

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:14-16; I Cor. 10:13; 2 Tim 3:1-13 *DATE: 2018-09-09*

Place: Auditorium

SUBJECT: Temptation

Series: Our Weakness – God’s Strength

THEME: Strength to Resist

SERMON: “My Tug of War”

Introduction

Have you ever played **Tug of War?** (I loved it growing up) Here is a version of it you may not have seen before. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0csUrGpd5A> (1:20 to 1:47 approx.) Looks like fun doesn’t it? Tug of war isn’t always fun, but tug of war between two people, to get what you want, starts very early in life. Just watch **two toddlers** who both want the same toy at the same time – you’ve got ‘Tug of War.’ The strongest one wins, unless somebody stronger - like **mommy**, intervenes.

We face tug of wars all the time. You have **plans** and then a friend asks you to help them with something. Tug of war for your time. You want to **redecorate** the house, your spouse tells you they want to buy a new tool – tug of war for the family budget. And so it goes.

This morning we want to talk about a troublesome and serious tug of war that is going on in every one of us. Paul says in Romans 7.

Romans 7:19ff I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

There is a power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul’s tug of war over sin.

The struggle we all face – not doing what we want to do and doing what we don’t want to do. Who wins? Who is the strongest? Which power in us do we allow to dominate?

Our series is called – **Our Weakness – God’s Strength**. And we are considering areas of our lives where we find ourselves weak or with a weakness that can derail our lives, rob us of joy, and often leave us in a constant wearying struggle. And living life to the full as Jesus talked about, seems like a distant, or maybe even impossible, dream. The Apostle Paul discovered, that when he is weak, **God is strong**. So he learned to embrace his weaknesses, not because he liked the struggle, but because God’s strength was made even more evident in him.

Last week we talked about how **depression** can make life such a struggle for many – and how God often uses, **other Christians**, to help those struggling with depression.

Today we want to talk about our **struggle with sin** and the tug of war that goes on in our lives. It has to do with **Temptation – that desire or urge to do something wrong** or not do something right.

What is Temptation? What are some common sins we are tempted to commit and do commit when we are weak? And how does God give us strength to resist these temptations?

Let me start by saying – **temptation itself is not the weakness**. Temptation is something God has allowed in this world. I am weak when I give in to the temptation, rather than fighting against it. Usually, if I try to fight the temptation on my own, I will lose that tug of war.

On July 4th I had the great experience of accompanying one of my grandchildren, Landon, 8 years old, on a 1 mile Fun Run. (**pic of pappy and Landon**) I’m not sure who ever thought running a mile in July would be fun. But...Previously, on other runs he had attempted, Landon would often stop in the middle of the run to rest. This time he wanted to run the whole mile without stopping. He started out running well – strong, brisk, good rhythm to his steps and his breathing, pappy running beside him. (Not so strong and brisk.)

But about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the run, we had just climbed a pretty steep hill on the course and I could tell he was beginning to falter. He started gasping for air, his mouth was dry, and he started holding his side because of a side stitch. He said, “Pappy, I don’t think I

can keep going.” I pointed to a light pole just a short distance ahead, “Try to make it to that pole.” He did. Then I pointed to the traffic light in the distance. “Let’s run to the light.” He kept going. At the light, we turned the corner and there was the big banner up ahead that said, “Finish Line.” And even though it was up a slight hill, Landon got this determined look on his face, (**pic of Landon finishing**) his pace picked up, and he ran to the finish line without stopping.

His temptation, the desire, the urge, was to stop part way through. Landon became weak but I was able to be strong for him, by encouraging him, coaching him, cheering him on, so he could do what he wanted to do – finish the race without stopping. In one sense, I became his strength and, I helped him find his strength.

Stopping in a race is not wrong. But there are things in life that are wrong. We call them **sins**. We are all tempted by those desires or urges. And the call for every believer, is to face the temptation and not give in to it. But like Paul said, we find ourselves weak and we give in. How can we become strong when we face temptation? Let’s begin an example of One who was strong in the face of temptation.

