

*Understanding*

# *Temptation*

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During the month of July 2006 Pastor Mark Ballard led the congregation of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church through a four-week study on temptation. The contents of this booklet are based upon the material presented during that study. Our prayer is that the Lord will use this material in your life to enable you to better deal with temptation.

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## UNDERSTANDING TEMPTATION

He taped up the last box then took a long look around the large executive office suite. Shaking his head he sat down in his plush executive chair one last time. As he felt his body sink into the comfort of the thick genuine leather, he felt a tear slowly make its way down the side of his cheek. “What have I done? How am I going to tell Julie? What will I say to the class I teach at church? How about Pastor Mike? My kids, how will I explain this to them? How in the world did I get myself into this mess any way?”

Yesterday it seemed that Ryan Smith was on top of the world. Today it seemed as though his life was over. Yesterday he enjoyed the luxurious life of a senior executive in the high tech industry. Today he was jobless. Now he had to face his wife, his kids, his church and his neighbors to explain why his company fired him. There could even be legal charges brought against him, but the company lawyer seemed to think it wouldn't result in jail time.

Ryan thought to himself, “How did I get here?” Then he remembered. It all started with an email. One morning a few years back, shortly after arriving in his office Ryan checked his email. One of “those” emails was sitting in his inbox. The subject line simply read “Beautiful Pics Just For You.” These types of emails made through the filtering system on the company server from time to time, but Ryan always simply hit “delete.” This time was different. Something drew him to open the email. That one view started the whole thing. The picture so captivated his attention that he clicked on

the link and went to a website where he spent the next 30 minutes viewing images that would forever be engraved on his mind.

That would have been bad enough but it was only the beginning. Soon Ryan built a pattern of viewing pornography from his work computer. Before long it didn't seem he could get enough. He knew it was wrong but the temptations kept getting stronger and his ability to resist kept getting weaker. He would wake up and tell himself, "Today will be different. This is wrong. Maybe I should talk to someone about this? No, I can handle it. I am going to stop!" Yet, as he sat behind that large mahogany desk he soon turned once again to hard-core pornography.

Very quickly Ryan's addiction began to impact other areas of his life. He just didn't get much out of Church anymore, but he had to keep going. If he gave up his Sunday School teaching assignment everyone would wonder why and he would have to come clean. His family was certainly impacted by all this. Julie, his faithful wife of 25 years, couldn't seem to figure out what was wrong but they were becoming more estranged everyday. Ryan hardly talked with the kids anymore. He seemed to spend more and more time down at the office.

Eventually it began to impact the work environment as well. Ryan slowly changed the way he viewed people at work. Before long he found himself thinking about the ladies in the office in inappropriate ways. It was almost like he was living out the pictures he saw on the computer screen in his mind. Eventually Ryan caught himself saying things to co-workers that no one would have ever thought would come from his mouth. The last few years he had been sliding down a long winding slide that ended this

morning with him being fired for sexual misconduct at work. Now what? If only...if only he never opened that first email....if only he had gotten help...if only....<sup>1</sup>

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The above story is all too common today. The names and circumstances may be different but dabbling with temptation always ends worse than we ever imagine. Years ago I heard a preacher say, “Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, sin does not happen in a vacuum. It always begins with temptation. Usually a series of “small temptations” lead to more and larger temptations, which lead to sin and devastation.

The purpose of this booklet is to help us gain a Biblical understanding of temptation in order that we will be better prepared to deal with the temptations faced in daily life. Though we will consider other passages much of our study will focus on the following temptation texts: Genesis 3, Matthew 4:1-11, James 1:12-18 and 1John 2:15-17. We will focus our attention on four specific themes. First we will consider The Source of Temptation. Next we will discuss The System of Temptation. We will then examine The Seriousness of Temptation. Finally attention will be given to The Smashing of Temptation.

### **The Source Of Temptation**

“Don’t tempt me!” Often when we think of the source of temptation other people come to mind. Indeed, Americans are used to blaming other people for our sinful

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this story is fiction. Though it represents bits and pieces of many real life situations I have heard of over the years it is no now way to be construed as an actual event.

