

The title of this morning's sermon is "*Three Ways to Resist Temptation.*"ⁱ

If you're new to joining us, last week we started looking at Proverbs 7, which is the chapter with the harlot who lures the foolish young man.

The week before that, I said I would preach a sermon addressing young men, and they surprised me by sitting up front. I hoped the young men would sit up front again this week, which they did.

Young men, I wanted to share something from last week with you. Because last week's sermon was addressed to you, people could have told me, "It's nice you preach to the young men, but I will be glad when it's over and you get back to preaching to all of us."

Instead, it was the opposite. Many people were glad the sermon was preached to you. As more people shared that with me, guess what it made me think?

It made me think that you're loved! You have a church family that cares about each of you and the battle you're fighting. As discussed last week, they know you're in the trenches and on the front lines. They are burdened for you, and they want to see you succeed.

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I think you get a breather next week, because we will reach the verses about the harlot which have more application for young women in the church. Just as the young men in the congregation can learn what not to do from the foolish young man, the young women in the congregation can learn what not to do from the harlot.

Maybe we should leave the front pews open for them.

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With that, I want you to think about something:

God is a visual teacher. He wants us to have pictures in our minds. Think of how God had prophets use object lessons in the Old Testament so the people had images of the truths being preached.

Think of the poetic language used throughout the Bible, such as:

Exodus 19:4 I bore you on eagles' wings.

God didn't literally carry Israel with eagles, but this creates wonderful imagery of him swooping in to save his people from Egypt.

Psalms 6:6 Every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.

David wasn't literally lying on a soggy bed of tears, but it creates the imagery of his sleeplessness and sorrow.

Think of the way Jesus taught in parables, causing people to picture:

- A sower sowing seed
- A friend coming in the middle of the night
- A king throwing a wedding for his son
- A greedy farmer who kept building barns for his crops.

This creates pictures in our minds that help us understand spiritual truths more easily.

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I'm sharing this with you because God does the same thing in Proverbs 7. He personifies temptation as a harlot.

This chapter gives us three things:

First, the harlot gives us one of the greatest pictures of temptation in Scripture. Because temptation can be so strong, God wants us to have an equally strong picture of how terrible it is. The harlot pursues the young man the way temptation pursues us.

Second, the foolish young man gives us one of the greatest pictures of the foolishness of giving in to temptation. The young man should have resisted the harlot like we should resist temptation.

Third, the end of the chapter gives us one of the most dramatic pictures of the danger of giving in to temptation. The harlot killed the young man like sin kills us.

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You might even remember from last week's sermon:

James 1:14 Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

“When he is lured” is one word in Greek, *exelkō*, which is a metaphor for the seduction of a harlot. In other words, when James wants to describe temptation enticing us, he uses the imagery of a harlot. We get to see what that looks like in this chapter.

Jerry White said, *“What is temptation? Some synonyms for ‘tempt’ are: allure, attract, entice, seduce, and tantalize. Each word generates an emotional picture. We are allured by the temptation. We are attracted to it, enticed by it, seduced by its seeming pleasure, tantalized by the fantasy of what it would be like.”*

If you didn't know better, you would think Jerry is describing a harlot enticing someone versus temptation enticing us.

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Last point before we jump into the verses:

Because we are dealing with a harlot, there's lots of application for young men, but because the harlot personifies temptation, and we all face temptation, there is application for all of us. That's why the sermon title is “Three Ways to Resist Temptation” versus “Three Ways for Young Men to Resist Harlots.”

So, following these sermons, I hope that when we are tempted, all of us, myself included, have the strong, sobering imagery from this chapter to help us resist.

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With that in mind, look at Proverbs 7:6 to review briefly:

Proverbs 7:6 For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, 7 and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, A YOUNG MAN lacking sense,

The young man is “Simple” and “Lacking sense,” which are both ways of saying he is foolish and lacking wisdom. He shows us what not to do.

Look how his foolishness begins:

Proverbs 7:8 passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house

She has a “corner” because harlots have corners. For most of today's harlots, it is a corner of the Internet.

“Her house” is where she lures her victims. This is the website she wants young men to click on.

Proverbs 7:9 in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.

The young man will end up with this harlot, and the first important thing I want you to notice is his sin didn't "just happen." He wasn't walking along, tripped and fell, and suddenly found himself with a harlot.

He took numerous steps to sin:

1. First, he went to her corner.
2. Second, he took the road to her house.
3. Third, he did this at night when he thought nobody would see him.

Warren Wiersbe wrote:

"During more than forty years of ministry, I've listened to many sad stories from people who have indulged in sexual sin and suffered greatly; in almost every instance, the people DELIBERATELY PUT THEMSELVES INTO THE PLACE OF TEMPTATION AND DANGER."

