

A MODEL TO PUT OFF THE OLD SELF and PUT ON THE NEW SELF

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You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

(Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV)

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

(1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV)

The believer's character, spiritual growth, reputation, and Kingdom effectiveness are a consequence and outgrowth of life choices he or she makes over time. We continually make behavioral choices in response to:

1. Jesus Christ
2. Our old nature
3. Direct temptation from God's enemy.

By choosing to respond to Jesus our divine potential for Christian growth and maturity is enhanced. By choosing to respond to our old nature (old habits) or to God's enemy our spiritual growth is stymied and our effectiveness for God's Kingdom is diminished. The purpose of this short article is to present a practical way to help counselees respond to temptation using a model developed by EMERGE Ministries, Inc. called "Putting Off the Old Self...Putting On the New Self."

Our counselees are well served when we can help them identify the triggering mechanisms and origins of the thoughts which lead to behavioral choices. Consider that a good speaker can talk at about 450 words per minutes. However, our thoughts race along at a clip of about four or five thousand words per minute! Thus, the potential is in place for us to experience temptation several thousand times a day! Our spiritual battles are won or lost in the battle that takes place in the four inches between our ears. This is where spiritual warfare really takes place. While there are times when we are relatively free of temptation, those times are clearly far and few between.

It is likely that most temptation begins even before we are consciously aware. There is a brief time between our first awareness of tempting thoughts and the loss of control over them. This period is represented on the diagram as a "growing temptation" which is accomplished by awareness of healthy alternative. The first awareness of being tempted may be accompanied by an urge, thought, fantasy, or idea. Triggering influences may be a mood, a place, a certain person, etc. Remember, temptation in and of itself is NOT sin! Bear in mind, God is always faithful to provide both a warning and a way of escape whenever we are tempted (review 1 Corinthians 10:13)

(Follow the lower part of the model) If we ignore the warning signs and way of escape that God the Holy Spirit suggests, we will eventually lose control over the increasing power of temptation. At some point, we act out the “old self” and sin. Then we become disheartened in our self-evaluation by self-condemnation, shame, and we lose ground in our spiritual maturing process. Consequently, some counselees have lost days, weeks, and even years of spiritual growth, to say nothing of erosion of ones character, the loss of esteem and the injury to the testimony of Christ. In some instances the choice to yield to sin has brought devastating and irreversible outcomes for the counselee and for the others (e.g. David and Bathsheba).

(Follow the upper part of the model) However, if we wisely listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and choose a healthy alternate behavior, we are strengthened in the inner person. We make progress in our spiritual maturity and experience the pleasure and holiness of God.

The enemy wants to blind us to the consequences of our choices. The wise counselor helps the counselee consider the natural and logical outcomes of potential choices in the hope that those choices will be mediated. As one popular humorist said, “If you don’t want to go to Minneapolis...don’t get on the train!”

The Christian counselor assists the counselee to identify the triggering mechanisms of temptation and then define several healthy substitute behaviors. Work diligently to assist counselees to respond quickly to the urges of the Holy Spirit. Small victories over time cause us to sow behaviors which lead to a harvest of holy habits, godly character and a glorious eternal destiny!

Reflection and Application

Take a moment and reflect on the thoughts that have been flowing through your mind over the past few hours. What is the origin of these thoughts? What has been your response to these thoughts?

In counseling, have the counselee list several triggering events for their temptations. Then, make a second list of alternative behaviors which they will empty the net time they are tempted in this way.

* Model developed by EMERGE Ministries, Inc.