<sup>2</sup> Original author unknown

choices. Certainly sometimes other people do place temptations in front of us, which further entice us to sin. However, the Bible reveals that there are three basic sources from which temptation springs. The first temptations recorded in Scripture come from Satan himself. As we study the Bible we learn that there is a world System that brings temptation into our lives as well. In addition to these two sources the Bible reveals that our biggest struggle comes from the temptations brought about by Self. Lets take a look at each of these.

### Satan

The first temptation recorded in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:1-5. This familiar story reveals two things about Satan as a source of temptation. First, we learn that He tempts us through **Doubt**. In verse 1 Satan begins to cast doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve by asking, “*Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’*” This simple little question implies that maybe the first couple misunderstood God’s instruction. Maybe they misunderstood His intent. Maybe God was trying to keep them from something good. All sorts of doubts could enter the mind as Adam and Eve contemplated the question posed by Satan.

The Genesis text also reveals that the enemy not only used doubt to bring temptation but he also used out right **Deceit**. In verses 4-5 we learn that Satan contradicted God’s Word by saying, “*You will not surely die.*” He then goes on to suggest that if they eat of the fruit they will become like God, implying the motivation for God’s instruction was misplaced jealousy.

Satan won a battle in Genesis 3 that plunged mankind into a life of sin. Thousands of years later we again find the enemy on the scene performing his work of temptation. In Matthew 4:1-11 we find Satan attempting to destroy God's plan of Redemption by tempting the Second Adam – Jesus. In this encounter we learn that Satan tempts as a slanderer and a seducer. In verse 1 Satan is identified by the title “devil.” The Greek word is *diabolo* (*diabolos*) meaning, “slanderer” or “false accuser.” Satan uses the technique of **Slander** to further his temptations.

The enemy is a powerful **Seducer**. He came to Jesus when He was physically weak and attempted to seduce him physically, mentally, and emotionally. The three temptations themselves will be examined later but for now take a moment to read over the text noticing the seduction the devil employs.

In the 1970's Flip Wilson built a career with the phrase, “The devil made me do it.” From that seemingly harmless poking fun of Satan, people all over this country began to discount the enemy and his powerful means of temptation. Too many folks tend to picture the enemy with horns, wearing a red suit and carrying a pitchfork. We fail to realize that he is a slanderous deceiver who attacks us with subtle doubt and disguised seduction. Don't be deceived, “*your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

## System of the World

Satan is not the only source of temptation. The Bible reveals a world system that serves as a source of temptation for all of mankind. Notice the discussion of 1John 2:15-17. These three verses can be summarized with three words. First we have a **Command**, then we are exposed to the **Cause** behind the command and finally a **Conclusion** is expressed.

John had a particular **Command** to deliver to the first century believers and the command has direct application to believers today. In verse 15 we read, “***Do not love the world or the things in the world.***” Within context it is clear that the Lord is not telling us that we cannot enjoy the beauty of His creation. However, He is warning us of a world system that leads us down the path of sin.

This command is serious business. In the later part of verse 15 John hurries to point out the **Cause** of the command. “***If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.***” The reality of the world system is that it is diametrically opposed to the Father. We cannot love the Father and the world system at the same time. Therefore we must understand that the world system is working to draw us away from our relationship with the Lord. The system the world uses is described in verse 16, which we will examine in detail later in this study. For now it is important to understand that this system is working to tempt us away from God and His ways.

The **Conclusion** of the matter is revealed in verse 17 and is summed up in a contrast. “***The world is passing away, and its lust, but he who does the will of God abides forever.***” By revealing the end result of giving into the temptations of the world



system, John desires to motivate us to take temptation seriously and make the right choices in our daily life.

