ask, "Hey, what are we doing? What can we do?" I want you to know about one of our favorite partnerships with an organization called Convoy of Hope. You can go on their website and check out everything that they do.

Essentially, if I could describe it this way, anytime there is a natural disaster, they are the first in, boots on the ground, semi-trucks in to try to meet tangible needs. And we partner with them financially all through the year so that way they are ready to go.

Now, if you want to contribute more to what is going on through the Convoy of Hope, you can go to the link and you can give individually to them. I know there are a number of really reputable organizations but that would be one that I highly, highly recommend. You can check out what they do.

The second thing is that I'm just staying in communication with the churches that we have a relationship with all over southern California and two churches in particular, Shepherd of the Hills Church, which is right smack dab in the middle of all of the fires—they are in the Thousand Oaks area—and then Oasis Church, which is in downtown L.A.

I've talked to both of those pastors. They are personal friends of mine. And they said the biggest thing that we can do is just send money as they are just trying to help resource people who have lost their homes. So, that's what we're doing as a church. We're giving an additional \$25,000 to both of those churches, between those churches to help meet needs.

So, guys, I want to thank you. Your ongoing generosity helps us pivot in moments of crisis. That's what we are doing this week. Let's continue to just be in prayer for all of those who have lost homes and gone through such devastation.

A personal friend of mine lost his home in L. A. this last week and I texted him just to let him know that we are praying. And his response back to me was, "Hey, we're really, really sad but we see God on the move, and we see the church being the church and stepping up in southern California." So, that's exciting to be a part of and we want to help contribute to that.



Well, I want to acknowledge everybody across all of our locations. If you have a Bible, go ahead, and meet me in James, chapter 1. Get there with me. That's our primary passage today.

As you are turning there and getting settled in—when my son was in middle school I took him and a few of his buddies and their dads paintballing. I don't know if any of you have ever been paintballing, it's been a while since I have done it, but I remember that we showed up at the place and they got us all geared up, our helmets and our paintball guns. And they took us out to the playing field, which was some abandoned buildings and some objects that we could kind of hide behind.

It was sort of like every man for himself—kind of a last man standing thing. So, there was going to be a time limit. They were going to sound the horn, and then whoever was standing at the end of the game, they were the winners.

I'm like kind of crouched—first time I've ever played. I'm crouched behind this shelter, and I remember getting this thought. I thought to myself, "You know what? I wonder if there is a warrior within me. I wonder if I've got what it takes." That's a good question every man could ask, "Do I have what it takes?"

I've never been in a battle, never served in the military. But my grandfather was in the Army and my other grandfather was a Marine. So, I thought, "I wonder if I have any of their genetics. What am I going to be like?"

So, I was like, "I'm going to take this super seriously. I'm going to pretend that this is a real deal. I'm going to John Wick this thing." And for those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, "I'm going to Jason Bourne this thing." That's for the rest of you.

So, I was like, "Alright. Here I go." They sound the horn. And not even preacher exaggeration, in a millisecond I got shot in the hip. I didn't even move. Hadn't even taken a step. And I walked off the field in shame. Turned in my man card. Never played it again.

That's kind of how life is. Isn't it? Have you ever been facing some sort of a challenge, a trial, a difficulty, or a temptation in your life and you're like, "Okay, man. I'm going to give it everything I've got," only to be taken out. And if you can relate to that, which every single one of us should, then that's what we're talking about today.

Now, if you missed last weekend, we kicked off an eight-week series of messages with kind of a funny title, but a cool graphic, called Set Like Flint. And if you are like, "What in the world is that?" Well, it comes out of a single verse in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 50, verse 7 where the prophet says these words:

"Because the Sovereign Lord helps me," I love that phrase, God is sovereign and in control, and He helps me, "I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint," flint is another word for stone, "and I know I will not be put to shame." (NIV)

So, really the context around all of this is the song that we just sang, "God would You please awaken us? Would you please bring revival? God, I want to have an encounter with you." And if you want a stirring from God, if you want to have an encounter with God, you desire God to bring about revival and awakening, there is an enemy who is not just going to roll over and let that happen. He's going to come against you with all kinds of resistance.

The pursuit of intimacy with God happens within the context of adversity

It's been said this way. You don't have to follow Jesus very long before you begin to realize that the pursuit of intimacy with God happens within the context of adversity.

