

The title of this morning's sermon is "*What Is Temptation?*"<sup>i</sup>

If you're new to joining us, we have been reading Proverbs 7 verse-by-verse, the chapter about the harlot who lures the foolish young man.

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We like showdowns. When I say the word, our minds probably go to Westerns with two cowboys staring each other down while they stand on a dirt road in the middle of a small town with a saloon on one side, a bank on the other, and a few other buildings scattered about. A tumbleweed rolls by, and we hear the familiar whistling sound while we wait to see who draws first. Do any whistlers want to volunteer?

There are many famous showdowns in fiction outside of Westerns. For example, Achilles and Hector's fight in the Illiad. My favorite showdown is Gandalf's fight with the Balrog in the Lord of the Rings.

When I was going over the sermon with Katie, she said, "Oh my goodness. Balrog? How can you take any of that stuff seriously."

Needless to say, I had to withhold my frustration toward her for the rest of the sermon.

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There are also famous showdowns in Scripture.

The first few chapters of 2 Samuel record the conflict between the House of Saul and the House of David. Saul's forces, led by Abner, ran into David's forces, led by Joab:

**2 Samuel 2:12 Abner and the servants of Saul and Joab and the servants of David met by the pool of Gibeon...one on one side...and the other on the other side. Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." 15 Then they arose...16 And each caught HIS OPPONENT BY THE HEAD AND THRUST HIS SWORD IN HIS OPPONENT'S SIDE, SO THEY FELL DOWN TOGETHER...17 And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.**

Can you guess some of the other showdowns in Scripture?

- David and Goliath
- Elijah and the prophets of Baal
- I would argue when Jesus was in the wilderness, he had a showdown with the devil. I could go one step further and say Jesus' earthly ministry was a showdown between the kingdom of God that Jesus rules over and the kingdom of darkness that Satan rules over.

In this morning's verses, we see another showdown—the foolish young man against the harlot.

Look at verse 7 to see the foolish young man's description:

**Proverbs 7:7 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. Let me add a few adjectives from other translations:

- The NKJV says he's devoid of understanding
- The NASB says he's naïve
- The Amplified says he's gullible

Now let's read a few verses, and then we'll see his opponent:

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

She has a “corner” because harlots have corners. Many of today’s harlots have a corner of the Internet.

“Her house” is where she lures her victims. For today’s harlots, 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.**

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.”

He 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. It pictures his pursuit of sin, which he didn’t take long to find.

Look at verse 10 to see the foolish young man’s opponent:

## **Proverbs 7:10 And behold, the woman meets him (the showdown is about to begin), dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.**

Before discussing the harlot, let me make one point about the foolish young man.

Notice it says the harlot “meets him.” He had to reach this point. He wouldn’t be in this situation if he hadn’t taken all the previous compromising steps:

1. Going to her corner.
2. Taking the road to her house.
3. Doing this at night when he thought nobody would see.

We can’t help being tempted—even Jesus was tempted—but we can avoid putting ourselves in tempting situations:

- Don’t grab your phone or look at your computer at the wrong time.
- Don’t be alone with that person of the opposite sex.
- Don’t go to that bar or club.

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We saw how the foolish young man is described. Now, look how the harlot is described. The ESV says she is “wily of heart”:

- The NIV says, “with crafty intent.”
- NASB says she is “cunning of heart.”
- HCSB says, “having a hidden agenda.”

So, here’s the showdown:

We’ve got a foolish young man lacking sense, wandering around aimlessly and naïve, versus a crafty harlot, who is cunning of heart, aggressive, and on a mission.

It isn’t tough to figure out who is going to win.

The foolish young man has about as much of a chance as:

- Goliath had against David
- The prophets of Baal had against Elijah
- Satan against Jesus

And this brings us to lesson one:

## Lesson One: Foolish people are outmatched against temptation.

Let me remind you of something I shared with you in a previous sermon. The harlot personifies temptation:

**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*, and it is a metaphor for a harlot’s seduction. In other words, when James wants to describe temptation enticing us, he uses the imagery of a harlot.

When we see this harlot tempt the foolish young man, we are seeing temptation in action:

- The harlot pursues the foolish young man like temptation pursues us.
- The foolish young man should have resisted the harlot like we should resist temptation.
- Instead, the foolish young man gave in to the harlot like we give in to temptation.
- The harlot kills the young man like sin kills us.

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We’ve all seen videos of a strong, ferocious lion pursuing an injured animal, and we think: “This animal doesn’t stand a chance.” That’s what I think when I look at the foolish young man against the harlot.