You do not have to look far today to see the system of the world at work. On television, the Internet, radio, billboards, etc., we are constantly faced with the temptations of the world. One can hardly drive down the street, walk into a convenience store or check email without being faced with the temptations the world throws at us. Remember John's Conclusion! "*The world is passing away.*"

### Self

Most believers today readily acknowledge the temptations of the world system. However it hits us like a lead balloon to hear someone suggest that we ourselves are a source of temptation. As mentioned in the introduction to this booklet we live in a society of blame. We look for an opportunity to blame others for personal sin. Yet in the book of James we learn that in reality we have no one to blame but ourselves.

To understand what James wants us to learn about temptation we must begin in the first chapter. In 1:12-18 we find that he exposes The **Lie**, the **Lust** and the **Loss** of temptation. Many people believe the **Lie** that says temptation comes from God. Verse 13 clearly states, "*God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*" So then from where does temptation come? James emphasis is important to note.

*"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."*<sup>4</sup> In other words, we cannot blame God for our temptations; rather it is our own **Lusts** that draw us away from following God. Our own desires are the biggest source of

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<sup>4</sup> James 1:14

temptation we will ever face. It is within our nature to have what we want and to have it when we want it.

In verse 15 James quickly warns of the **Loss** we experience when we pursue our own lustful desires. *“Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”* When we give in to our lustful desires of the self we find ourselves fully engulfed in sinful behavior. Sin brings death. Sin brought spiritual death to Adam and Eve immediately. Sin brought physical death into the world. Sin made it necessary for Christ to die if men were to be redeemed. Sin brings death. Therefore we must learn to hate sin and view it as our mortal enemy.

In chapter 4 James further exposes the reality of Self as a source of temptation. In the first 6 verses of the chapter he speaks of two issues: the **Fight** and the **Flesh**. We all know fights are to be avoided; yet the reality is they happen, even in churches. James wrote to the early church about fights. He spoke of fights within the church but he also spoke of the fights that take place within the life of each individual believer. In verse 1 he asks the question where these fights come from.

In verses 2-6 James revealed an unexpected answer. When a fight happens we often focus attention on who started it. Indeed, when I was growing up that was the most crucial question. This often led to blame games that tried to determine who was at fault. However James reveals the true source of our fights. He says it is our self. We fight and war because we desire and cannot attain. We need no longer look for someone to blame. The blame is our own Self.

## **The System of Temptation**

At 8:50 am on September 11, 2001 my wife, another member of our congregation and myself were sitting on a plane, heading down the runway, gaining speed every minute. We were leaving Manchester, NH on our way to Detroit, MI and then on to China with a group of folks from LifeWay Christian Resources. About half way down the runway the plane began slowing down. We came to a complete stop and then slowly moved over to the edge of the runway. After several minutes the pilot came on and told us that there was trouble in Boston airspace and it could be terrorist related. Within a short time we found ourselves back in the terminal waiting to see what would happen. As we watched the television monitor we saw the second plane hit the World Trade Center. Soon we were told to go home because the US government had shut down all flights in the United States.

As the events of the day began to unfold no one really knew what was happening. However, soon our government agencies learned the tactic of our enemies and acted to protect us from further destruction. I have often wondered if our plane was supposed to be used in the attacks. Though I will never know, it is clear is that by learning the tactics of the enemy our nation was spared more attacks on that unforgettable day. Since that time our nation has focused much effort on learning the tactics of our enemies before they hit us. Thus numerous attacks have been avoided both at home and abroad.

In the same way, we will be better equipped to face the attacks of temptation if we understand the tactics used in the temptation process. The tactics are clearly stated in 1John 2 and clearly demonstrated in Genesis 3 and Matthew 4. The same system of

temptation is used whether the source of that temptation is Satan, the world's System or Self.

#### The System Was Exposed In John's Epistle

In 1 John 2:16 we read, "***For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.***" Notice the three tactics John reveals. 1. The Lust of the Flesh, 2. The Lust of the Eyes, 3. The Pride of Life. These three tactics form the system of temptation we face. All temptation appeals to one, two and sometimes all three of these areas of life. In fact, every temptation you face can be understood in light of these three tactics.