What does Warren Wiersbe mean?

He means these people took steps toward sin.

And this brings us to lesson one:

Lesson One: To resist temptation (Part One) don't take the first step.

Before discussing the steps to sin, let me back up and get you to think about something.

I've shared before that [all sins are NOT the same](#). Here are just a few ways sins are presented differently in Scripture:

- In the Old Testament, some sins are called abominations.
- Numerous Old Testament verses describe murder as a sin that pollutes the land, and the victim's blood calls out for vengeance.
- Proverbs 6 lists seven sins that God hates. We know God hates all sins, but apparently, he hates these sins more than others.
- In Matthew 11 and Luke 10, Jesus said some sins merit worse punishments than others.
- First Corinthians 6 describes sexual sin as a sin against our bodies.
- Romans 1 describes homosexuality as a sin that is unnatural and against nature.
- Hebrews 12 says bitterness is a sin that defiles many.

Another way some sins don't require any steps. For example:

- You get cut off in traffic, and you get angry.
- Someone confronts you and you're embarrassed so you lie.
- You see someone with something you want, and you covet it.

These are sins, but they don't require steps. Only a few moments earlier, we had no idea we would be tempted. Our flesh flared up, we gave in, and we sinned.

We were living our lives, and unforeseen circumstances exposed our weakness. If you're like me, when this happens, you look back and say, "Okay, I'm not as spiritually mature, or disciplined, as I like to think that I am."

But other sins require taking steps in a sinful direction. To use biblical language, they involve devising or scheming:

- Proverbs 6:18 describes "A heart that devises wicked plans."
- Psalm 21:1 describes people who "Plan evil" and "Devise mischief."
- Micah 2:1 describes "Those who devise wickedness."

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Think about David’s adultery with Bathsheba and all the steps involved. You don’t have to turn there. Let me quickly read through the account and share some thoughts:

2 Samuel 11:2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.

We don’t know whether David expected to see Bathsheba or it was purely accidental, so there’s no reason to speculate. I will give him the benefit of the doubt and say this wasn’t a step toward sin.

Listen to these two quotes:

Billy Graham said, *“The first look is free. It’s the second look that kills you.”*

As I told you last week, we live in a sexualized culture that seems designed to ruin men. We would have to lock ourselves in our closets to make sure we never saw any immodestly dressed women.

And I think that’s what Billy Graham meant when he said, “The first look is free.” We didn’t try to see that scandalous billboard. We just happened to be driving down the road.

We get in trouble when we take a second look.

Job 31:1 I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I GAZE at a virgin?

Job meant he wouldn’t be taking a second look.

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Martin Luther said, “It’s not wrong for a bird to fly over your head, just don’t let it build a nest in your hair.”

We can’t help being tempted, but we can help giving in to temptation.ⁱⁱ

So, I’m going to say, at this point, David might not have sinned.

But now he takes the first step:

2 Samuel 11:3a And David sent and inquired about the woman.ⁱⁱⁱ

If we’re married, I can’t think of many good reasons we would need to inquire about someone who isn’t our spouse.

In David’s day, it meant sending one of his servants to inquire about her, but in our day, it looks like searching on social media. Social media has been a tool for countless people to commit adultery by looking up exes and rekindling an old relationship.

How did that adultery start?

It started with a simple search for the person’s name. That was the first step.

2 Samuel 11:3b [The servant] said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?”

It wasn’t right, but men in the Old Testament married multiple women. But Even if David thought that was okay, he learned Bathsheba was off-limits when the servant told him:

- She was married to one of his mighty men, Uriah.

- She was Eliam’s daughter, one of his other mighty men.
- She was his counselor, Ahithophel’s granddaughter because Eliam was Ahithophel’s son.

I point all this out because it reveals David had an almost unimaginable amount to lose. But he kept taking steps forward.

How many men today have an almost unimaginable amount to lose, but they keep taking steps forward?

Sometimes, when you take that first step toward sin, God graciously warns you. That’s what happened with David.

The servant said: “David, this is the wife of one of your mighty men, the daughter of one of your other mighty men, and the granddaughter of your counselor and friend. You don’t want to do this.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also PROVIDE THE WAY OF ESCAPE, that you may be able to endure it.

God gave David a way to escape. But David kept taking steps forward:

2 Samuel 11:4 So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.

It is shocking to read this because David was the man after God’s own heart. He was deeply spiritual. He knew God intimately for decades. Yet he still fell, which should sober all of us.

When we were at the ACBC training a few years ago, [Randy Patten, the former Executive Director](#), shared a story about a prominent leader in the organization who was disqualified because of a sexual failure. The man’s sin was announced at a meeting with other leaders in attendance. Randy said the room immediately went quiet, and all the men hung their heads. He said it seemed like hours before anyone spoke. Finally, one of the men broke the silence by saying, “When he fell, he didn’t fall far.”