And if we’re foolish and lacking wisdom, it will be the same for us when we go up against temptation. We will be soundly defeated.

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I used the analogy of a lion pursuing its prey, and let me ask you this:

Is that fitting for us?

Yes, a lion is pursuing us:

**1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**

The devil is looking for weak, foolish people to consume.

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Look at **verse 11**...

**Proverbs 7:11 She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; 12 now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.**

She’s one of the nastiest women in Scripture. She gives Potiphar’s wife a run for her money.

All she wants is to find men to conquer.

- She’s the temptation looking for someone to catch.
- She’s the woman on the Internet hoping some weak-willed man will visit her site.

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I have told you before that we face three enemies. Can you remember them?

The devil, the world, and the flesh.

And the harlot looks like each of them:

- She’s prowling around like the devil prowls around.
- She’s outside, everywhere, like the world surrounding us.

- You can't get away from her like we can't get away from our flesh.

Studying the harlot, who personifies temptation, will help us understand how temptation works and better equip us to resist.

Look at the beginning of verse 13:

**Proverbs 7:13a She seizes him and kisses him,**

Please pause right here.

This is shocking. She is a harlot, but even harlots don't go up to men and grab them and kiss them. We are dealing with a woman whose actions look outrageous and exaggerated:

- We're not talking about a woman struggling with lust.
- We're talking about a woman showing a level of aggressiveness that is hard to believe.

But if we understand she represents temptation, it makes perfect sense. Temptation is aggressive, and this brings us to lesson two:

**Lesson Two: Temptation (Part One) is aggressive.**

At times, we can almost feel temptation pursuing us, seeking to catch us like the harlot caught the foolish young man.

Please mark your spot in Proverbs 7 and turn to Genesis 4:3. I will go quickly through these familiar verses:

**Genesis 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,**

When Cain's offering was rejected, he faced the two choices we face when we sin:

- Be humble, repent, and get the sin out of our hearts.
- Or be prideful and angry and let sin control us.

Sadly, he chose the second option:

**Genesis 4:5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.**

God could see what was happening in Cain's heart, so he graciously warned him about what sin wanted to do with him:

**Genesis 4:6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, (now listen to this) sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."**

Talk about aggressive!

How does sin sound when God said it is crouching at the door?

It sounds like some monster waiting for Cain so it can pounce on him and attack...like the harlot with the foolish young man.

God added that sin desired him...like the harlot desired the foolish young man.

The Hebrew word for desire means a desire to control. Look at the end of Genesis 3:16 when God spoke to Eve:

**Genesis 3:16 Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”**

This is part of the curse. It is not a blessing. God is not telling Eve, “You will desire your husband in a loving, wonderful way.”

He meant she would have flesh now that would tempt her to control her husband versus submit to him. But he had to rule, or remain in authority, over her.

Similarly, God told Cain sin desired to control him, but he must resist and rule over it instead.

And the same is true for us: sin is crouching at the door. It desires to control us, but we must resist and rule over it.

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Turn back to Proverbs 7. The temptation is about to get even worse. Look at the rest of **verse 13**:

**Proverbs 7:13b and with bold face she says to him, 14 “I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows;**

According to Leviticus 7:16-18, when people fulfilled their vows, they presented a peace offering to the Lord. But with peace offerings, the entire sacrifice wasn't consumed. Some of it was kept by the worshipper to eat. Because there was no refrigeration, the food had to be eaten quickly.

That's what the harlot is saying: “I have this food; it must be eaten soon. Why don't you join me?”

But listen to this verse about harlots when they eat:

**Proverbs 30:20 This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, “I have done no wrong.”**

This probably describes what the harlot has done countless times before and is trying to do again with the foolish young man.

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Now listen to this:

When people ate the food left over from the peace offering, it was considered part of the worship as much as the offering itself.

So, do you see how she tries to sound good, even religious, by saying she offered sacrifices and paid her vows?

Temptation does the same with us, and this brings us to the next part of lesson two:

### **Lesson Two: Temptation (Part Two) makes itself sound good.**

Think of the way we see the devil tempt people in Scripture. He tries to get them to see some supposed good:

- The devil told Eve, “Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
- The devil told Jesus, “You haven't eaten for weeks. You're about to starve. Turn these stones into bread.”

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When the harlot invited the foolish young man to enjoy the peace offering with her, what could he have told himself?

- “If I go with her, I can engage in religious activity.”

- “Eating this meal with her will be a form of worship.”
- “She has this food, and according to God’s Law, it must be consumed. She probably can’t finish it herself, so I should help her.”

