

This winter we're looking at understanding our hearts from the book of Proverbs. This aligns with our focus on God's transforming work in our lives. We want to cooperate with Him as He transforms us. We're asking the question "What do we need to understand so we can cooperate with God's transforming work in our lives?" We first learned about our need to understand our hearts from God's perspective. We learned our hearts can deceive us but not God; no one has a pure or clean heart but we can receive new hearts by God's grace. Then we need to guard our hearts with the Holy Spirit's help. Last week we saw our need to understand our desires. We learned desires are good and given by God. But they can be corrupted or twisted. So we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work to reorder our desires so they honor God. Today we're looking at understanding temptation. A popular definition of temptation would go something like this – "A temptation is an invitation to do something you probably shouldn't do, but you can always recover later. Like eat too much chocolate. Or have that dessert even though you might pay for it later." So temptation may be seen as something you should consider not doing. But it feels good in the moment and can be easily recovered from. Temptation in the Bible is very different. I would define like this – "Temptation is an invitation to think, say or do something contrary to God's will and law." So giving in to temptation is never seen as "no big deal" or easy to recover from in the Bible. It's seen as dangerous, damaging and soul-threatening. It offends God! So we need to learn or review how temptation can work on our hearts. And then we can see how to resist temptation in dependence upon God. My hope is that you will leave here today with greater insight into how temptation works. And be greatly encouraged because of Jesus' help, power and wisdom to overcome the temptations we face. Our text today is Proverbs 7. Last week I said for most of the Proverbs, you just have to take one or two on a particular topic and meditate on them. But there are occasional extended Proverbs like this one. We get to examine it today.

**Proverbs 7 (ESV) (Page 461)**

**7** My son, keep my words

and treasure up my commandments with you;

<sup>2</sup> keep my commandments and live;

keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;

<sup>3</sup> bind them on your fingers;

write them on the tablet of your heart.

<sup>4</sup> Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"

and call insight your intimate friend,  
<sup>5</sup>to keep you from the forbidden woman,  
from the adulteress with her smooth words.  
<sup>6</sup>For at the window of my house  
I have looked out through my lattice,  
<sup>7</sup>and I have seen among the simple,  
I have perceived among the youths,  
a young man lacking sense,  
<sup>8</sup>passing along the street near her corner,  
taking the road to her house  
<sup>9</sup>in the twilight, in the evening,  
at the time of night and darkness.  
<sup>10</sup>And behold, the woman meets him,  
dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.  
<sup>11</sup>She is loud and wayward;  
her feet do not stay at home;  
<sup>12</sup>now in the street, now in the market,  
and at every corner she lies in wait.  
<sup>13</sup>She seizes him and kisses him,  
and with bold face she says to him,  
<sup>14</sup>"I had to offer sacrifices,  
and today I have paid my vows;  
<sup>15</sup>so now I have come out to meet you,  
to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.  
<sup>16</sup>I have spread my couch with coverings,  
colored linens from Egyptian linen;  
<sup>17</sup>I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,  
aloes, and cinnamon.  
<sup>18</sup>Come, let us take our fill of love till morning;  
let us delight ourselves with love.  
<sup>19</sup>For my husband is not at home;  
he has gone on a long journey;  
<sup>20</sup>he took a bag of money with him;  
at full moon he will come home."  
<sup>21</sup>With much seductive speech she persuades him;  
with her smooth talk she compels him.  
<sup>22</sup>All at once he follows her,  
as an ox goes to the slaughter,  
or as a stag is caught fast

<sup>23</sup> till an arrow pierces its liver;  
 as a bird rushes into a snare;  
 he does not know that it will cost him his life.

<sup>24</sup> And now, O sons, listen to me,  
 and be attentive to the words of my mouth.

<sup>25</sup> Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;  
 do not stray into her paths,

<sup>26</sup> for many a victim has she laid low,  
 and all her slain are a mighty throng.