He meant that before the man’s sin took place, he had already taken so many steps the final step was short. Think of walking down a flight of stairs. It is quite a distance from the top to the bottom, but it is only a few inches when you take that last step.

It’s one compromise after another, and the compromises look so small they seem harmless and are easy to justify. We can even convince ourselves that we are not compromising. But if we turn around and look up, we see how far we are from the top step and how close we are to the bottom.

Let me ask you a question:

- When religious leaders like the man in the story commit sins that cost them their ministry
- Or when men commit sins that cost them their marriages.
- Or when young men commit sins that ruin their future marriages
- Or when men are slaves to pornography as much as the drunk is a slave to alcohol or the addict is a slave to a drug

When they took that first step:

- Did they ever imagine it would cost them so much?
- Did they have any idea where they would end up?

Absolutely not.

And in most cases, what would they give to go back and never take that first step?

Probably just about anything!

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Think about the foolish young man in Proverbs 7. Did he think he was going to end up being killed?

No.

More than likely, he thought, *“I will just take this stroll by her corner. Now, I will just walk down the road toward her house. I will do this at night so that nobody sees me.”*

We haven’t reached it yet, but when he sees her, more than likely he thought, *“I will just see what she has to say. It can’t hurt just to have a conversation with her.”*

It was one step after another after another until he ended up getting killed.

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So, what is the solution?

Don’t take that first step.

Practically, that means:

- Control your thoughts.
- Rip your eyes away when the world puts a harlot before you.
- Avoid places you shouldn’t go.
- End conversations you shouldn’t be having.

Let’s briefly zoom in on pornography.

We know there are right and wrong times to use electronic devices:

- There are times we know we will be tempted, and there are times we know we won’t be tempted.
- There are times when we don’t have accountability, and there are times when we have accountability.

Don’t take the first step and reach for the screen when you know you will be tempted and you don’t have accountability.

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Listen to the wonderful promise for those who won’t look at screens when they shouldn’t:

Isaiah 33:15 He who...SHUTS HIS EYES FROM LOOKING ON EVIL, 16 he will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; his water will be sure.

Young men, this is what I want for all of you. I want you dwelling on the heights. I want your place of defense to be a fortress of rocks.

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The second way to resist temptation:

Lesson One: To resist temptation (Part Two) guard your heart.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

And if we guard our hearts, we can avoid much sin. Let me explain:

I have known a few men who committed physical adultery, but before that, they were already committing spiritual adultery, or adultery in their hearts, by looking at pornography.

I don't know the man in ACBC who disqualified himself, and I don't think I know any prominent men in ministry who have disqualified themselves. But even though I don't know them personally, I'm almost certain they were also committing spiritual adultery before they committed physical adultery, and here's why:

Matthew 15:19 OUT OF THE HEART come evil thoughts, murder, ADULTERY, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, theft, false witness, slander.

These sins come out of the heart before they're committed outwardly, which means they wouldn't be committed physically if they weren't already in the heart. So, guard your heart. Don't let sin in.

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Consider Jesus's words:

Matthew 5:27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

This is a quote from Exodus 20:14 forbidding physical adultery.

Now listen to what Jesus says about spiritual adultery:

Matthew 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has ALREADY COMMITTED ADULTERY with her in his heart.

Jesus is making the well-known point that even if we don't commit physical adultery, we can still commit spiritual adultery.

Many men will say, “I would never commit adultery.” They might even look down on men who do. But if any of these men look at pornography, they are committing adultery every time they do.

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But the main reason I read this verse is Jesus also provides the solution to avoiding physical adultery: don't commit spiritual adultery. Listen again to the words:

“everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has HAS ALREADY committed adultery with her in his heart.”

A man who commits physical adultery is ALREADY committing spiritual adultery. If you don't want to commit physical adultery, don't commit spiritual adultery.

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We are talking about taking steps, and if a godly man refuses to look at women he shouldn't, it wouldn't be a step for him to commit physical adultery. It would be a leap.

But if a man already chose to commit adultery in his heart, it is only a few more steps to commit adultery physically.

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This has application for many sins:

If we want to avoid committing the outward sin, we shouldn't allow the sin in our heart:

- If we don't want to commit murder physically, don't hate in our hearts.
- If we don't want to commit theft physically, don't covet in our hearts.
- If we don't want to commit adultery physically, don't lust in our hearts.

We must guard our hearts.

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Now let me briefly address the parents and then the children...

Parents, I don't want to pry into your homes too much and tell you what to do, but I want to offer four practical strategies to help you help your children guard their hearts:

First, keep electronic devices, whether phones or screens, out of your children's rooms. This might not be popular, which is my way of telling you to be prepared for resistance if this has not been a rule in your home, but I think it's important and effective.