Jesus. He faced tremendous temptation to sin, near the beginning of his ministry. We read about it in the Gospels. Jesus went in to the wilderness and **fasted for 40 days**. Then Satan came and offered him food if he would bow down and worship Satan. Can you imagine the power of that temptation at that time? You are starving to death and someone offers you food for something as simple as bowing down. But Jesus knew there was more to it than that. So he resisted the temptation. Jesus did not give in.

Then Satan took him to the **top of the temple** and invited him to jump off and see if God’s angels really would protect him. Again, Jesus resisted the temptation and warned against testing God. A third time Satan tempted Jesus with the **attraction of power** over the whole world, if Jesus would worship Satan. And a third time Jesus resisted the temptation and did not sin. How was he able to resist the temptations and remain sinless?

Each time, Jesus recalled scripture. I think that is a clue for us.

You may be thinking, if I was **tempted directly** by Satan, to jump off a high building or

bow down and worship him, of course I would say, “No,” as well. But, Satan is crafty and cunning. He more often brings us **everyday types** of temptations. Ones that at first, don’t seem so big and harmful. What about those types of temptations?

Paul talks about being able to resist the more common temptations to sin.

I Cor. 10:13 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.

Notice that Paul does not say God will take away the temptation. He says, **God will show you a way out so you can endure – or resist.** Our Weakness – God’s Strength.

What are these:

Common Temptations Paul is thinking about?

He gives a long list of common sins (18 of them) in:

II Timothy 3:2–5: We are not going to mention all of them here. But I noticed how many I am tempted to commit. He mentions:

“Loving yourself” in a **narcissistic** way – **preoccupied with yourself and always admiring yourself**), - where you always focus on your agenda, your schedule, your plans, your needs, your work. You don’t let other people and their needs or desires interfere with what you want. When your life is about you and you are impressed with yourself - that’s not a good way to love yourself. (There is a good way to love yourself but that is not it.) Narcissistic self-love is so different from the way Jesus went about living his life.

Loving ourselves is a pretty common temptation.

Closely related to that, Paul mentions the sin of being:

Proud and Arrogant - being **Proud** is when – **you love to draw attention to your accomplishments.**

When someone is telling you a story about something they did, instead of just being happy with them and praising them, do you find yourself trying to top their story, or belittle their

story – even if you only do it in your head and you don't say anything? That's pride. Pride says, "I am better than you."

Arrogance often shows up as loud, or aggressive, disagreeableness towards other people. It often includes making slurs, derogatory comments and insults, that are intended to make the other person look bad. This is a pretty common sin today. Just listen to the way people talk to each other, or read the comments on face book posts.

Paul also mentions the sin of:

Loving your money - being **materialistic**. We often convert our money into stuff. There seems to be nothing wrong with having money, it is loving money. How can you tell if you are tempted to love your money or your stuff? Pretty easy really. How quick are you to give your money away when you see someone in need. Or how easily do you loan or even give your stuff to other people to use or keep? It is very tempting to love our money.

Paul mentions the sin of:

Loving pleasure rather than loving God. This is when we **find more satisfaction in physical excitement than in admiring and seeking God**. If you spend more time on your hobbies than in your worship this may be a sin you are tempted with. I am not saying that worship and hobbies are mutually exclusive. You can do both at the same time. I suspect the Holy Spirit and your spouse or a close friend can help you discern the truth for you on this one.

He mentions the sin of being:

Abusive - This includes **being verbally, physically or emotionally hurtful** to another person. It seems like there is a headline about this sin almost every day. But we should be less concerned about the headlines and those awful people who do such things and more concerned about that being an area where we are tempted and falter.

Then there is the temptation of being:

Ungrateful – This is **assuming that you have a right to, and have earned the things you want to get**. In other words you feel that you are owed certain good things in life – just because!! Here is the test. Anytime you find yourself complaining – when you have to wait at the doctor's office, or your meal wasn't cooked exactly the way you want it, or the grocery store

didn't have the brand of ketchup you like, or when your internet goes out and they say they won't be there to fix it for 3 weeks – if you complain about that. You are being ungrateful.