<sup>27</sup> Her house is the way to Sheol,  
 going down to the chambers of death.

This Proverb is told from the perspective of a father or a wise older person instructing younger people. Notice he speaks to “my son” in verse 1 and “my sons” in verse 24. So it’s addressed to young men to heed this warning. But we also need to recognize it has application for both men and women. We need to be careful that we don’t misuse the Proverb to place all the blame on the woman and then carelessly extend that blame solely to women in these situations. Nor must we absolve the young man we will meet in this story as if he is a helpless victim.

We must also recognize that the tables can be turned where a man tempts a woman.

Alice Ogden Bellis is a professor on the Hebrew Bible paraphrased this proverb from a mother speaking to her daughter.

“My dear girls;

You know that I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to be happy, but as you know, life is tough, life is real. It takes more than being an excellent student, athlete or dancer or musician to lead a happy life. These things are important and you are on your way to achieving some of these goals, but it takes more to be happy. And so I ask you to try to discover what is true and just and wise....

Make truth your lover, justice your muse. Truth will stand by you if you lose your friends or job because you refused to do something unethical. Justice will encircle you with warmth more real than a fire when people shun you for standing up for the dignity and worth of every person regardless of their personal characteristics, or when you blow the whistle on wrongdoing....

But Truth and justice are elusive. They present themselves to those who seek them persistently and seriously. They hide from everyone else. Do not be misled by handsome faces, by beautiful bodies, by the right clothes, or by correct manners. Especially do not be deluded by flatterers who tell you that you are beautiful (of course you are!) and then ask you to give them your body or your soul. The pretty boys and jocks will beckon to you. They will ask you to go out. Soon, they will ask you to bed. It's a dangerous world. Their ways lead to death, not just moral death, but physical death as well. Drugs and alcohol and cigarettes are some of the ways of those who want to show off, but inside are little boys. They want easy sex with no responsibility. Do not cavort with folly. Do not consort with the frivolous. Rather spend your time with men of substance and worth. A good man is hard to find, but he is more precious than jewels."

So with the Proverbs 7 and this other perspective in mind, let's go through this text to understand temptation.

**How does the heart fall into temptation? First it starts we allow our hearts (eyes, feet, mouths, thoughts, desires, emotions) to carelessly wander. (7:6-9)**

The story begins with the narrator looking out their window in verse 6. They look through lattice which are strips of wood put together in a criss cross pattern. It served as a fence or something that you might want climbing plants to grab onto. If you put it across your window, you could still see out through the gaps between the wood strips but your view was obscured a little. Yet the narrator sees a young man lacking sense. His vulnerability oozes from his behavior. The narrator describes him as simple. He knows this because of the situation the young man puts himself into.

In verse 8, he passes along the street near the corner that leads to the adultress' house. But he not only passes the corner, he turns down the street. He takes the road that will go by her house. I think the language indicates he may not have set out to go on that road. But he when he saw her corner, he went down her street.

But verse 9 clearly reveals his carelessness. When is he out walking? "In the twilight, in the evening at the time of night and darkness."

Now to us it's no big deal to go out at twilight or at night. Sunset times change dramatically throughout our year. During the winter months, we're always out in the dark. But remember this was primarily an agricultural society. They lived relatively close to the equator. So they had sunlight from around 6 AM to 6 PM. People got up at the crack of dawn to take advantage of the daylight. They worked very hard throughout the day to survive. Then they dropped exhausted into bed at night. There may have been the occasional torch or lamp burning inside a house. But there was no bright outside

light unless it was full moon. Their villages and cities did not have streetlights. There may have been the occasional torch burning attached to city walls. But people didn't go out at night except for special occasions.

And the question begs to be asked, why was this young man out in the twilight, in the evening at the time of night and darkness? He couldn't do any work. It doesn't sound like it was a feast time. It was an ordinary night when he should have been at home. But he's out wandering and careless. This can be where temptation starts. We allow ourselves to wander. We can allow our thoughts or eyes or feet wander to see where we'll end up. This can lead to trouble. This especially happens in mid-life or later in life. We can get comfortable. We can think that we've seen it all. We can believe that we know it all and nothing can surprise or catch us. But wandering or letting our guard down can lead to problem.