#### The System Was Experienced In The Temptation Of The First Adam

Take another look at Genesis 3:6. Satan used the system of temptation exposed by John in the Garden. Notice the connection: The Lust of the Flesh – "***good for food.***" The Lust of the Eyes – "***pleasant to the eyes.***" The Pride of Life – "***desirable to make one wise.***" Satan appealed to Eve and to Adam who was "***with her***"<sup>5</sup> through the three-fold system of temptation revealed in John's Epistle.

#### The System Was Experienced In The Temptation Of The Second Adam

Matthew 4:1-11 reveals that after thousands of years the enemy's tactics remained the same. When the devil confronted Jesus with temptation he did so following the exact same three-fold system he used in the Garden of Eden. In verses 2-3 Satan tempted Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:6

using the tactic of the **Lust of the Flesh**. Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and as you can imagine He was hungry. Satan's first temptation appealed to Jesus' flesh.

The second temptation Jesus faced in this encounter followed the tactic of appealing to the **Pride of Life**. In verses 5-6 the devil tried to get Jesus to "prove" that He was the Son of God. It was an appeal to pride.

The third temptation follows the tactic of appealing to the **Lust of the Eyes**. The enemy showed Jesus "*the kingdoms of the world*" and offered them to Him if He would simply bow down to the devil and worship.

In Hebrews 4:14-16 we are told that our High Priest (Jesus) has been tempted "*in all points like as we are.*" Now Jesus was not tempted to go on the Internet and view sinful pictures since the Internet did not exist 2000 years ago. However, Jesus Was tempted "*in all points*" that we face today. He was tempted using the same tactics and the same system of temptation that you and I face every day. Yet, He was without sin. Therefore, He could pay the price and serve as our Substitutionary Sacrifice, taking the penalty for our sin upon Himself, rising again, defeating sin and death so that all who believe on Him may be saved from the punishment, the power and eventually the presence of sin.

Now that you know the tactics of the temptation system be on the lookout. Get ready! Knowing the system is a step in the right direction. It will move you closer to gaining the victory over temptation in your daily life.

## The Seriousness of Temptation

Earlier we mentioned the Flip Wilson way of understanding sin and temptation. His popular phrase (“the devil made me do it”) demonstrates the fact that many people do not take temptation seriously today. In fact, the subject of temptation is often the source material of modern comedians. However the reality is, temptation is serious business. Temptation that is acted upon does at least three critical things. First, Temptation Endangers Your Relationship With The Savior. Second, Temptation Endangers Your Relationship With The Saints & Others. Third, Temptation Endangers Your Self.

### Temptation Endangers Your Relationship With The Savior

In Genesis 3:7-8 we learn that Adam and Eve’s relationship with the Lord was immediately impacted by giving in to temptation. Verse 7 tells us they “**made themselves coverings.**” Prior to this Adam and Eve lived in the Garden naked and were not ashamed. Now that sin entered the picture they immediately began trying to hide from God by making coverings for themselves. In verse 8 we are told that when God came to visit they “*hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.*” Giving in to temptation negatively impacted their relationship with God.

In James 4:4-6 we find this principle reinforced once again. James tells us that by becoming friends with the world we become the enemies of God. Furthermore he quotes Proverbs 3:34, which says, “*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*”

Earlier we read in 1John 2:15, “*If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” All three of these passages clearly establish the fact that when we yield to temptation our relationship with the Lord is impacted. Temptation is serious business.

## Temptation Endangers Your Relationship With The Saints & Others

Temptation not only endangers our relationship with the Savior but it also endangers our relationship with others. In the Bible the term “saints” is used to describe all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. When we give in to temptation our relationship with other believers is impacted. In fact, our relationship with everyone around us is impacted when we choose to sin.

We see this principle discussed in 1 John 1:5-7. If we are “*walking in the light*” then not only is our relationship to God what it ought to be, but our relationship with other believers is positively impacted as well. In fact, in verse 7 John writes, “*If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.*” So when we resist temptation and we walk with God we can enjoy the partnership with other believers that is only found within His Family.