Let me kind of expound on that a little bit. If you are trying to do the Christian life without a pursuit of intimacy with God, you won't be doing it very well.

What in the world do you mean by that? Well, if this is just a religion thing, if this is just an attend church thing because I think that's what good people do, if I'm just trying to appease my family or a spouse or a boyfriend or girlfriend, if I'm just trying to be a good person and sprinkle in a little bit of religion, you will not hang with it very long. You will deconstruct. You will waive the white flag. You will walk away. Because it's not about any of that. It's about the pursuit of intimacy with God.

And if you desire intimacy with God there is an enemy who is not just going to say, "Okay, by all means go for it." He's going to throw everything He can to try to keep you from that. To discourage you from that. To confuse you in that and to deceive you away from it.

Therefore, we've got to develop a resolve just like the prophet Isaiah and set our faces like flint. What do I mean by that? Develop some godly grit. Say, "You know what? Because he's throwing everything at me, I'm not going to give up. I'm going to be stable in my footing. I'm going to keep marching forward whatever adversity may come," because it will, and it is. "But I'm going to be determined to follow God even when adversity comes my way."

We said last week that the words I want and I hope are not effective strategies. They are the reason why New Year's resolutions fail at about this time of the year. So, what we've been saying is that we want to put into action our intentions.

This is a declaration series. We want to move away from the words I hope to the words I declare. Or as Paul was coaching young Timothy in 1 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 8, he would say, "Hey, you don't just wake up and become godly, you train for godliness and training requires resistance. So, that's how we are thinking about this.

Last week, if you missed it, our first declaration was, I will be more consistent. We said that the process of transformation is when we consistently do what we used to do occasionally. We're not just going to do this Christian life sporadically, we're going to do

it consistently, little by little, and then one day we wake up and we look back and we go, "Look how far I've come." That's how transformation happens.

So, this is a declaration series. Next week, just a little bit of a heads up, a little bit of a preview, we're going to talk about, "I will handle criticism in healthy ways." That's going to be a big, big message. I need that message. You need that message. We all need that message.

Today, I decided to go a little bit lighter. Just a little softball. We're going to talk about temptation today. Just a little light subject. And I want you to take a deep breath, because when it comes to temptation, I don't know about you, but there could just be this little bit of fear that comes over you.

Can I just go ahead and say this? There has been a lot of really bad teaching around this. And there has been a lot of bad thinking around temptation. And immediately, when I say temptation, it's kind of like, maybe there is a wave of shame that comes over you.

I think there is a fundamental misunderstanding about what temptation is. So, in the message today I want to try to clarify and define what it is, exactly. And then even more importantly, what it is not. I think that's really important to point out.

And then what's at stake when we are in the midst of temptation? And then I want to offer you some good news. How can we overcome it? And, by the way, we can absolutely overcome it.

Now, I've entitled this message with a little bit of an aggressive title I Will Declare War on Temptation. I woke up Tuesday morning and I was like, "You know what? I think that may be a little bit aggressive. Maybe I should soften it a little bit. So, I thought about changing the title to something like this: I Will Engage Thoughtfully on the Skirmish with Temptation.

And after studying God's word on it, I was like, "No, actually declaring war on it is the most fitting and the most in alignment with Scripture." And I think you'll see why here in just a minute.

James, chapter 1 is our text. Let me just let the word of God speak as James unpacks our struggle with this, and what it is, what's on the line. I've got five points for you after we read this passage. All five points come out of the text. So, James, chapter 1, starting in verse 2 he writes these words:

"Dear brothers and sisters," so he's writing to the family of God, those of us who are followers of Jesus, "when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy."

How many of you do that? Yeah, me neither. Very rarely when troubles come my way I'm like, "You know what? This is an opportunity for joy. That's what this is." Very rarely.
Verse 3:

"For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone.

"Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do." James 1:2-8 (NLT)

Skip down with me to verse 12:

"God blesses those who patiently endure testing," here's the word, "and temptation." Notice that those two are kind of bridled up together. "Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, 'God is tempting me.' God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else."

