

“Talking With the Tempter”

Sermon Notes

➤ **Mound Free Church...watch and pray that you not enter into temptation**

**Our Lord teaches us to pray ‘lead us not into temptation’
because...*

1. Temptation leads us to question God’s goodness (v.1b)
2. Temptation leads us us to fumble God’s Word (vv.2-3)
3. Temptation leads us to contradict God’s authority (vv.4-5)

Next Week: Genesis 3:6 - “The Silence of Adam”

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of September 28th-October 4th

Interview With John Owen on the Subject of Temptation

Pastor Dave: Welcome, Pastor John. What a privilege to sit down with you over these next three weeks for an interview on the subject of temptation and sin. We have been working our way through Genesis 3 these last several Lord's Day mornings as a congregation, and so this opportunity to think carefully with you about temptation this week is timely. So, let's start here. Why did you write *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*?¹

Owen: "If you are in any measure awake in these days wherein we live...I suppose you will not inquire any further after other reasons of the publishing of the ensuing warnings and directions, being suited to the times that pass over us, and your own concern therein."²

Pastor Dave: Fair enough. As different as our contexts are in some sense, I suspect it's also true that London in 1658 and the Twin Cities in 2025 likely have a great deal in common as it relates to living east of Eden. Suffering and sin abound in both of our worlds. What would you say to a potential reader who looks at the title of this book on temptation and just rolls their eyes at it as yet one more example of uptight conservative Christians getting in a twist over religious scruples?

Owen: "...reader, if you are among them who takes no notice of these things or cares not for them...I would desire you to know that I write not for you, nor do [I] esteem you a fit reader or judge of what is here written."³

¹ There are a number of editions of this work of Owen's, but a good one-stop shop would be *Overcoming Sin & Temptation: Three Classic Works By John Owen*. Edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. Crossway: Wheaton. 2006. Each of the quotations from Owen in this study guide are drawn from this edition. This paperback carries with it a forward by John Piper, carefully outlined chapter breakdowns, and helpful footnotes that define a number of older words common to Owen's vocabulary. Three of Owen's great works on these themes are included: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It* (1658), and *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers* (1667).

² Owen, p.145.

³ Owen, p.146.

Pastor Dave: Punchy. But quite true. Toward the beginning of your book, you make a distinction between different sorts of temptation. You're careful to distinguish ways that God tempts (Genesis 22:1) and does not tempt (James 1:13). In our culture, we might think of the first sort as more testing than tempting. You also use the word *trial* to speak of this sort of temptation. Why is it important to have this sort of holistic view of temptation?

Owen: "...temptation is like a knife, that may either cut the meat or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction."⁴

Pastor Dave: That's helpful. Okay, so let's attempt a definition here. What is temptation? Not the good kind with which God **tests** us or puts us through **trials** for his glory and our good (James 1:2-4). I'm thinking about the bad kind. The kind before which our first parents gave in (Genesis 3:1-6), the kind that Jesus withstood for us (Luke 4:1-13), and the kind of which Jesus warned us (Matthew 6:13; 26:41).

Owen: "Temptation, then, in *general*, is any thing, state, way or condition, that, upon any account whatsoever, has a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience, which God requires of him, into any sin, in any degree of it whatsoever."⁵

Pastor Dave: Excellent. There's a lot packed into that brief definition. But it seems to have a depth and a balance to it that gathers together the biblical ingredients of temptation. Much to chew on. Thank you. What would you say to believers who imagine that perhaps they are sanctified enough that they've really mastered this whole area of the Christian life and that your project here with this book is really just beneath them?

Owen: "Do not flatter yourselves that you should hold out; there are secret lusts that lie lurking in your hearts, which perhaps stir not, which, as soon as any temptation befalls you, will rise, tumultuate, cry, disquiet, seduce, and never give over until they are either killed or satisfied."⁶

⁴ Owen, p.152. It might interest us to note that in James 1:12-15, the words for "trial" (v.12) and "tempt" (vv.13-14) share the exact same Greek root. In other words, Owen's concept of good and bad versions of 'temptation' (though it may sound strange to our 21st century American ears), is a helpful distinction and one that is rooted in careful consideration of biblical language.