Think about King David. He was at the height of his power. He was king over Israel, defeated his enemies, secure in the palace and love by the people. When did he get into trouble? When his army was off at war where he should have been. He stays home in the palace. He goes out and looks over the city. His eyes wander until he sees a woman bathing. Instead of turning his eyes away, he continues to look and then acts on what he sees. That action leads to adultery, murder and the death of an infant son – all because David allowed himself to be careless. 1 Corinthians 10:12 is a great reminder. "Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." So the first step for the heart to fall into temptation is to wander and let down our guard.

**We listen to a rationalization for sin.** It can come from Satan, someone else or ourselves. In Proverbs 7, the young man receives rationalization from this woman who suddenly appears. Notice the word "behold?" She's suddenly there. He doesn't see her coming down the road. He doesn't see her open her door. It's like she waited in the shadows.

We're told she dressed like a prostitute with a wily or guarded heart. So she dresses in a revealing way but her heart is unrevealed. Outwardly, she holds nothing back. Inwardly, she gives nothing away. Her intent, however, is clear to the narrator. She wants to somehow take advantage of this young man. The question that we asked of him suddenly applies to her. What is she doing out alone, at twilight when it's dark? Verse 11 answers "She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home, now in the street, now in the market and every corner she lies in wait." She is rebellious and brash; restless and roaming. She displays her rashness by kissing him. This was apparently widely disapproved action in Israelite culture. You did not kiss someone who was not a family member in public. Song of Songs 8:1 states "Oh that you

were like a brother to me. . . If I found you outside, I would kiss you and none would despise me.” So if you kissed someone other than family in public, you were shamed. But this woman has no shame. She boldly kisses this young man.

Then she presents a rationalization for him to come with her. “I had to offer sacrifices and today I have paid my vows.” Now what does this have to do with anything?” Some of your versions might say “I made peace offerings.” So she’s gone to the temple in Jerusalem or to the local priest that day to make peace offerings with God? So she’s completed some sort of religious duty. These offerings often involved a meal. So you would make your offering and then invite others to share the meal with you. But you shared the meal with your family or friends who would come to celebrate peace and fellowship with God. Here she meets maybe a stranger and invites him to this meal? A wise young man would wonder where her husband and family might be. But somehow this invitation seems reasonable. It’s almost like she’s saying “I have prayed and sacrificed to God. Now please come to my home and finish my religious observance. And then we can be together. Or put more starkly – “After we finish our prayer and devotion, we can commit adultery.”

But she doesn’t quite put it like that. It’s presented rationally. It’s almost like she believes you can appease God by giving him a sacrifice. Then He’ll turn a blind eye to whatever you do after that. This was Amos the Prophet’s message that we looked at in the fall of 2017. The Israelites did the religious ritual and then lived however they wanted to which was abominable to God.

This is what can happen to us with temptation. We go along in life and walk with God in most parts. But then we separate out some parts of our lives and disconnect them from the Lord. So we’ll walk with God during our work week. But when we get to the weekend, we’re taking a break and we’ll do our own thing. Or we walk with God when we’re with other people. But when we get alone, we deserve a break. Suddenly we don’t walk with God for that segment of time. This is like magical thinking. People did it all the time in ancient Israel where they thought you just had to do your religious duty to get God off your back for a while. Christians continue to do this today when they disconnect parts of their lives from Jesus’ Lordship.

So a wandering heart hears a rationalization for sin. Then things really heat up. The woman used her mouth to kiss the young man. She used her mouth to invite the young man to join her in a meal. Then she uses her mouth to make an over promise. This is another stage in temptation. **We trust an overpromise. (7:15-18)** Verse 15 – “So now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly and I have found you.” Really? This woman who is at every marketplace, street and

corner came out to meet him. She sought only him? Now she has found him. How flattering. How captivating. She didn't seek only him. She sought whoever came along. That's an overpromise.