Now, here's a description or a definition of temptation in verse 13:

"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

"So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession." James 1:12-18 (NLT)

Now, let me unpack that tremendous passage with five things that I just want you to know. Hopefully, you are taking some notes. Number one:

I am going to be tempted

You and I are going to be tempted. Temptation is not optional. It is inevitable. James uses these words when writing about it. Notice that he says when troubles of any kind come your way he does not say if troubles of any kind come your way.

So, the bad news today is that temptation is inevitable. I'd even say it this way. The minute that you decide to take your faith public, expect to be attacked in private. And don't be a fool to think, "Well, not me. I'm the exception."

Right after Jesus was baptized, which was not a baptism for salvation, Jesus didn't need salvation, He's God. But Jesus was baptized for a couple of reasons: for an example to us, to inaugurate His ministry, and, really, for God to publicly identify Him as His Son. Because right after Jesus was baptized the voice of God said, "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus hadn't done anything to displease God in any way. And yet, what happened right after that? He was led out into a desert where He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights— that's like a spiritual discipline. I don't know if any of you have ever done any amount of fasting. I've never fasted for 40 days. That just seems like a super, super spiritual thing to do.

And you would think that God would reward Him for that, and yet, what happened is that in the midst of that thing that Jesus was doing came great temptation in His life.

It's been said that the toughest night of Jesus' life was in the garden the night before His arrest and crucifixion where it said He sweat drops of blood. He was under so much stress and anxiety over what it was that He was about to do. But the most difficult season of Jesus' life would have been the 40 days of prayer and fasting in which He was tempted by Satan.

Last year I got a chance to go to Israel and we visited the desert where they believe that Jesus fasted and was tempted. And this is an image of it behind me taken as we were talking to our guide.

That picture doesn't really do it justice because it was so vast, and it was so empty. I felt so small when I was standing there. I could feel the spiritual weight just being in that place. And I was only there, maybe 45 minutes. Jesus was there 40 days.

The reason why I'm bringing this up is because if the Son of God was not exempt from a season of desert and temptation, then what makes you think you will be? We are going to be tempted.

Now, the good news is that you can absolutely overcome it. But we've got to understand what it is and what it isn't and really what is going on. This brings me to number two:

Temptation is an indication of spiritual war

The war that you are in whether you realize it or not. James talks about or uses the words testing and endurance in verse 3. He talks about divided loyalty between God and

the world in verses 6 and 7. He comes back to the word testing in verse 12. This is all resistance language.

So, the word temptation comes from a couple of words in the original languages. The Hebrew noun *maccá*, which means to test. So, really at the root of the word is testing and then the verb *bāhan*, which means to prove or to try.

The metaphor of metal refining is something that we could use in this. It's kind of like when you heat up metal and then it cools, some of the impurities get heated out of it and it cools into stronger metal. That's the idea here. That's where we get the word temptation.

What is so transformational about your faith is not just a knowledge about God but it is the pursuit of intimacy with God that is always going to come in the midst of adversity. And Satan is going to throw all kinds of tests your way to get you to walk away. It's a struggle. And if it's a struggle, the question is: How do we struggle well?

I just want you to stop for just a minute and I want you to think to yourself: what, right now, if you could maybe narrow it down, what are the one or two vices, addictions, temptations, or pitfalls that you have in your life? I'm not going to ask you to write it down. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand. I'm not asking you to look around the room and go, "Hm. I bet you their vice is..." No. Don't do any of that.

What's yours? Maybe it's something that you have been struggling with for years. Um, maybe it's something that nobody else knows about. Now, just ask yourself this question. Maybe, whatever that thing is, maybe you've been living with it long enough that it's cost you something.

Maybe it cost you your reputation. It cost you a marriage. It cost you a relationship or a job. And even though it cost you something really, really high you're still drawn to it. Now, we're living in Romans 7. Remember that passage last week? The good I want to do I don't do. The evil I hate I keep on doing.

Why is it that this activity, this addiction, this temptation that I know is so destructive and costs me so much, why am I still drawn to it? The reason why is because there is a deception to it and a deception sets into motion a million acts of destruction.

See, the spiritual war that we are all involved in started back in a garden with a lie. And the lie, if you recall the dialogue between the serpent and Eve (and Adam was there too, he was just kind of strangely abdicating and off to the side) but Eve was going head-to-head with the serpent.