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And when we are tempted, we will often be tempted to find good reasons to justify giving in.

For example, if believers want to marry unbelievers, they can come up with an almost endless list of reasons they should. But what is the classic line?

“Then I can lead them to Christ!”

When we want to justify purchases we shouldn’t make, we can come up with lots of supposed good reasons to make the purchase:

- “This is a great deal. “It’s on sale.”
- “I deserve this.”

When we want to justify gossip, we make up good things like:

- “I was just trying to get advice.”
- “I wanted them to be able to pray for the person.”

When we lose our tempers and yell at our kids, we will be tempted to say:

- “They shouldn’t have been acting this way. I had to teach them a lesson.”
- “They need to learn right from wrong.”

My personal favorite: “Even Jesus got angry when he witnessed sin! That’s why I was chasing my children with a whip and flipping over furniture in our house. I just wanted to be like my Lord and Savior.”

When children disobey their parents, they say, “My parents are too controlling. Other kids get to do this, or listen to this, or watch this, or wear this, or stay up this late, so I should be able to as well.”<sup>iii</sup>

The list could go on. There’s almost no end to the number of temptations we can justify giving in to because of some supposed good we imagine.

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Let me conclude this lesson with this:

When temptation says, “I have paid my vows, and I have peace offerings that need to be consumed. Come eat with me,” we must resist trying to come up with good reasons to give in.

If we sin, we are not doing something good. Instead, we are giving the devil, the world, or our flesh a victory.

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Look at verse 15 to see the next way temptation works:

**Proverbs 7:15 so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.**

Notice how she speaks to him: “I have come out to meet YOU. I have sought YOU. I have found YOU.”

It’s very flattering. She appealed to his pride, and temptation does the same with us, and this brings us to the next part of lesson two:

**Lesson Two: Temptation (Part Three) appeals to our pride.**

She gives the impression that she chose him out of ALL THE PEOPLE she could be seeking. She even uses the word “eagerly,” suggesting she worked hard to find him.

You can hear her appealing to his male ego. She says, “You’re the special, wonderful, handsome, exceptional young man I have been looking for—the one I really want.”

In reality, she’s a married woman who’s probably often on the prowl for any foolish young man she can find...like women on the Internet. She has about as much interest in this young man as women on the Internet have in men who look at their websites.

But the foolish young man is “simple” and “lacking sense,” so he believes her flattery.

The lesson is that when we listen to temptation, rather than flee from it, we also reach the point of believing just about anything temptation uses to appeal to our pride.

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For a moment, consider another Old Testament account like Proverbs 7: Balak and Balaam.

Balak, the king of Moab, wanted Balaam the prophet to come and curse Israel for him so the Moabites could defeat the Israelites:

- Balak pursued Balaam like the harlot pursued the foolish young man, and like temptation pursues us.
- Balaam should have resisted Balak like the foolish young man should have resisted the harlot and like we should resist temptation.

Balak sent his first messengers to Balaam, and they said:

**Numbers 22:6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”**

God told Balaam to tell them no, which he did, and they returned to Moab.

Then Balak requested Balaam again and listen to how he appealed to his pride:

**Numbers 22:15a Once again Balak SENT PRINCES, MORE IN NUMBER AND MORE HONORABLE than [before].**

The first time, Balak just sent regular messengers. Now he uses princes! And he sent a larger, more prestigious group.

How do you think this made Balaam feel?

He must have thought, “Look how important I am. King Balak would send many of his own princes to obtain MY services! I am a big deal.”

And there’s more:

**Numbers 22:16 They came to Balaam and said, “Thus says Balak: ‘Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, 17 for I WILL SURELY DO YOU GREAT HONOR, AND WHATEVER YOU SAY TO ME I WILL DO. Come, curse this people for me.’”**

Imagine a king saying he would greatly honor you and do whatever you said.

All this appealed to Balaam’s pride, and he gave in.

Just as Balak appealed to Balaam's pride and the harlot appealed to the foolish young man's, temptation appeals to our pride.

Now, here's the question: why would temptation WANT to appeal to our pride?

Because our pride can convince us of anything.

Our pride tells us:

- "You should be mad!"
- "You didn't really lie."
- "You weren't gossiping."
- "You won't get caught."
- "You don't have to help that person."
- "Other people have problems doing this, but you won't."
- "You will be strong enough to stop when you want."