Then she appeals to his senses. "I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linens." Okay, this is no poor woman. She has a couch which most ordinary people couldn't afford. She has linens from Egypt. That's not the ordinary linen spun by the farmer's wife while she tries to keep her children and the household going. Verse 17 – I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon." Myrrh is that pretty expensive liquid that the wise men presented to Joseph and Mary. Aloes and cinnamon are spices. She describes an environment that looks and smells really appealing. She apparently has money. This young man must have thought he hit the jackpot.

Then comes another over promise – "Come let us take our fill of love till morning, let us delight ourselves with love." She paints a picture of ultimate romance. This will be so wonderful and memorable. It will be so much love. Notice how she mentions love twice in verse 18. But is she really talking about love? Will this love last? Notice how long she commits to loving him? Verse 18 – "Come, let us take our fill of love till morning." That's how long she would "love" him – a few hours. Or that's how long a man "loves" a woman he just wants to use for sex. That's not love. Love is patient, kind, does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth." The love of verse 18 fails the love test on every level. Yet it sounds appealing and intoxicating. She overpromises love which he will believe. When temptation goes to work on our heart, there are often over promises that we must discern.

So the steps toward falling to temptation include a careless or wandering heart; listening to a rationalization to sin and believing an overpromise. This is often enough to get the heart to sin. But we may still resist temptation because of the fear of consequences. So sometimes the final stage of temptation will happen when **We believe assurances that there will be no consequences.** That's what the woman does in verses 19-20. "For my husband is not at home, he has gone on a long journey. He took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home." She reassures him that there will be no consequences to their sin. Her husband cannot possibly come home that night for apparently the new moon is far away. He took a large money bag with him indicates a lengthy journey.

But in reality, there is always a cost – a heavy cost for transgressing God's spiritual and moral order. Not only is there the financial and potentially physical danger of the husband's wrath upon discovery of this sin, such a sin destroys

homes and harms families. Tim Keller notes that we often believe a demonic lie – we can sin now and easily ask forgiveness later. But things are not so simple or harmless. Sin can lead to a hard or despondent heart. And consequences will eventually come out. Abdu Murray in his book *Saving Truth* states “Integrity takes years to build and moments to destroy.”

All of this comes together to overcome the young man’s objections or rational thinking. So in verse 22 we read “all at once he follows her.” The temptation succeeds. The heart falls. Her seductive speech and smooth talk have persuaded him. This smooth talk is like walking on ice that it’s easy to slide and fall off.

But lest we think this is all the tempter’s fault, the young man is completely responsible for his actions. He cannot claim that “it just happened.” He was the one who wandered carelessly. He listened to the rationalization. He trusted an overpromise because he wanted to. He accepted the argument of no consequence. When we give in to temptation, we cannot blame others for our choices. We gave in. Nor can we argue that the temptation was just so strong, we couldn’t resist it. And God never puts us in situations where we have to sin. The temptations we face are common to all people says 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13. But God is faithful and will with the temptation make a way to escape so that we can bear up under it. So we never have to sin.

But temptation is part of living in the real world. **So how do we resist temptation?** First, we need to **Cry out to Jesus for His help to resist temptation.** Jesus knows what its like to face and resist temptation. Hebrews 4:15-16 – “For 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. 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.”

When it comes to temptation, Jesus is right there to help us. He’s someone who can actually say “I know what you’re going through.” But He can also say, “And I didn’t give in.” Jesus has the power, love and desire to help and protect His people through temptation if only we will ask for His help.

