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SERMON TITLE: Your Foe May Be Closer than You Think
SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 24:1-17
DATE: October 24, 2021

Read also Matthew 5:17-20. Online service at
www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Have you been feeling tempted lately?

There are brownies in the kitchen. . . . *Anyone tempted?*

- ~ Mae West said, "I generally avoid temptation unless I can't resist it."
- ~ Oscar Wilde took another slant: "I can resist anything, except temptation."
- ~ Here's one: "Opportunity may knock only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell." ~ Robert Orben

There are brownies in the kitchen. . . . *You are being tempted.*

Paul writes:

"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure" (1 Corinthians 10:13). NLT

Brownies are easy. But then there's the hard stuff—when you are tempted to take shortcuts from the internal character you are to grow into as a Christian. God wants your character to be shaped for eternal living. We are shaped by temptations. We learn from success and failure when we are tempted.

Today's story has to do with the temptation of a guy who started out as a secondary character in the Bible, but he was being shaped for and would become one of the greatest leaders who ever lived. Let's see him during the early stages: READ 1 Samuel 24:1-17

David was called to be king. He had been anointed as king by Samuel, the prophet. But, Saul still held the position! David had his own army. That's what warriors did in those days and their reputations were built by successes in battle. But it would take a long time before David was ready. How would David become king?

Saul's army was five times as large as David's. It wouldn't even be a contest. When would David become king?

How and when David would become king was on the mind of his men. So when they find themselves in the cave with the very man who is the obstacle to David's assuming the throne—yay!

Lucky day! Saul's vulnerable. This will be easy. Take him down, David's men urged!

This all seemed too good to be true! **This was temptation. This was the human way of accomplishing David's future.**

Sometimes we are tempted to take advantage and follow the "human way of doing things." But as believers, should we not set a higher goal?

God wanted to replace Saul because Saul was always running ahead of God. Saul disobeyed God's orders. Saul put other concerns before his relationship with God.

Scripture says in James:

"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death" (1:14-15).

David inadvertently found himself in a position where he could seize advantage.

God did not cause this temptation. James says:

"And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else" (1:3).

God did not cause David's temptation. His friends did. Your foe may be closer than you think!

But why does God encourage us to not give into our own desires? Dallas Willard says that when you follow God's ways you are relying on God's will and *there is no safer place than to put your life in God's will.*

God is always aware of what you are going through and you can lean on God.

As soon as David cut Saul's robe his conscience bothered him and he turned to God's way. God was close to David because David talked to God when he was troubled, discouraged, depressed, being hunted by enemies, being hurt by friends, when life was tough and there was loss.

Turn to God and God will help you make the right decisions.

David knew it was not right to kill Saul, even though it could be called "self-defense." So what is the goal?

It is the belief that we are actually in good hands when we are the Lord's:

“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. His heart is secure; . . . in the end he will look in triumph on his foes” (Ps 112:1, 8).

So David backed off. David decided to put it all in God’s hands.

Let’s step out of this story for a minute for a twentieth century story that we can relate to more readily. It was 1943 during World War II.

You see a picture here on the chancel. The larger plane is an American B-17 bomber. Its nickname was *Ye Olde Pub*. At the controls was Second Lieutenant Charlie Brown, along with his copilot Pinky. Flight Engineer Frenchy; Radio Operator Pechout; Bombardier & Navigator Andy and Doc, Ball turret Blackie; Left & Right Waist Jennings & Russian; and Tail Gunner Ecky—Charlie, age 21, led this crew of nine. *The Pub* was flying their first mission over Germany.

You can see it is badly damaged. That was the first day’s damage. You see a big hole in the nose; an engine out; a wing with a hole; another engine malfunctioning. In this mission, his formation broke up until *The Pub* was flying alone. It was attacked again by enemy fighters. Engine controls were shot out. Their guns jammed due to the cold until only three were operational. Half the rudder was shot away. Bullets and shells slowly dismembered *The Pub*. The tail was hit and the gun position destroyed, the glass gone, and wall hacked open. Ecky was dead.

Russian was seriously hit and unconscious. The radio room was shredded until it looked like a cheese grater. Half the crew was injured and Charlie frantically maneuvered the plane to avoid a knockout blow. His left horizontal stabilizer was shot off, leaving a three-foot stub from what had been a sixteen-foot rear wing.¹

The small plane in the picture is a German Messerschmitt fighter, carrying the marks of an ace pilot, Second Lieutenant Franz Stigler. He needed one more bomber victory to qualify for the Knight’s Cross. In Franz’s mind, it wasn’t something to brag about—gaining that award was a sign of honor that he had done something good for his people. His country had been all but destroyed by this war.

The Pub was in trouble. It started dropping in a spin, accelerating as it descended from 22,000 to 10,000 feet when it went into a nosedive. At 3,000 ft. though, it began stabilizing for no reason. And this was an aircraft with no stabilizer! Charlie said later it was as if her wings began to flutter.²

She was so low she was blowing leaves off trees. But she remained leveled out. The crew began mapping the fastest way to get to England. When they approached Germany’s coastal flak—like a wall of defense, they went right over a German airfield where Franz Stigler was. Hearing the bomber, he jumped in his

plane, throttled forward, and blasted off toward the bomber, to pursue his Knight’s Cross.

It wasn’t hard to catch the slow-moving bomber. He saw the tail gunner with weapon aimed and Franz aimed through his gun sight. But then he noticed the damaged plane, the broken stabilizer, the missing windscreen, and the gunner covered in blood and not moving. So he released his finger from the trigger. He thought—*how in the world are you still flying?* Emotion swept over him and he forgot he was a German fighter pilot. He began flying along the bomber’s right side.

He saw the missing gun, the radio room that had been blown out, the empty top turret, and then its crew, huddled over one another, caring for their wounded. So he settled his 109 into position above the bomber’s right wingtip. He saw the nose that had been blown away. **The bomber flew as if held up by an invisible string.**

Then Franz saw Blackie in his turret. Blackie looked back at him, prepared to die, folding his hands, expecting the 109 pilot to shoot. But Franz never fired. Blackie’s eyes met his. And Franz remembered.

He remembered when he had gone to Africa to avenge his brother’s death and he would have had no mercy. This was a temptation led by anger. Had it been then, he would have destroyed the bomber and killed its crew. But a trainer he had had taught Franz a new code. That was “*to know when it was time to answer a higher call.*” He looked at the men tending to each other’s wounds, and a gear clicked in his soul. He felt the small Bible in his breast pocket. “This will be no victory for me, he decided. I will not have this on my conscience for the rest of my life.”³

Then he decided to do more. He decided to escort the bomber over the German border to safety.

Near the right wingtip, Pilot Charlie caught sight of Franz. The German pilot nodded to the American pilot. He knew that if he escorted the bomber through the flak zone, the shooters would recognize his 109 and the gunners would not fire on one of their own. The little fighter, rather than destroying the big bomber and its crew, protected it and led it to safety, at the risk of his own life.

There’s more to the story, of course. But the point is we have a higher call to overcome temptation and act with the true character and courage of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we do that—both men and women are better people—good people who change the lives of other people for the better.

Where might you be needed to change the life of someone, when it would be easier to ignore them and think only of yourself?

Lead us not into temptation—and deliver us, and others, from evil.

AMEN

¹ Descriptions of the damaged plane comes from “The Boxer” in *A Higher Call: An Incredible True Story of Combat and Chivalry in the War-torn Skies of World War II*, (Dutton Caliber: 2012) 174-189.

² *Ibid.*, 194.

³ *Ibid.*, 202.

