



Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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TEMPTATION: UNDERSTAND, RESIST, RECOVER

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.
Luke 4:1-2

‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’

Luke 22:40

Jesus, immediately following his baptism, was tempted ... for forty days! On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he exhorted his disciples to pray “that you may not come into the time of trial.” If Jesus and his disciples were tempted, what hope is there for us and for our children?

The first Sunday of Lent, as our pastor preached on Jesus’ temptation, he turned to face the youth choir, as well as the congregation, and announced, “All of us will be tempted. Temptation itself is not a sin. Like Jesus, we are given the choice of how to respond. Unlike Jesus, we won’t always successfully resist temptation ... and even then, God has a plan for us.”

Growing up, I believed that to be tempted was a moral flaw, one I wanted to deny and hide from view and never acknowledge. I thought the goal in life was to be perfect. Now, I know that the goal is to follow, love and be loved by, and accept forgiveness from the only One who ever lived and was perfect. Wish I’d heard that sermon as a child and youth.

So, what can we do to teach our children about temptation, to help them understand it, resist it, and recover when they give in to it?

UNDERSTAND

Let’s make sure we make the distinction between being tempted to do what we know is wrong and giving in to that temptation. Let us speak our own temptations aloud in the presence of our kids. “I was really upset when that woman cut me off and took the parking space I was waiting for. I was tempted to get out of my car and tell her how rude that was. Instead, I tried to understand why she might have been in a hurry or exhausted or pressured or upset, and I prayed for her.”

When your toddler balls up a fist to reclaim a favorite toy from her brother, hold her little fist and tell her, "I know how tempting it is to hit or pull your toy away when Ted takes it. What else could you do instead?"

Tell the story of Jesus' temptations. Read the story of Jonah giving in to the temptation to run away from what God was calling him to do. As you read Bible stories or other favorite children's books, talk about the temptations people face. Listen to the stories of your child's day and what was tempting to them.

RESIST

Talk with your child about all of the resources available to resist temptation - a clear sense of right and wrong, adults to give you support, good friends who share your values, prayer that God will help you.

Then, be vigilant to catch your child resisting temptation ... to take what is not theirs, to butt in line, to cheat, to lash back ... and applaud them. Tell them that you know how hard it is and that they must be very proud of being able to resist the temptation. This can be a story you remind them of when they have not been able to resist.

Assure your child of your availability and support to get out of hard situations. Teach them to ask for the help they need. Identify safe people to ask. Create a family code word that your child can use to signal you to come to the rescue. Ours was, "I don't feel well." We came to get our child, without asking any other questions. Later, we'd discuss it.

RECOVER

There are some great biblical stories of recovering from giving in to temptation. Read the story of Jonah's rescue by God and being sent again to Ninevah. Read the story of Peter's betrayal of Jesus and Jesus' reconciling gift to Peter, asking three times, "Peter, do you love me?" and enjoining Peter to feed his lambs, tend his sheep, feed his sheep. This is the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted building his church!

Remind your child that in baptism, God declared them beloved and forgiven. Invite them to confess their sins in worship, in prayer, to you, to accept God's love and forgiveness. Make the sign of the cross on that dear forehead and bless them: "Child of God, Jesus loves you, blesses you, and forgives you." Amen.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. As a family, make a collage of pictures and words and symbols that are temptations for people in our culture. Talk about what makes them tempting. Frame the collage with words and pictures of those resources that help us resist temptation. Discuss how we can call on those resources to resist temptation.
2. Create a code word that your kids can use to signal you to rescue them.

3. When your children give in to temptation, help them learn how to recover from a mistake. Own what they did wrong. Apologize and make it as right as they can. Learn from the experience what will help them resist temptation next time. Covered by God's grace and forgiveness, move on. Make sure that you model this when the mistake is yours!
4. Read stories or watch movies about people who resist doing the wrong thing, even when peers are pressuring them. Ask: What can we learn from these characters? What would be hard for you in that situation? What resources do you have to resist doing the wrong thing? How can your friends and family support you?
5. Pray with and for your child that they may be spared "the time of trial," that they may resist temptation, that they will have the courage to own up to what they do wrong, and trust in a God who loves and forgives them.