⁵ Owen, p.156.

⁶ Owen, p.171.

Pastor Dave: Your stark realism is refreshing. So, help us with the big picture here. Why should we as evangelical believers think carefully about the subject of temptation and have a healthy respect for what we're talking about here?

Owen: "Consider the end⁷ of any temptation; this is Satan's end and sin's end, that is, the dishonor of God and the ruin of our souls."⁸

Pastor Dave: The Bible tells us that Jesus experienced temptation, too. Is there a difference between his temptations and ours?

Owen: "It is true, our Savior was tempted...[but] Christ had only the *suffering* part of temptation when he entered into it; we have also the *sinning* part... We never come off like Christ. Who of us 'enters into temptation' and is not defiled?"⁹

Pastor Dave: Agreed. Reminds me of when C.S. famously responded to the mistaken idea that either the temptations of Jesus weren't real (since he is God incarnate) or at least no big deal (since, once again, he is God incarnate). As Lewis noted in his classic *Mere Christianity*: "That is why bad people in one sense know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. . . . Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist."¹⁰ Okay, so let's shift to application mode. What directions would you have for us as we seek to watch and pray that we not enter into temptation?

Owen: "Always bear in mind the great danger that it is for any soul to enter into temptation. It is a woeful thing to consider what slight thoughts that most have of this thing. [If it] so [be that] men can keep themselves from sin itself in open action, they are content, they scarce aim at more...He hates not the fruit who delights in the root."¹¹

Pastor Dave: That'll preach. So good. Talk to us about prayer in the context of this discussion. Jesus says "Watch *and pray*". How?

⁷ Owen uses the word "end" here as we would use the word "goal" or "aim".

⁸ Owen, p.181.

⁹ Owen, p.183.

¹⁰<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/only-jesus-knows-the-full-force-of-temptation>. Accessed 9/27/25 @ 9:30pm.

¹¹ Owen, p.193.

Owen: “We are to pray for what God has promised. Our requests are to be regulated by his promises and commands...act faith on the promise[s] of God for preservation...To pray that we not enter into temptation is a means to preserve us from it...he that would be little in temptation, let him be much in prayer...If we do not abide in prayer, we shall abide in cursed temptations.”¹²

Pastor Dave: Great. Now, let’s talk about what it means to *watch*. Jesus says: “*Watch* and pray.” What are we to be watching? Or watching out for?

Owen: “Watch the Seasons...[1.] A season of unusual outward prosperity is usually accompanied with an hour of temptation...Prov. 1:32...[2.]...a time of the slumber of grace, of neglect in communion with God, of formality in duty, is a season to be watched in, as that which certainly [has] some other temptation attending it Rev. 3:2...[3.] A season of great spiritual enjoyments is often, by the malice of Satan and the weakness of our hearts, turned into a season of danger as to this business of temptation...2 Cor. 12:7...[4.]...a season of self-confidence; then usually temptation is at hand...Matt. 26:33, 35.”

Pastor Dave: So pretty much all the time. Got it. Recognizing you have many other practical applications in your book, we’ll leave our readers to search out your work here in greater detail. Well, we look forward to a second interview next week on the topic of indwelling sin. For now, any final words for us as it relates to watching and praying that we not enter into temptation?

Owen: “Consider that if you neglect this duty, and so fall into temptation - which assuredly you will do...All your...peace and strength will be gone in a moment. This may seem but a noise of words for the present; but if ever it be your condition, you will find it to be full of woe and bitterness. Oh, then, let us strive to keep our spirits unentangled...[from entering into temptation].”¹³

Pastor Dave: Thank you, Pastor John. See you next week.

¹² Owen, p.197.

¹³ Owen, p.223.