

# Arming Your Soldiers to Fight Temptation

## By Hal and Melanie Young

The sermon one Sunday was from Romans, and after the message Hal jotted down a thought about the universal problem we face:

Struck with musical cravings subliminal,  
William purloined a page from a hym-i-nal  
Relatively it's small  
That it happened at all  
But the merest transgression is criminal.

When Martin Luther was a young monk, he was overwhelmed by his sense of sin and guilt before a righteous God, and he wore out the priests who were assigned to hear his anguished confessions. "Look here," the head of the monastery told him, "if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive—parricide, blasphemy, adultery—instead of all these peccadilloes."

Some thought Luther was excessive, but he was right—little sins, peccadilloes, are still sin. Our children may not be wrestling with the same kinds of sins that we, their parents, grapple with, but each is tempted in his own way and at his own level. We know we need to teach them about the Bible, about God's law and His grace through Jesus Christ, but are we giving our children practical tools to help fight temptation, big or small?

"Submit yourselves therefore to God," wrote the Apostle James. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).<sup>1</sup> Do they know how to resist? Here are five simple ways to push back against the devil's attacks—and they work for parents just as well as they work for kids.

### 1. Pray

*"The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them" (Psalm 145:18–19).*

Can you imagine what we would think of a military officer whose unit was being overwhelmed by the enemy, his men decimated and nearly destroyed, who wouldn't call for reinforcements? We do that all the time as Christians, though. When the enemy attacks, our very first response should be to call out to our General for help.

### 2. Read the Bible

*"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God . . . ." (Ephesians 6:17).*

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered Satan with Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11). The Bible is our weapon to fight our enemy. When we fill our eyes and hearts and minds with the Word of God, we can fight temptation actively—and win!

### 3. Sing Praise to God

Music can have a powerful effect on our spirit. When King Saul was suffering from spiritual attack, the Bible says: ". . . David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was

*refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him" (1 Samuel 16:23). Martin Luther was a musician himself and said, "Music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of men. Thus it drives out the devil and makes people cheerful. Then one forgets all wrath, impurity, and other devices."<sup>2</sup>*

Singing can melt our hard hearts in a way other things can't, and it can divert our thoughts from unprofitable pathways too. When temptation strikes, sing praises to God and fill your mind with memories of His grace!

#### **4. Leaving the Situation**

*"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent . . . . Do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths" (Proverbs 1:10, 15).*

So often, you can easily fight temptation by just removing yourself from the tempting situation! When the Egyptian's wife tried to seduce Joseph, he left his cloak in her hands and ran (Genesis 39:11–12); the commentator Matthew Henry noted: "It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience."<sup>3</sup>

So if you're tempted about sin in the shower, dry off and get out. If you're tempted while lying awake in bed, get up and get busy. If it's when you're alone, seek out other people.

Note, too, that one of our enemy's great lies is "No one will know." The Lord sees all that we do, and one day our secrets will be shouted from housetops (Luke 12:3). Don't let the illusion of privacy lead you into temptation. If it does, then it's better to lose the privacy!

#### **5. Go to Your Authority**

*"My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. . . . When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you" (Proverbs 6:20, 22).*

Proverbs 6 tells a young man to turn to the guidance of his parents when facing severe and persuasive temptation. Charles Spurgeon wrote that God has one Son without sin but no sons without temptation; the lure of sin is not the problem, but allowing ourselves to take the bait certainly is a problem! We tell our children that we can't help it if the pigeon of temptation flies over us and drops something yucky in our hair; we wipe it off and move on. It's another thing entirely to stand around under the nest, hoping for something to fall out or maybe climbing up and rooting around the nest, rubbing our hands in whatever we find. Bleah.

Since we know that our children will face temptation just as we do, we need to teach them to bring their struggles to us so that we can pray, counsel, and encourage them in the fight. We're not looking for opportunities to berate or embarrass them but rather are offering them a hand of support or rescue when they find themselves in slippery places where they soon might fall. This "open door policy" also eliminates the privacy and isolation that the enemy often uses to tempt and overcome the young believer. The wandering sheep gets eaten, but the one who stays close to the shepherd has greater protection!

From a very young age, we talk with our children about resisting temptation. We count off these five weapons: praying to God, reading His word, singing His praises, leaving the situation, and running for help—and we raise five fingers, which we close into a fist "to knock away temptation"! It's a simple illustration, and whether dealing with a young boy

who is tempted by underwear advertisements or an older one who is tempted by a racy sidebar on the Internet, it's effective.

Just as we give our children directions about how to cook, clean, and care for themselves, we need to give them guidance about fighting temptation. God has warned us that our enemy and our own hearts are ready to lead us to sin, but we also know that no temptation will overtake us that is not common to man—and that . . .

*"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" (1 Corinthians 10:13).*

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Endnotes:

1. Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2001, 2007 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2. New Reformation Press ([www.newreformationpress.com/blog/2011/08/31/music-one-of-gods-greatest-blessings](http://www.newreformationpress.com/blog/2011/08/31/music-one-of-gods-greatest-blessings) ).
3. *Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* by Matthew Henry, [1706], [www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/henry/gen039.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/henry/gen039.htm) .

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