Remember what we read in James 4:1-3? If we give into the temptations we face the result is wars and fights. When we give into temptation we are more susceptible to fighting with other believers. This is true within the home as well as within the church.

Lets also reconsider Genesis 3. Look at verses 9-13. Adam blames two people for his giving in to temptation. First, he blamed Eve, “*the Woman.*” He also blamed God, “*the Woman You gave me.*” Eve quickly turns and looks to the snake passing on the blame. Surely if there had been anyone else nearby, the serpent would have passed the blame as well. The point here is that not only was Adam and Eve’s relationship with God impacted but their relationship with each other was strained as well.

When I do pre-marital counseling I often demonstrate this truth through an illustration shown to my wife and I by our pastor during our pre-marital counseling. Draw a triangle, and then write God at the top. Now write in your name on one side at the bottom of the triangle and the name of another believer on the other side at the bottom of the triangle. Notice that as you each get closer to the Lord, you also get closer to each other. In the same manner, the further you get away from God, the further you get away from one another. Think about it! When you sin those you care about the most are hurt the most. Temptation is serious!

#### Temptation Endangers Your Self

Temptation endangers not only your relationship with God and others but it also endangers Your Self. In Genesis 3:14-19 we find that the Lord deals out punishment to each of the characters in the narrative of the Fall. Adam would now experience work not simply as a joyous activity but it would be burdensome. Eve would not simply experience the joy of being a mother but she would give birth with extreme anguish and pain. Even the serpent received his own punishment. Adam and Eve faced the consequences of their sin and so do we.

We noted earlier that James describes the downward spiral of giving in to temptation in chapter 1. In verse 15 we learn that sin leads to death. So often the world makes light of sin yet the Bible is clear. Sin has dire consequences. These consequences are reiterated in 1John 2:17 where we are told both the world and its lusts are passing away. This reality is illustrated in David's life.



In Psalm 32 David describes what it was like after his sin with Bathsheba. Notice his descriptive words. *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah”*<sup>6</sup> Remember the words of the preacher mentioned earlier in this booklet? “Sin will take you farther than you want to go. It will keep you longer than you want to stay. It will cost you more than you want to pay.”<sup>7</sup> Temptation is serious!

### **The Smashing of Temptation**

Thus far we have sought to understand the Source, the System and the Seriousness of temptation. The fact is we can be familiar with all three of these truths and yet find ourselves continually giving in to the temptations that draw us away from the Lord. Therefore this booklet would not be complete without attempting to gain a Biblical understanding of how to **SMASH** Temptation. In order to gain consistent victory over temptation you need to Realize Your Standing, Rely On The Spirit and Respond With Scripture.

#### Realize Your Standing

In Ephesians 2:1-7 the Apostle Paul describes the standing that you have before God as a believer. He speaks both of what we were and who we are. In verse 1 he says we *“were dead in trespasses and sins.”* In verse 2 he proclaims we were once *“sons of disobedience.”* In verse 3 the Apostle states that we were once, *“children of wrath.”* Let’s face it our past is not pretty. However Paul also describes our present. He says we

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<sup>6</sup> Psalms 32:3-4

<sup>7</sup> Original author unknown

have been “*made alive*”<sup>8</sup> He further states in verse 6 that God has, “*raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” What a contrast between what we were and who we are in Christ Jesus!

In Romans 6:11-14 Paul tells us that we are to “*reckon*” ourselves “*dead to sin and alive to God.*” Furthermore he goes on to demonstrate that this reckoning is key to our ability to avoid presenting ourselves or our members for unrighteousness and to enable us to present ourselves and our members to God as His instruments. The word here translated as “reckon” is the Greek word, λογίζομαι (logidzomai) which is an accounting term. It means to consider, account it as so or to believe. Furthermore the verb is here found in the present imperative tense which emphasizes a continual action. Thus we are to continually consider ourselves as those who are “*dead to sin and alive to God.*” If we are to overcome temptation we must continually recognize our standing before God.