Here's the basis of the lie: God is not a good God who can be trusted. That's the basis of the lie. He's holding out on you. He doesn't want you to be like Him. He doesn't want you to experience what He's experienced. Adam and Eve fell for it, and we've been falling for it ever since.

And ever since then we've been forsaking the stream of living water in a futile search to quench our thirst in empty cisterns. So, the lie kind of began with this question. And it's really still the basis of every one of the temptations that we face today. It's simply this:

Did God really say?

It's a twisting, a denying, a distorting of God's word. And if you go back and you read the dialogue of Satan and Eve in the garden, Eve caught the lie first. Good on her. She caught it. She called him out on it, because Satan kind of overplayed his hand, which he normally does.

So, what he said was, "Hey, did God really say you can't eat of any of the trees?" And she was like, "No, no, no. That's not true. He didn't say that. He said just one of the trees. We actually have access to the whole garden. There is just one tree." She caught him in it but then he's relentless, man. He just kept coming back and grinding her down and pounding it down.

And this is why daily Bible reading, what we talked about last week, is so important. It's not this idea of I just need to read my Bible to be a good Christian. It's, "I need to read my Bible so that way I understand what God's word says because there are so many other things that are coming into my mind that are deceptions of the truth.

And if you didn't get a chance to join us on YouVersion and follow along with a daily reading plan, you can actually scan this QR code behind me and you can read the Bible with us as a church.

Traders Point YouVersion

You can jump into our church group on YouVersion. You can jump into the same Bible reading plan. I would encourage you to do that, because Psalm 119 says, "I stored Your word in my heart." And if you recall the rest of that verse it says, "so that I might not sin against You."

The way that Jesus fought off temptation in the desert was not with better logic, it was not because He'd been listening to all of the right podcasts. It was because Jesus used Scripture and Scripture alone to fight off every temptation that Satan threw at Him.

And so, if Jesus needed to quote Scripture to fight off temptation, then you and I need it all the more. And, honestly, right now I feel like I'm talking to somebody. There may be somebody who walked into any of our locations today, you walked in here today and you don't fully know why you are here because it is a challenge for you to be here.

If you were to be really, really honest, it's hard for you to be here, it was hard for you to sing. When the worship leader kind of beckoned everybody to raise their hands you wanted to, but you didn't.



And the reason why isn't because you're doubting God. It's not because you're cynical about all of this. If you were to be really, really honest it's because you walked in here today with 200 pounds of shame on your back of your sins and consistent failures. Those things have muted any fire or passion for the Lord that you might have.

It has honestly been the moments in my life when I've experienced great temptation where I can almost feel the presence of the enemy. Any of you ever been there? I can feel the darkness of the enemy. I can almost feel his breath on my shoulder. Any of you ever had a thought in your life and you are like, "What in the world? Where did that come from?" That's what I'm talking about.

And it has ironically been in those moments when I have felt the presence of an enemy that has reaffirmed my believe in a good God. And right now, he is whispering all kinds of condemning accusations and shame, hurling them at you.

He comes at you hard in gatherings like this, "Who in the world do you think you are? Why are you singing that song? If they only knew who you really are, they would throw you out of here. There would be no grace for you. Why are you raising your hands? Do you know where those hands were last night? Shame on you. I can't believe you would be in there acting all holier than thou."

He's got you in a ground and pound of sin, shame, and accusation. Which is why what I want to say next is going to seem counterintuitive but it's good news and we don't hear it enough. Number three:

Temptation is an indication that you are a child of God

Temptation is an indication that you are God's. You are a child of God. Now, the reason why that was such a mixed response is because you don't feel that. Do you? I've talked to so many people who are like, "You know what? I'm so tormented over temptation. I thought that after I gave my life to Jesus, went to CYI, went to church camp, got baptized, went through Rooted life would be so much easier.

Who in the world told you that, man? The birthmark of every believer is a bullseye. You just invited more warfare into your life. How do you figure? Because you just became a greater threat to the enemy. So many people get defeated just by temptation alone. And I'm going to define it here in a minute.

Temptation alone is not a sin. And I think so many people feel that. They are just like, "Man, I can't believe that I am still struggling with this. Why am I thinking about doing this? I must not be doing this right. God must be mad at me. He still loves me because that's kind of His job. I know He's super annoyed with me right now. When am I going to move beyond this?"