Look at the next way she appeals to him in verse 16:

**Proverbs 7:16 I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.**

She mentions things he can see, touch, and smell, and this brings us to the last part of lesson two:

**Lesson Two: Temptation (Part Four) appeals to our senses.**

Temptation makes itself as attractive as possible, often by appealing to our senses...like the harlot:

- She appealed to his sense of sight by the way she dressed.
- His sense of taste by inviting him to a meal.
- His sense of hearing with flattering words.
- His sense of smell with her perfumes.
- His sense of touch with her coverings and linens.

This is what temptation does: it appeals to our senses.

Think about the fall itself and the way temptation appealed to Eve's senses:

**Genesis 3:6a So when the woman saw that the tree was GOOD FOR FOOD,**

It appealed to her sense of taste.

**Genesis 3:6b and that it was a delight to the eyes,**

It appealed to her sense of sight.

**Genesis 3:6c and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,**

And it appealed to her pride.

Now, of all our senses, which one do you think temptation appeals to most often?



I would say our sight.

We see that with Eve:

- When she SAW that the tree was good for food.
- It was a delight to the EYES.

Listen to the way the world tempts us:

**1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and THE DESIRES OF THE EYES and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.**

The world appeals to our flesh and pride, but the one sense that is singled out is sight: the desires of the eyes.

It wouldn't be too much to say that our eyes get us in more trouble than any other senses:

Think about Achan. When Joshua confronted him, he said:

**Joshua 7:20 “I have sinned against the Lord...and this is what I did: 21 when I SAW among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them.”**

Think about Samson:

**Judges 16:1 Samson went to Gaza, and there HE SAW A PROSTITUTE, and he went in to her.**

Think about David:

**2 Samuel 11:2 When David...was walking on the roof of the king's house...HE SAW FROM THE ROOF A WOMAN BATHING.**

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I told you before that the summer before Rhea was born, I couldn't teach summer school, and I decided to play World of Warcraft. I quickly became addicted. A few months later I repented, quit, and after that, when I went to the store, I avoided walking past video games so I wouldn't see them and be tempted.

This is why Job said:

Listen to what Job said:

**Job 31:1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?”**

If I said, “Tell me about the covenants in Scripture,” I bet the two that would come to mind are:

- The covenants God made with man.
- The covenant we make with our spouse or marriage.

I doubt any of us would think of making a covenant with one of our senses, but that's what Job did, and of all his senses, it was with his eyes.

We must get used to ripping our eyes away if we expect to resist temptation.

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The harlot appealed to the young man's senses and pride, the devil appealed to Eve's senses and pride, and the world appeals to our senses and pride.

We need to be on guard against all the different ways temptation appeals to us.

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Let me conclude with some encouragement:

The sermon is about temptation. What do we do when we're tempted? Where do we go? Maybe I should ask, whom do we go to?

We go to our Great High Priest, who intercedes for us and helps us:

**Hebrews 2:18 Because [Jesus] has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**

Then two chapters later:

**Hebrews 4:15 We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

We know Jesus was tempted but didn't sin, so he could be our perfect sacrifice.

But there's another part to this: he was tempted so he could help us when we are tempted:

**Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

We tend to think of the help we receive during trials, and that's part of it. Trials are a "time of need" for us. But the context is temptation. The previous verse says:

**Hebrews 4:15 We have a high priest who...in every respect has been tempted as we are.**

Because of that, he gives us mercy and grace when we are tempted.

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If you've never surrendered your life to Christ, He isn't your High Priest.

- Instead, he's your judge.
- Instead of interceding for you, he will sentence you.

But that can change today if you repent of your sins and put your faith in faith.

Then, as Warren Wiersbe said, "*No trial is too great, no temptation is too strong, but that Jesus Christ can give us the mercy and grace that we need, when we need it.*"

As our high priest who has been tempted in all ways, like the song we're going to sing, we are fighting a battle Jesus already won.

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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.

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<sup>i</sup> Done:

- John MacArthur
- Moody

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- Nelson
  - ESV commentary
  - Life application
  - EW

<sup>ii</sup> In Malachi 2:16 God says He hates divorce. We have a number of verses spoken by Jesus and Paul regarding people not divorcing – not separating what God has joined together – but when people want to divorce they can find any number of reasons to convince you this is what’s best for them, and if they have children, you can almost be guaranteed they’re going to tell you this is what’s best for the children too.

- And I just want to add as a note, whenever I mention divorce in a sermon I want to be clear about the commitment we – the leadership – has to supporting your marriages. We want to do whatever we can to help your marriages be strong, healthy and Christ-centered. It could be providing counseling, or if it’s one of those rare situations where separation is warranted, we’d want to help provide a place so the couple could be separated while they work through their issues.
- It’s easy for churches to condemn divorce, but we want to be equally clear about our desire to help couples NOT divorce.