

It won't be long before the annual graduation ritual. High school students will walk the stage and receive their diplomas - only after enduring the obligatory commencement speech. Most of these will sound pretty much alike. "Reach for the stars. Find your passion. Don't be afraid to dream. Take risks." That's why parents were shocked when high school teacher David McCullough Jr. stood to the podium and addressed the graduates at his high school in an unforgettable way:

"You are not special. You are not exceptional...Yes, you've been pampered, doted upon, helmeted and bubble-wrapped. Yes, capable adults with other things to do have held you, kissed you, fed you, wiped your mouth, wiped your bottom, trained you, taught you, tutored you, coached you, listened to you, counseled you, encouraged you, consoled you and encouraged you again. You've been nudged, cajoled, wheedled and implored. You've been fêted and fawned over and called sweetie pie. Yes, you have. And, certainly, we've been to your games, your plays, your recitals, your science fairs. Absolutely, smiles ignite when you walk into a room, and hundreds gasp with delight at your every tweet...But do not get the idea you're anything special. Because you're not...even if you were one in a million, on a planet of 6.8 billion that means there are nearly 7,000 people just like you." McCullough went on to make his point that the purpose of life is not to be made much of. He concluded his speech this way: "Selflessness is the best thing you can do for yourself. The sweetest joys of life, then, come only with the recognition that you're not special - because everyone is."

What I appreciated about David McCullough's speech is that he had the courage to call out one of the greatest temptations known to man - being made much of. When we make much of ourselves, we obscure the glory of God. The bigger we get, the less room there is for God. Pursuing our own self-esteem at the expense of esteeming God is like traveling to the Alps and being locked in a room full of mirrors. No one stands at the rim of the Grand Canyon to boost their self-esteem and contemplate their own greatness. The exhilarating joy we feel at moments like that comes from outside ourselves as we contemplate the majesty of God. We were born to make much of God. And making much of God is the last thing the devil wants.

All of us are dogged by the devil. Moderns may deny his existence but they cannot deny that they often do things they know they shouldn't do and they don't do many of the things they should. Why is that? The Bible makes it clear that there is a powerful angelic being we call Satan or the devil who is opposed to the purpose of God. "Satan" is mentioned 47 times in the Bible. "The devil" is mentioned 33 more. In a scientific age, concepts like sin and evil are as irrelevant as this mythological figure we call the devil. But "If Satan is our mythological holdover from a prescientific age, then the lifelong struggle of our Lord Jesus was mere shadowboxing. Take Satan and his forces out of the Gospels, and Jesus is left like a fool punching the air." Piper

The devil is a powerful being that specializes in temptation. He tempts us for the same reason he tempted Jesus - to subtly lure us off course until we are numb to the will of God. Most of us don't "fall" into temptation nearly as often as we "drift" into temptation. That is why we are calling the three temptations of Jesus, "Life drifts." Let's take a look at the second temptation described in Lk. 4:9-12...

The first thing I want to point out is that the devil has a strategy that is remarkably consistent. There is a pattern throughout the Bible I want you to see.

Mt./Lk. 4	Stones to bread	Glorious kingdoms	Pinnacle of temple
1 Thes. 5	Body	Soul/Mind	Spirit
Genesis 3	Good for food	Pleasing to the eye	Able to make wise
James 3	Earthly	Natural	Demonic
1 John 2	Lust of the flesh	Lust of the eyes	Pride of life

“Lust of the flesh” is physical temptation. (Pleasure) “The lust of the eyes” refers to the greed or covetousness that is aroused by what we see. (Possessions/Materialism) “The pride of life,” refers to the enthronement of self over God. (Pride/ego). The **lust of the flesh** is the desire to *have* something apart from the will of God. The **lust of the eyes** is the desire to *accomplish* something apart from the will of God. The **pride of life** is the desire to *be* something apart from the will of God.

In today's temptation, Satan appeals to that aspect of Jesus' human nature that craves approval. We all want to be loved and accepted. We all want to be special. That desire is hard-wired into every human being. The issue is how we satisfy that desire. If we cannot find the true source of the acceptance and approval we crave, we will waste our lives chasing something we can never catch. Jesus knew where His approval came from. He had just come from his baptism where He heard His Heavenly Father say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." God has spoken. Now Satan is asking Jesus to put God to the test so that He will have to prove that His word is true. God has spoken and He did not stutter. What does His word say to you?