And I just want you to hear this, man. In a season of great temptation, I want you to hear that quite possibly the reason why is because you're a greater threat to the enemy because you are a child of God.

I need to build this out a little bit. I need you to follow me. We've already established that there is a war going on, a spiritual war. And if there is a war, there is always an object of that war that is being fought over. But the object of this spiritual war that you and I are wrapped up in is not over land, it is not over minerals, it is not over resources, it's not over politics. So, what does that leave?

Look in the mirror. You are the object of this war. I'm indebted to Pastor Ben Stuart's observations of this because here's how he frames it. He says, "Jesus in the Scriptures is presented as a lamb and as a shepherd. But that does not mean that He is weak. He is a warrior. And He's also presented as a warrior."

And when Jesus arrived 2,000 years ago, God incarnate, God in the flesh, that was a landed invasion. And here's what He came to do. He didn't just come to teach us some parables and to do some miracles. Those are definitely things that He did, but that was not His primary mission. His primary mission can best be summed up in 1 John, chapter 3, verse 8:

"But the Son of God came," what's the word? To destroy. He came to destroy, not people, not things, but what? "the works of the devil." (NLT)

So, He came, obviously, to build His kingdom and build up and to bring love. But He also came to destroy the works of an enemy.

So, pop quiz. Don't you just love pop quizzes? No, you hate pop quizzes, especially in church. When did Jesus show up in the Scriptures for the very first time? You are so afraid to answer right now. I know.

It wasn't the New Testament. It wasn't Luke, chapter 2. It was Genesis, chapter 3. Jesus shows up for the first time in Genesis 3, right after Adam and Eve fell to temptation God said these words, "The seed of the woman, the Son of Man," that's Jesus, "will crush the head of the serpent." His introduction comes through warfare. Meaning, He will destroy the one and the works of the one who has deceived you.

And when Jesus returns in Revelation, I love how He returns. He is not some Mister Rodgers character wimp. I know I wore my cardigan today. That was not on purpose. He's not coming back in a little cardigan. He's coming back on a white horse with a tattoo on His thigh and a sword coming out of His mouth. And I love how it says... I like to think about it this way...

The claps are just so amazing today.



Listen. When I'm talking about all of this warfare it makes some people uncomfortable. Jesus as a warrior. Jesus as a fighter. Jesus as a destroyer. He wasn't the instigator. Satan picked the fight. Jesus meets it and He will destroy it.

So, He came as a land invasion, and it was a rescue operation. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He came behind enemy lines to rescue those of us who were enslaved to sin. Isaiah, chapter 61, verse 1 says:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me...to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed." (NLT)

Captives and prisoners—that is war talk. And that is why the gospel is such good news. The good news is only good when you understand the bad. The bad is that you are enslaved to your sin. The good news is that you can be set free in the name of Christ Jesus, and you are no longer held captive by your sin and your shame.

We've just got to understand this when it comes to the Christian life. But we will misunderstand it. It was a landed invasion. It was a rescue operation. And it is an ongoing mission—Matthew 28, "Go and make disciples of all nations." That was Jesus' battle cry to us.

I love how C.S. Lewis put it. He said:

"Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage."

I love that. The best defense is to be on offense. When you begin to realize that there is an enemy who is trying to deform the image of God in you, and he's trying to destroy the works of Jesus and His kingdom we come, and we sabotage that work. That's what an ambassador means. That's what salt and light mean. That's what this means: You are no longer a victim. But in Christ Jesus you are a victor.

And Satan knows that he cannot go on a full-frontal attack of Jesus. He can't do it. Jesus has already won the victory on the cross. So, what does he do? He goes after the next best thing. He goes after God's kids. And that's you.

And if you were trying to attack me but you couldn't get to me, the way that you could get to me is through my kids. That would unleash all sorts of righteous and unrighteous anger in me if you went after my kids. That would be a way to get to me if you couldn't touch me.

And it's the same way with God. Satan knows he cannot get to Jesus, so he goes after God's kids. Why? Because His image is all over you. It's stamped all over you. You should actually be alarmed if you don't feel the intensity of spiritual battle. Because that

means, quite possibly, God's image is not upon you, or Satan doesn't see you as a threat.