### Rely On The Spirit

Knowing our standing before God is only the first step in SMASHING temptation. Though our position before God is right we must take further steps for our practice to match our position. Never be fooled into thinking that you are now able to handle temptation on your own. Rather you are to Rely on the Spirit.

In Galatians 5:16 Scripture commands, “*Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*” This verse comes at the beginning of a paragraph where we find a contrast between living in the flesh and living in the Spirit. The passage clearly serves as a test for you and me. Take a few minutes to review verses 16-26. Notice that

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:5

if you are producing the works of the flesh, then you can be sure that you are not walking in the Spirit. If however, you are walking in the Spirit, then HE produces HIS Fruit in and through you.

The last three chapters of the book of Ephesians teach us how we should live in light of the doctrinal truths revealed in the first three chapters. The key to experiencing these practical realities in your life is found in chapter 5. Verse 18 says, “***And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.***” Once again we see that the key to living the Christian life effectively comes from the work of the Spirit. Ultimately this happens as moment by moment we reckon ourselves dead to sin and submit ourselves and our members to God, as the ones Jesus has made alive from the dead.<sup>9</sup>

Several years ago I had the privilege of hearing the late Dr. Adrian Rogers preach a chapel message at the Criswell College in Dallas, TX. He was discussing the believer’s need to rely on the Spirit. He took off his suit jacket and set it on the pulpit in front of him. He stepped back and commanded the suit jacket to raise its arm. As he started nothing happened. He waited a few seconds and tried again. Still nothing happened. Then he told the jacket to wave at the audience. Again - nothing. Finally he put the jacket back on and said, “Jacket, raise your arm. Immediately the arm lifted. Then he said, “Jacket, wave at the congregation.” The jacket began to wave. The point was clear. The jacket could do nothing unless it was filled with the upper body of Dr. Rogers. The same is true of you and me. We cannot resist temptation in our own strength. If however, we walk in the Spirit, He resists temptation through us.

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:11-14

## Respond With Scripture

Once we realize our standing and as we rely on the Spirit, we should arm ourselves to be able to respond with Scripture. This truth became very real to me in another chapel service at the Criswell College in Dallas, TX. Pastor Fred Wolf brought the message. He expounded on 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and then led us to consider Jesus' desert temptation.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 teaches us that the weapons of our warfare are powerful. They can be used to "*cast down vain imaginations.*" Pastor Wolf rightfully stated that every battle with temptation begins as a battle for the mind. He described the mind as an airport and temptation, indeed all thoughts, as planes requesting permission to land. He stated that those who have trusted Christ as Savior have become air traffic controllers. Thus, in Christ we have the ability to allow planes to land and to decide which ones we refuse the right of landing. He said we should refuse thoughts of temptation the right to land. As for the thoughts that should be allowed to land, the preacher pointed us to Jesus' example.

Look again at Matthew 4:1-11. Notice that every time a tempting thought came, Jesus replaced it with Scripture. To each tactic of the enemy Jesus responded by focusing attention on the truth of God's Word. Satan attempted to misuse Scripture and take it out of context. Jesus simply continued to replace the tempting thoughts with the truth of God's Word. If Jesus used Scripture to combat temptation, we certainly should.

Pastor Wolfe concluded by teaching the students a three-step method of dealing with temptation. He called it the 3 R's. This method so impacted my life that I have

shared it countless times in private counseling as well as in public communication. Here it is:

**REFUSE**

**REPLACE**

**REQUEST**

When a temptation comes, refuse the thought, replace it with a Scripture verse, then request God's help remembering your standing in Christ and relying on His Spirit to empower you to SMASH temptation.

### **Conclusion**

Remember Ryan Smith? Just think how his life might have been different if he understood temptation. What if he would have understood the source, the system, the seriousness and most importantly the SMASHING of temptation?

What is your story? How do you deal with temptation? If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior You Can Smash it in Christ! Begin applying the principles learned in this booklet today! Remember the "3 R's."

**REFUSE!**

**REPLACE!**

**REQUEST!**