Second, you can install apps or software on your children's devices. We use [Family Link for our Google devices](#), such as Chrome Books, and [Microsoft Family Safety](#) for our Windows devices.

Third, I ensure devices turn off at an appointed time in the evening and don't turn on again until an appointed time in the morning. The apps I just mentioned allow you to do this.

Fourth, children should know that you can – and do – look at their electronic devices regularly.

And if you're a young man listening to this and no longer live at home, I recommend Covenant Eyes or another program like it and make sure the report goes to someone you trust. You can send it to me or one of the other elders.

Also, I know young ladies can have some of the same struggles we're talking about young men having, and we will discuss this more in a future sermon, but for now, let me say, if you're a young lady, and this applies to you, get Covenant Eyes, or a similar program and connect with one of the elder's wives.

And to briefly address the children:

If your parents provide safeguards to help you guard your heart and stay pure, let me tell you what you shouldn't do and what you should do:

Here's what you shouldn't do: whine, moan, groan, or complain about your parents' rules that could save your future marriage and help you avoid decades of addiction and shame.

Plenty of adults have ruined their hearts, destroyed their marriages, and developed addictions. They look back and wish their parents had been more proactive and taken steps to help them when they were young.

Which brings me to what you should do for your parents instead: thank them and obey them.

Now look back at Proverbs 7:9 one more time:

Proverbs 7:9 in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.

This verse works hard to describe the absence of light! It says the same thing four times: "in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness."

And this brings us to the third way to resist temptation from these verses:

Lesson One: To resist temptation (Part Three) stay in the light.

Proverbs 7:9 means the foolish young man went out at night. But we shouldn't look at this only physically. Light is a metaphor for truth and righteousness, and darkness is a metaphor for sin and unrighteousness.

He went out at night, but it pictures his pursuit of sin.

Consider these verses:

Proverbs 2:11 Men of perverted speech...13 forsake the paths of uprightness to WALK IN THE WAYS OF DARKNESS.

Perverted men walk in darkness.

John 3:19 Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

The light represents Jesus and his teaching, which people rejected because they love sin.

The next verse:

John 3:20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Darkness is such a fitting metaphor for sin because it hides evil works. If you think of the most compromising places – whether bars or clubs – they’re almost always dark, so people can feel like what they’re doing is hidden. They don’t want their actions exposed by the light.

1 John 1:6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we WALK IN DARKNESS (like the young man in Proverbs 7:9), we lie and do not practice the truth.

Walking in darkness revealed the young man had no fellowship with God.

When we see people who habitually avoid the light and pursue darkness, we see people who, more than likely, don’t have fellowship with God.

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Wanting to hide in darkness starts at a young age.

Last night, after we put George to bed, Katie had a feeling he got into something he shouldn’t. If you know George, as wonderful as he is, he’s very busy, so this is a common feeling. She went into his room, felt around in his crib, and under his pillow, he had one of the boy’s pocket knives with the blade out.

Katie felt like he would do something else, so she opened his bedroom door so the light would shine in. He didn’t like that, so he kept getting out of bed to close the door, but Katie kept opening it. Eventually, he gave up when he knew he would be spanked for doing it again. The point is, even at two years old, we want the dark to hide our sin.

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I would say to the young men, but really to all of us:

Pursue the light:

Ephesians 5:8 Walk as children of light.

1 John 1:7 If we WALK IN THE LIGHT, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

John 8:12 Jesus [said], “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me WILL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS, but will have the light of life.”

Young men, stay in the light. Keep your actions in the light.

Live so that your parents or friends can look over your shoulder and see what's on the screen without you being embarrassed.

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Let me conclude with this:

Young men, I told you at the beginning of the sermon that you are not fighting this battle by yourself. You have a church family that loves you and wants to see you succeed.

This includes me as your pastor, friend, brother-in-Christ, and, for a couple of you, your father. Just as the father in Proverbs 7 pleads with his son, I am also pleading with you:

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I URGE YOU as sojourners and exiles to ABSTAIN FROM THE PASSIONS OF THE FLESH, WHICH WAGE WAR AGAINST YOUR SOUL.

Flee from the harlots on the internet who would destroy your soul. Turn your eyes away from them to Christ, the author and finisher of your faith.

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If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

- John MacArthur
- Moody
- Nelson
- ESV commentary
- Life application
- EW

ⁱⁱ Over the years, I have seen people beat themselves up, not over sin, but over being tempted. Another way to say it is: I have seen people beat themselves up when they didn't have anything to beat themselves up over.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's fine if you're a young man and you're learning about a young woman to figure out whether you want to ask her dad for permission to court her, which, of course, is what all the young men in the church would do, especially if they were interested in one of my daughters...seventeen years from now.