

A young man, who worked for a travel agent, was sent to a Pacific island. Even though it meant being separated from his girlfriend, he accepted the job because it would enable him to earn enough to marry her.

As the lonely weeks went by, she began to have doubts that he was being true to her. After all, the holiday resort where he was working attracted beautiful women from all over the world. The young man declared that he was paying absolutely no attention to them. But he did write this in one of his letters, "I admit that sometimes I'm tempted. But I fight it. I am waiting for the day when I can be with you again."

Not long after he had sent that letter, the young man received a parcel. Inside there was a note and a harmonica. The note said, "I'm sending this to you so you can have something to take your mind off those girls." Dutifully the young man wrote back to his girlfriend and told her that he was practising the harmonica every night and thinking only of her.

Eventually the young man's work on the island finished and he flew home. His girlfriend was waiting at the airport. As he rushed to embrace her, she held up her hand to stop him and said sternly, "Just hold on there a minute. First I want to hear you play that harmonica!

It always comes as a bit of a surprise that even Jesus wasn't exempt from temptation. He was perfect, yet he experienced the subtle attacks of the devil. Temptation will come to anyone regardless of how close they believe they are to God. We are powerless to stop temptation from coming, but it's what we do when temptation comes that really matters.

But let's be clear. Satan is very sneaky. The temptations that Jesus experienced in the wilderness were very logical. He had been fasting for forty days. Turning stones to bread was the most natural thing to do. Who would be hurt by this? After all, it would be ridiculous for God's Son to starve when he could have food with a simple command. He had the power to do it, so why not?

Jesus is taken to the roof of the temple. Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself down onto the courtyard below. Things would be a lot easier if he dramatically landed in the courtyard below. With such a spectacular display the crowd would flock to him. What better way to promote the kingdom of God? He could even avoid the whole Good Friday ordeal.

Then Jesus is shown all the kingdoms and countries of the world. He could have them all if he would bow down and worship Satan. Look at all the good he could do. There are so many who are sick and dying and with all wealth of the kingdoms set before him, this is his chance to do some good.

There is logic behind each of these temptations. They offer an easy way out for Jesus to calm his grumbling stomach, to win instant acclaim, and to do so

much good and gain the whole world for his kingdom without any suffering and dying.

Temptation is often not simply choosing between good and evil, but choosing between what is easy and what is hard. And guess who has the easy answers.

That's why we find ourselves discouraged. We are tempted and we fall for it. Often it is only after when we are experiencing the consequences of our choice that we realize that we've been duped. And if you ever get to the point where you love your sin, you want your sin, you need your sin more than you love, want, or need God, the consequences are severe. Simply put, you're walking a path towards hell, and it may feel like you're there already.

So what can you and I possibly do? First, you need to know you have a substitute. His name is Jesus. Jesus handles these very real temptations perfectly. He does not succumb to them. He chooses the good and hard road, time after time. By His consistent choices, He created a perfect performance record. And rather than keep it to Himself, He sets up a trade. Are you ready for this? He takes your performance record with Him to His cross and dies—and He gives you His perfect performance record, and you live. And now, whenever God looks at you he sees Jesus' perfect record. Isn't that amazing? I hope you think so. That's what the gospel is.

And it's this gospel that enables us to love God more than our sin. It's the gospel that transforms duty (I've got to obey) into choice (I want to obey).

Too often we flounder when faced with temptation because we don't know our Bibles well enough. When we are at a crossroad and have to make a choice, we are confused and easily led astray because we don't know what God has said. The bottom line here is Biblical illiteracy is deadly. It's like going into battle without armor or weapons.

But when you are Biblically literate; when you love God more than your sin, you can learn to recognize temptation and say no to it. And, when you know what God says, you learn that when you do make bad choices, your heavenly Father reaches out to you and points you to His Son's cross and assures you that his love for you is as strong as ever. Don't you love a God like that more than your sin?