The last one I will mention:

Sinful speech – this include lying, blaming, insulting, cutting remarks, yelling angrily, gossiping, complaining and more. Anything you say that tears down rather than builds up – sin. Most of us are not serial killers or armed bank robbers – but sinful speech - that may be one of the most common for many of us. It is like we don't even know how to talk nicely to each other. It happens so often. In the counseling office, a couple comes see me because they aren't getting along. It takes about 30 seconds to recognize that they don't know how to speak nicely to each other, particularly about issues they disagree on. Until they can learn to talk nicely, it will be practically impossible to work on other issues.

So these, and Paul's list is much longer, are all common temptations that people struggle with. We are tempted to fall into these types of behaviors and attitudes because of our weakness as human beings with a **sin nature**. That is, **our natural bent or desire to be our own god**. Isn't this how Satan tempted Adam and Eve? Remember he said, "When you eat the forbidden fruit – you will be like God." He offered them a false, but tantalizing promise.

He tempted Jesus with a false but tantalizing promise as well, but Jesus didn't take the bait. Jesus chose to lay aside the privileges that come with being God. Laying aside your privileges and rights is another key to fighting temptation. Paul said, "Jesus, emptied himself, meaning he laid aside his rights and lived his life for the benefit of others – even to the point of considering others better than himself."

Temptations are disguised promises, but they are not from God. They sound like a promise that life will be better if we follow the urge.

God did not create us with the ability to run our own lives successfully without Him. But temptation is the urge to do just that. And when we try, we will make bad decisions, have wrong priorities, hurt people we love, and do things that will bring us misery rather than the happiness we seek.

And the more we dwell on and entertain thoughts of being in charge, the more we want it to be true. So, entertaining or savoring temptations to sin, feeds them and makes them stronger, and harder to resist. They begin to shape our thinking and our behavior. And soon: **Sin has crept in** because we are not strong enough to resist the temptation.

What do we do? We are weak but God is strong. Paul says God will provide a way of escape.

I Cor. 10:13 God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape.

What does that look like? If a temptation is a false promise:

God's escape is almost always found in his promises. And we must choose to trust Him.

Two examples:

The temptation to grumble is disguised as a promise, from the Evil One. Satan promises that if you can have your own way and get what you think you want, you will be happier. That's a false promise.

Grumbling is a form of rebellion against God, treating Him as if he is incompetent, and thinking He can't or won't take care of your needs. So really, grumbling is the failure to trust that God will come through for you. Are there promises in the bible that help us not grumble?

How about this promise?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Here God's promise is that He really does know what is best for us and will lead us that way. Another promise against the temptation to grumble:

My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19) Grumbling really means you don't think God will provide what you need.

Strength to not grumble comes as you learn to trust that he will provide – everything you need.

Another promise to help against grumbling:

And we know that, for those who love God, all things work together for good. (Romans 8:28)

Some things don't make sense in life. You lost your job, now your finances are really tight, and the hot water heater gives out. That's reason enough to grumble. I think it is okay, and a good thing to talk to God about how you are feeling about the situation. But grumbling is saying, "God is not on my side, he doesn't know what I need, so I will tell some other people about it instead." God says, "I am on your side. I will use this in a way that will be good for you. Even if you don't see it right now." The question is: **Will you trust Him?**

The strength to resist the false promise of a temptation often begins by remembering a promise of God and his goodness to us. This is often your way of escape.

A second example:

The temptation to watch pornography, or be sexually immoral or unfaithful to your marriage vows. This one is an epidemic in our society and destroying many. It is the false promise that a forbidden sexual experience or the wrong type of emotional relationship with someone else will make you happy. The way of escape is trusting promises of God such as:

Trust in the Lord and do good.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)

We see sexually explicit images or read sexually explicit stories, or we latch on to the good feelings we get when a co-worker pays special attention to us. And we start thinking there is more pleasure and joy out there for me than I am currently getting and it won't hurt me.