A second strategy to resist temptation involves **Place supreme value on God’s Word.** During Jesus’ great temptation, He fought off Satan’s invitations with the Word of God. This proverb began with an appeal to pay attention to the words of this wise person. So if you imagine God speaking to you from verses 1-5 in this passage, you see an appeal to pay very close attention to His Word. “Treasure up my commandments with you. Keep them and live. Keep my

teaching as the apple of your eye.” The apple of the eye is the dark part of the eye – the pupil – the very center.

It’s like he’s saying treasure this word like you treasure your sight.

Or bind them on your fingers. If you were to tie a string on your finger in the morning, you would see it all day. You would feel it and notice it when you looked down at your hand. It would be a constant reminder of something. Here the appeal is to keep God’s Word constantly before us. Knowing God’s Word can protect us during times of temptation. It shows us God’s glory and reveals Him as infinitely more appealing than the cheap pleasures of the world.

And in verse 4, the narrator appeals to his son to adopt wisdom like your sister. In good family relationships, a sister is someone you can talk with and entrust your deep thoughts to. They can also be someone who has permission to speak truth into life and unmask what we might not see in ourselves. Then at the end of the chapter in verse 24, the narrator again appeals for the sons to listen to the words of his mouth. We need to be attentive to the words of the wisest person in the universe, God Himself.

**Another piece in resisting temptation. Remind yourself often of the deadly consequences that accompany sin.** (Prov. 7:22, 23, 26, 27). Sometimes we may need some brutal honesty to help us take seriously the dangers of temptation. Notice how the narrator describes the young man after he agrees to go with the woman. Verse 22 – “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare”. All three images describe animals who semi-willingly go to their deaths. The ox walks with the one leading it even though it’s being led to slaughter. The deer has run free until its horns get stuck fast in a bush. Perhaps it was led there by a trap or enticement. The bird flies into the snare. It is not running away and then gets caught. In a similar way, this act will cost the young man his life not necessarily his literal life. But his life will suffer great loss and suffering though he believed he would experience great gain and joy.

But the sons or daughters listening to this proverb might think they’re special. It could never happen to them. So the narrator reminds them verses 26-27 of how many have fallen on this way. Many have been laid low. A mighty throng has been slain. Her house leads to death. Giving in to temptation leads to death. The wise narrator adds one more piece in his arsenal against temptation. Remember it can start with careless wandering. So a most proactive way to resist temptation is not to wander. Avoid the paths that might lead there. **Do not turn to temptation’s ways or stray onto its paths.** Verse 25 – “Let not your heart turn aside to her ways or do not stray on her paths.” The young man walked at

night past her corner and then down her street. If he was not out at night or not walking near her street, he would likely not even have faced this temptation. We need to fight the battle starting with our thoughts. Ideas or tempting thoughts might come to our minds. But we must not entertain them or act on them. Don't let a thought become a train of thoughts leading in a wrong direction. These are all ways to resist.

So how might we respond to all of this today? Well all of us have given into temptation at times in our lives. That might be where you are at today. We must admit and confess our sins. We acknowledge it before God and others who have been hurt or affected by our sin. But the good news of the Gospel is that Jesus died to pay for that sin. We can be forgiven from it. God will then walk with us through any consequences as we go forward with a new heart and life. So maybe you need confess giving in to some temptation today and get right with God and others.

You might have been unable to resist temptation in your life. You or others may have suffered greatly because of it. But Jesus himself bore your sins in his body on the tree, that you might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24). Through Jesus' death, it is possible for us to die to sin and live to righteousness. When we receive Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. We have a new nature and new heart. By the Spirit's power we can resist the temptations that come to us. If this describes you, I invite you to turn away from your sins and turn to Christ as your Savior, Redeemer and Lord. You may want to come forward following our worship service today to pray with those who are here.

To all of us, we need to acknowledge the reality that our hearts can wander. They are prone to wander and prone to leave the God we love. But by constantly turning to Christ, we can ask Him to keep us close to Himself. We can resist temptation by grasping how it works and depending on Jesus to resist it. Let us come now to Jesus to be honest with Him about our hearts.