Number four:

Temptation is a pivotal moment

In that moment of temptation, you just need to realize it is not fun and games. It's not paintball. There is so much hanging in the balance. And James gives the description of what temptation is and what it isn't in verses 14 and 15. He says:

"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions." So, the desire is not sin until it turns into action. "And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death." (NLT)

Let me just state this as clearly as I can. Temptation is not sin. It leads to it. But in and of itself it is not sin. So, here's the process of what happens. An illicit thought comes to your mind because always our actions begin with our thought life.

So, an illicit thought comes into your mind, we've not sinned yet. It stirs our emotions or our affections—I would say the appetites within us as flesh and blood human beings. Still not sin yet. But then it enacts the will. That's when you take a step. And either you can step into rebellion against God, which would be sin, or you can step into obedience with God, which would be following after Him in sanctification. You've got a decision to make.

So, when there is an illicit thought that comes into your mind and stirs your affections and enacts the will, the enacting of the will is when we give birth to sin. What we think about is what we care about. And what we care about we'll eventually run after. So, we've got a decision to make in that moment.

Here's the question, "Okay, Pastor Aaron. Got it. When an illicit thought comes to my mind and stirs my affections, how do I fight it to make sure that I step this way instead of this way?"

This is where I think some good Bible words could be helpful. The first three you may be familiar with, the last two, maybe not so much. Here's the first three. I'll go through these really quickly.

Salvation - saved by grace through faith in God

Salvation just means that you are saved through faith in God. It is the finished work of Jesus on the cross. There is nothing you can do to save yourself. God saves you because of what Jesus has done.

Justification - justified in God's sight and released from the penalty of sin



The second word is justification, which is justified in God's sight and released from the penalty of sin. The way I was taught it when I was growing up is—just as if I had never sinned. So, it's like I'm declared righteous in God's sight because of Jesus.

Here's a good theological word. He imputes His righteousness to me and then He takes on my sin and shame. And He pays the price.

Sanctification - the process of being set apart for special use or purpose (being made holy)

The third word is sanctification, what we talked about last week. This is the process of being set apart for a special use or purpose. Being made holy. The work of transformation. I am being perfected. Less of me and more of Jesus until it is Christ alone, to quote John the Baptist. That is sanctification.

Now, we have those three words. We oftentimes aren't as familiar with these last two words, but these are absolutely critical in declaring war on temptation.

Mortification - actively putting to death sinful impulses and temptations

The first word is this: mortification. And it is defined as this. Actively putting to death sinful impulses and temptations. Romans 8:13. Colossians 3:5. I'm not messing around with it. I am actively going after it and trying to kill those things.

Vivification - actively cultivating spiritual practices that promote spiritual maturity

And then the last word is vivification, which can actively cultivate spiritual practices that promote spiritual maturity. Galatians 5:16-25.

And these two have to go together. So what mortification is, it's a move away from the kinds of things that rob me of intimacy with God. We did a series a few years ago Killing What is Killing You. That's the idea, "I'm going to go after this thing at the root."

But vivification is a move toward thinking and living that which promotes intimacy with God.

For those of you who are more visual learners like me, maybe these visuals behind me will help you. Mortification, if you're gardening is pulling up the weeds by the roots. Vivification is planting seeds for fruit.

And here's where I think so many of us go wrong. Maybe we do the mortification thing, we go after sin, we're going at it, we're trying to kill it, trying to pull it up by its root, but we never plant seeds in its place.

It's kind of like if you wanted to cultivate a garden, you're like, "I don't really know why I don't have any cucumbers or tomatoes or corn, I keep weeding that thing every day." But if you never plant seeds, you're never going to get the flowers or the fruit.

And I would say in declaring war on temptation both of those things have to happen. Every day I've got to be pulling this stuff by the roots and in its place planting seeds for flowers and trees.

You cannot do this in the power of the flesh. If you do this in the power of the flesh, ironically you just give it more power. It's got to be done in the power of the Spirit. 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 22 talks about it. Even though neither of those words are found in this text, it is describing what they are.

"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts." Mortification, "Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace." Vivification. "Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." That's the church. That's the gathering.

And I need you to hear me in this, God is with you, and He is for you, and He is a God of conviction but not condemnation. He is a God not of shame, but a God who invites you to be set free from your sin and shame. Which leads me to the last thing.