The psalmist says, it is a better idea to listen to God's advice in the area of our sexuality and relationships. This is not a promise that God will give you whatever you desire, but that he will grant your **legitimate desires**. It is helpful to remember this when tempted to act out in a way that God does not approve of. Paul advises about this temptation when he writes:

You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:5) There are severe consequences for ignoring God's design for fulfilling our sexual urges in life.

So:

Every escape in the face of temptation will be slightly different. But it will often be there in the form of promises. When temptation hits, **look for God's promises**. Have verses in your mind or read them. When I am tempted to be **stingy** – I try to remember – **“It is better to give than to receive.”** When I am tempted to fire back at someone who is angry with me, I try to remember, **“A gentle answer turns away wrath.”** And so on.

Strength to resist temptation **also** comes by **running away from the temptation**.

We don't typically think of running away as a strength. Only weak people run away – strong people stand their ground. There is a time to stand your ground but when the issue is your weakness causing you to give in to temptation, God's strength is often to run away.

We see this in the story of Joseph, when Potiphar's wife was tempting him to have an affair with her. He literally ran out of the house.

Paul had earlier written to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:22a Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts.

And then after his list of sinful things people do that we referred to earlier, Paul says:

2 Timothy 3:5b Stay away from people like that!

He is not saying you can't have any contact with people who sin – or you would have to be in solitary confinement – even from yourself. Paul is talking about who do you normally hang around with, imitate, and **get advice from**? If we always hang around with and join in with those who enjoy sinful behavior, it will become harder and harder to resist temptation.

Paul offers an alternative.

2 Timothy 2:22b Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy

the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

Pursue a different way of life.

We tend to pursue a selfish way of life – quite the opposite of Jesus who lived his life for the benefit of others. If we pursue pleasure, wealth, power or fame, temptations will overpower us. If on the other hand we pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace, we will find strength to resist the sins that destroy us. And it often requires living in a different environment.

Often, when people are released from prison, if they don't find a new way of life, with new friends, and often in a new area, it is not long until the person has fallen back into their old ways and is in trouble again. We may need to be that radical and change our environment to keep from falling back into old destructive patterns: what we read, what we watch, who we hang around with, what we agree to talk about with others, how we prioritize our time and money. All of that must be on the table to reconsider if we want to resist temptation.

Paul also advises pursuing:

Friendships with fellow believers. We need the spiritual company of each other. We need the regular accountability to each other. You need someone in your life who asks you the hard questions about your life – your thoughts and your behavior, and then who helps you stay on track and resist temptation. Celebrate Recovery is a very helpful program in which you can find support in dealing with all kinds of hurts, habits and hang-ups, that leave you feeling weak and defeated. Contact me and I will get you connected with Celebrate Recovery.

If you are struggling with pornography, there is a helpful program for your computer called Covenant Eyes, which watches everywhere you go on the internet. This program has helped many in their struggle with pornography.

“10 Ways to Fight the Temptation of Pornography.”

What is God's strength against temptation? Remembering scripture, gaining a new direction in life, finding new friends. And at the center of all this is the Spirit of Christ who enables you to do these things.

The question was asked in Romans, “Who will rescue us from losing in the tug of war of temptation – the answer was given, “Thank God, it is Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now the author of Hebrews confirms that.

Hebrews 4:14-16 So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Faith in Christ is learning to trust that Christ will help us resist temptation. In the meantime:

Prepare to Struggle

The hardest part about fighting temptations is that we often don't feel like we want escape in the moment. So don't be surprised when that happens. But remember. Fighting temptation means trusting God's promises over the false promises offered by the temptation.

It will be a tug of war – but one that you can win with God's help and God's strength. We do not have to live defeated by sin. Jesus understands what we are going through and he advocates for us with His Father in heaven.

PRAY