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Ro. 8:15-17

If you don't keep the eyes of your heart on the approval of your Heavenly Father you will twist every relationship into some kind of stroking machine so that you will be made much of. If you don't make much of Jesus, you are condemned to endless attempts to be made much of. One of the unintended consequences of living in this selfie kingdom is that we sometimes trade the approval of God for the approval of men. It's a bad trade. That is why worship is so essential. Worship is worth-ship, making much of God.

The insatiable appetite for the approval of men can even keep people out of the Kingdom of God. "Many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." Jn. 12:42-43. “If your identity is rooted in the approval of man it will have to be sustained by the approval of man.”

So how do we defend ourselves from temptation? How do we defeat the devil? Well, first of all, YOU don't. You cannot defeat the devil by your own human cleverness. I've seen people try.

Jana and I were leading a pastor's conference in Guatemala and spent a couple of days in Antigua for our anniversary...explosions and fires all over the city. We thought we were celebrating our anniversary in the middle of a revolution." It was Quema del Diablo – what Lent is to Easter QDD is to Christmas except during QDD you sort of thumb your nose at the devil by ridding yourself of temptation. The whole ceremony ends by burning the devil in effigy in the town square...bomberos...drove off with great fanfare. It was a slapstick comedy until I realized that it was also a sad parable of how we wage war against the devil – intense activity, earnest devotion, a lot of noise - all very impressive but all for naught. The firemen of Antigua were earnest and sincere but they failed to do what they set out to do, to burn the devil.

Thwarting the devil's schemes by our own human effort is as misguided as trying to eliminate temptation from our lives by burning the devil in effigy. Our most effective response to temptation requires an appreciation for the weapons God has provided. There is only one offensive weapon available to the Christian, and it is the word of God. It is the sword of the Spirit. This world lies under the power of the evil one. That means this world, apart from Christ, is doomed. There is no defense against the devil. But the weapons of our warfare are divinely designed to defeat the devil. That's how Jesus did it. He spoke the word.

Now I'm sure you noticed that the devil quoted God's words too. Satan does not always try to destroy our faith by saying, "The Bible isn't true." He often tries to destroy our faith by misusing some passage to lead us into disobedience.

Jesus refused to question the word of God. God had already spoken - "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." To throw Himself off the temple expecting the Father to send His angels to catch Jesus was putting God to the test. We don't test God. God has nothing to prove. God tests us because it is through resistance that our faith muscle grows strong.

The devil is real, and he hates you with a vengeance, and will do anything to blow you off course. He prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. And his favorite food is faith. He eats faith so that you won't have it. He doesn't care whether you're healthy or not. If sickness will cause you to lose faith, he'll do what he can to make you sick. If he can get your faith by letting you enjoy good health so that you stop depending on God, he'll become a health expert. There is only one way to be strong in faith? "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

So here is my invitation to you - study the word. Meditate on it. Memorize it. I've never met a strong Christian who hasn't memorized the Bible. I have met countless Christians who constantly struggle in their lives but who know little or nothing of the scriptures. Next week we are offering another round of How To Read The Bible. Sign up. Eat the word of God or the enemy will eat your faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Your faith will grow to the extent that you feed on God's word. And we all need faith.

Faith is the gift of God that allows us to get our hands around the invisible. Because we are having this temporary earthly experience, unseen spiritual things seem very unreal and unexciting. Unseen things don't force themselves onto our senses so they seem very unreal. It's easy to get excited about a new computer or a new pair of shoes. But it's hard to get excited about heaven when you don't know where it is, what it looks like or who your neighbors are going to be. But that can change in a moment. Like the moment the doctor walks out of the room leaving you with the news you have a terminal disease. What happens to the gripping fascination with earthly things? Would you want your family to sit by your bed and read to you from a computer manual, a shoe catalogue, or from the Bible?

I watched Barry Annino die. And as I watched him die, I saw him come alive. In the end he was not really interested in politics or buying a new car or even March Madness. He wanted to know what was on the other side. He wanted to know he was loved, accepted and forgiven. He may have arrived at the party a little late, but he made it, not because of his ability to believe but because of God's ability to keep His promise.