Temptation cannot be fought alone

And, ironically, when you do you just give it more power. Some of you have been trying to white knuckle it through will power alone. And you can do that for a while, but it just comes back bigger and badder.

Listen, man. I never want to have to fight a lion, but if I have to fight a lion I want it to be a baby one. I think I could take a baby lion. But if I keep waiting it's just going to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And temptation and the sin that it leads to is like mold in your house. Mold grows in the dark where it can't be seen. You expose it to the light and then it kills the destructive hold that it has on us.

And the best defense is a good offense. I just need you to hear this. Satan is coming for you, especially if you are trying to take this seriously, especially if you are trying to pursue intimacy with God. He hates it. He's going to come at you with everything he's got. The best question you can ask yourself today is, "How does he come at me? How does he come at me?"

In Matthew, chapter 26, Jesus would say this:

"Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!" Matthew 26:41 (NLT)

Isn't that true for you? I want to, which Romans says it all over again, "I want to. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." And just like a good fisherman, Satan knows the bait you'll bite on. By the way, he's been doing this way longer than you've been alive. So, he's super good at it. He knows that if you're not going to bite on a grubby earthworm, you'll just bite on a spinner bait. He'll just switch it up for you. So, you've got to understand how he works.

Sun Tzu in the Art of War says:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles...if you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”

Satan has been watching game film on you since you were born. And he understands your patterns. And he understands your rhythms. He understands your weaknesses. He knows when you get tired, lonely, stressed, and bored, which, by the way, is usually when he attacks. He knows what you're longing for. He knows when you are the most vulnerable. The question is: Do you know those things?

See, Satan has been watching game film on you, but the good news is that you can watch a little game film on him too, because he's really good at what he does but he only has one or two tricks. When you really begin to understand that God is a good Dad who can be trusted, then you begin to realize that those things that he is trying to lure you away with are empty cisterns, not living water. How many times are you going to walk away with a mouthful of sand before you realize that God wants to give you water.

Here's my favorite definition of sin: Sin is attempting to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. That's how he gets you. So, you're like, “What do you mean?” Well, how about this? “I want to feel valued, respected, and loved.” Legitimate needs. All of us want that. We try to cut God out of that process and meet that legitimate need in an illegitimate way, it turns into pride.

“I want to provide for and give enough to my family.” Legitimate need. Cut God out of the process, He's not a good Dad who can be trusted, it turns into greed.

“I want to experience the closeness and gratification of physical intimacy.” That's a good, good gift that God created and gave to us, but I don't believe that God has the best for me, so it becomes lust.

God has promised all of those things in a way that glorifies Him, that benefit you, and that contribute to human flourishing. It's just that we don't believe it. So, here's how you fight appetites within you, you get a better vision. You say, “No.” That frees you up to a better, “Yes.”

Here's how temptation works. It starts in your mind which elicits affection in the heart, which then enables the will, and you reverse that to fight it. Here's what I mean. You fill your head with the knowledge of God's word, the Bible, which then stirs your affections for God in worship, not just singing, but in lifestyle. And then you run hard after God in every area of your life. And you walk in step with the Spirit. Galatians, chapter 5.

The Holy Spirit is the X factor in helping you declare war on temptation. You know the word for the Holy Spirit is paraclete, the word paraclete means helper. He's your helper. And I think, oftentimes, when it comes to temptation, we're so ashamed that we just think the Holy Spirit posture toward us is [arms crossed in front of chest, making

disgusting faces], “I can’t believe you’re attracted to that. I can’t believe you want to do that. That is so gross.”

That is not the Holy Spirit’s posture. The Holy Spirit’s posture toward you is this [leaning down arms ready to catch you] “Oh, man. Just say the word, man. I’m so ready. I’m at the ready.”

For those of you wrestling fans, it’s like tag team wrestling. You are in the ring, down on the ground in a choke hold, “I think I got it.” You don’t got it. “Just tag my hand.” “No man, there’s one more round.”

