

- There is an old parable that goes like this. *A man and a woman are fishing in this river. Suddenly, a woman comes down the river struggling for life. The fishermen pull her out. Then another comes down the river and must be rescued as well. This happens all afternoon and the fisherman are getting very tired from constantly pulling people from the river. Eventually they think, "We need to go upstream and find out why so many people are falling into the water." When they go upstream, they find that people are drawn to the edge to look at the river, but there is no safe way to do this. Many of them fall in. The fisherman go to the community leaders and report the number of people who have fallen into the river. They also report that this is due to the lack of a protective barrier on the cliff. Community leaders build a barrier and a warning sign which allows people to safely view the water. Some still fall because they don't heed the warning of danger, but there are many fewer victims to rescue because of the warning and barrier.*
- This parable fits in well with life. We as a church want to help pull people out of the river of sin and save them before its too late. For some, it only takes that one time of drowning in sin to realize that they need to stay away from it. For others, they might not get it until the 2nd or 3rd time. And then there are the few that continually find themselves in the clutches of sin, they continually find themselves drowning in the river. A man named Desmond Tutu said this concerning that last group of people. He said, *"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in."* It is good for people to recognize that they are in trouble and need help, but wouldn't it just be better if we could help people recognize the danger beforehand and simply stay away to begin with? I certainly believe that it would be the better way.
- So for this evening I'd like for us to think about this idea of avoiding temptation. It is good for us to repent of sin. It is better for us to overcome temptation. I believe it is best for us spiritually if we were able to avoid temptation all together, but that unfortunately just isn't possible in this life. Temptation is something that we will all face, regardless of how hard we try because we are facing a strong adversary in Satan. However, I think that we can help control just how much temptation we face from time to time. There are certain times and situations that we find ourselves in where temptation to sin is much more likely to raise it ugly head because Satan know that they are vulnerable times for us as human beings. My friend Mark Roberts has a friend who once shared with him 4 danger zones of temptation, and I'd like to discuss those with you this evening and have us think about these types of situations. Hopefully through this study, we will have a heightened awareness that temptation is very likely during these situations and we can be on guard and ready to escape the temptation that can come upon us. We need to recognize the warning signs that we are in a dangerous spot and we need to be on heightened awareness so that we don't fall into the river.

We must recognize the risk of temptation when...

I. ...we are anonymous.

- A. When people feel as if they can hide their identities then they are more likely to do things that they normally wouldn't do.
 - 1. I normally wouldn't do this... but no one will find out... What happens in Vegas... stays in Vegas...
 - 2. I can do get on this website and say this thing because no one will know that it is actually me.
 - 3. I can get on this website and then clear out my search history and it will be as if I was never there.
 - 4. Wen we feel anonymous we almost feel invincible and we can do whatever we want because its not really us.
- B. Evil loves darkness and if we are anonymous then temptation is certainly going to try to bring us down.
 - 1. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and Jesus explains that the evil loves darkness and anonymity. **(John 3:19,20)**
 - 2. Saul got himself in trouble by trying to be anonymous and bypass God and His commands. **(I Sam 28:5-12)**
 - 3. Man might try to hide from God, but he will not succeed. **(Jer. 23:23,24)**
- C. There is no such thing as true anonymity because the Lord sees all things.
 - 1. All things are laid out before the Lord. **(Heb. 4:13)**
 - 2. Therefore, we shouldn't be involved in things where we can be anonymous. When someone says, "c'mon let's do this (thing), no one will find out!" there should be sirens and red flags flying. This is how the adulterous woman hooks her victims. **(Prov. 7:18-21)**
 - 3. We shouldn't hide secrets from our spouses and have special codes to things that only we know. Having secret codes and being anonymous only gives a place for temptation to creep up and give us an occasion to sin and those sins will find us out. **(Num. 32:23)**

II. ...we feel spiritual superior to others.

- A. This is the "yes... but..." syndrome.
 - 1. "Yes I know that this is dangerous for most people, but..."
 - 2. "Yes I realize that this has really hurt a lot of other people, but..."
 - 3. We recognize the danger of whatever the subject might be but we feel as if our superior spirituality can get us through this thing without us being subject to be stung by it like so many before us.

- B. Unfortunately, we have a tremendous ability to overestimate our own strength and underestimate the power of Satan.
 1. "I'm the one that goes to service 3 times a week...I won't sin!"
 2. "I'm the one that's willing to get up early on a Sunday morning to go to Bible class...I won't sin!"
 3. "I'm the one that's been a Christian for ___ years... so of course I can do this and not sin!"
 4. "Look at all that I'm doing spiritually!"
- C. We must not be that person who thinks that we are far stronger than we actually are. We must recognize our weakness and be on guard against Satan.
 1. Satan will come at us in many different ways. **(Eph. 6:11)**
 2. Paul warns 2 separate groups of Christians against the folly of overestimating ourselves and our strength against Satan's tactics. **(I Cor. 10:12; Rom. 12:3)**
 3. If we begin to think about ourselves as being better and stronger than we are then we need to have those sirens and warning signs going off in our minds because we are in danger of being tempted to sin. **(Jer. 17:9)**

III. ...we experience success.

- A. When we are successful we can become trapped in a dangerous mindset.
 1. "Look how good things are going in my life... I must be doing something right!"
 2. "Man, I sure know how to do things well!"
 3. "Everything is going so well, so I'll just take it easy and relax."
- B. Success can easily put us in a mindset where we are drowning in self-conceit.
 1. Jesus warns about the dangers of becoming conceited when we are successful in this life. **(Luke 12:13-21)**
 2. When we are successful we might get people around us who are doing nothing more than living off of our success, but that's ok because we have great "friends" and that is another sign of success in this life.
 3. Many godly men have fallen when they they were the most successful.
 - a) Peter didn't take Jesus' warning about Satan seriously. **(Luke 33:31-34)**
 - b) Uzziah became proud as he grew stronger as a king and he did what was not lawful for him to do. **(II Chron. 26:16-18)**
 - c) David was at the height of his power when he saw Bathsheba on the roof and sinned with her. **(II Sam. 11)**
 4. We cannot be blinded by our successes into thinking that we are far stronger than we actually are. We need to remember who is the source of our success is and continue to lean on Him for strength and make sure that we are aware of the danger and the risk that come when we have successes.

IV. ...we are exhausted from being strong.

- A. Being strong for the Lord for so long can lead to a point where we are just exhausted and feel as if we can give in for just a little bit.
 1. "It'll just be this one time...I've been doing good for so long so this one time won't matter that much."
 2. "You know what? God wants me to be happy! I've been serving Him and this is just something I want and I'm tired of having to be strong."
- B. God does desire for us to be happy, but our happiness must be found in Him. **(Psalm 1:1,2)**
- C. Scripture encourages us to not give up when we are tired and worn out but to keep pressing on.
 1. Perseverance should be a part of our spiritual makeup. **(II Pet. 1:5-7, 8-10)**
 2. We shouldn't lose heart and grow weary with doing good. **(Gal. 6:9)**
 3. If we find ourselves growing tired with doing God's will then we need to be on high alert! Satan is waiting at the door and he is wanting to bring us low and cause us to rationalize our sin.

There will be times in life where we need to be on high alert. Those folks falling into the river should've noticed the danger, but they didn't and they continued to fall into the river and had to be rescued. We can find ourselves in the same situation in regards to sin. We must be diligent to make sure that we recognize the dangers in certain situations in our lives. If we do this then we can avoid the temptation and be much less likely to find ourselves in spiritual trouble. May God help us to be aware and ready to identify the warning signs of sin and glorify Him in all that we do.