Can I give you this visual? Some of you have been like, “What in the world is this doing up here?” [bench press machine]. [Aaron positions himself on the bench to lift weights] So, if I could just give you this one visual. If you’re lifting weights and you’re bench pressing, it’s important that you have a spotter. So, everybody say hello to the Holy Spirit. [tongue and check for his spotter]

You can get up underneath the bar and you’re lifting some weights. You’re kind of designed to do this. You know? So, you’re banging out some reps. Life is hard, we’re all about transformation, we’re trying to...

Oh, come on, I know those looks. Come on.

Now, here’s the thing. You’re eventually going to start getting fatigued. You’re like, “Alright, man. It’s getting a little wobbly, but I think I’ve got it.” And you’re going to get down to this [the bar almost on your chest]. Now, this right here, when you start to go up again and you’ve got nothing left, that’s a scary place to be. And by the way, I’m feeling super vulnerable right now.

You’ve got a decision to make. Am I going to keep going on my own power? Any of you done one of these? [wobbling the bar back and forth] Well, maybe I can kind of drop it this way. As you’re like, “Ughhhh,” you’re like in the hole and you’re trying to get it. And it’s like crushing you.

Here’s the thing. A spotter only does you good when you what? Ask for help. So, here’s what you do: Help. Help. Help. [spotter takes the weight and puts it back on the rack] Okay, I had about 80 percent of that still. Give the Holy Spirit a hand. The Holy Spirit is walking off like a boss.

Hey, I just want you to just have that image in your head the next time you’re in a moment of intense spiritual battle and temptation. Don’t mess around with it. Swallow your pride, “Help.” It’s what He’s here for.

1 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 12 says:

“If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful.” Here’s a promise. “He



will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted," not if "he will show you a way out so that you can endure." (NLT)

There is always a way out. There is always an escape hatch. And then when you go through it, you're strengthened for the fight. So, the great news in this is every time you rely upon the Holy Spirit, every time you tag Him in, every time you reach for help, and He gives it to you, you get strengthened and you grow a little bit more like Jesus.

Here's the bad side of this. Every time you refuse then the quieter and the softer His voice gets to the point that you no longer hear from Him anymore. He is a gentleman. He will not force His way into your life. He only comes when invited.

C.S. Lewis would say it this way:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"

If you are here right now, I don't know what your experience is. I've felt a bit of heaviness in all three services, and I think that maybe part of the reason is because there is a lot of content here. I also think it's heavy. It's a heavy subject. Every single one of us is facing something.

And I want you to know right now that there is a God who wants you to cry out for help. And some of you, right now, are caught up in temptation, addictions, and patterns of behavior that are, quite honestly, a lot stronger than you. But the good news of the gospel is that the stronger One has come if you would just call upon Him and His help and His power.

The Bible says that if we would confess and repent of our sins (James, chapter 5) we can find healing. So, what that means is, if I confess my sin to God I get salvation, if I confess my sin to someone else I find healing and release.

Here's what I want to ask you to do here in just a moment. We're just going to give you an opportunity to respond as we sing and even immediately after the service. There will be some prayer counselors around the room.

I just want you to go up to one of them and just simply say this, "I need to be released from my struggle with _____." Just fill in the blank. It can just be a single word. You don't need to go into details. You don't need to give any of the grizzly facts about it.

They are not going to judge you. They are not going to shame you. They are not going to report you, "I just need to confess my sin about _____." What they are going to do is they are going to pray over you so that you might be released.

Can I just say this? The response has been pretty slow today. I get it. But I know that there is a tremendous weight that is going to be holding so many of us back. And the



minute that you can begin to get it exposed to the light, God can do a transformational work in your life.

Let me just end with this quote. Saint Augustine was one of the most prolific thinkers in church history. He wrote some of the most amazing things about the church of God. What you may not know about Saint Augustine is that he was a sex addict for so many years of his life. And it tore him up. And he wrote this one time. He said:

How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys I once so feared to lose. You drove them from me, you who are the true sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place. You who are sweeter than all pleasure.

If today you are brave enough and ready to declare war on temptation in your life would you just please stand to your feet at all of our locations all around the room. This is not a firing squad. We're not asking you to stand to shoot at you. We're asking you stand to identify with the family of God to say, "We want to declare war on temptation." And as we sing, would you come and confess?

Father, we come to you right now and we pray that Your Holy Spirit would be our Helper and be leaned in and at the ready to help us in our time of need so that we can be strengthened to endure and run the race set like flint. We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.

