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How many of you have ever tried to make a change in your life? Maybe it's giving up a habit that you want to quit, such as overeating, smoking, or spending too much money on things you don't really need. Or maybe it's beginning a new habit, such as walking, exercising, or reading the Bible on a regular basis. Whatever the change you wish to make, there's probably an app for those who have smartphones, programs you can load on your phone to help you track your progress.

In order to give up overeating, for example, one can find an app to record meals to help with the counting of calories. There's even an app to remind you to not spend money on impulse items you don't really need.

To begin new habits, one can use an app to encourage the change. For example, Bible study apps offer reading plans for each day of the week. I even found workout apps that provide daily exercise routines. For students who need help with studying, study apps will help them learn or review information.

But even with all these smartphones and apps to help us make positive changes in our lives, we may still face temptations, as did one boy

who sat across from the smartest girl in his class. When they took tests, the boy was really tempted to cheat. One day he gave into temptation. The teacher suspected him of cheating and called both students in after school. The teacher said to the boy, "I think you cheated on your test."

The boy asked why. The teacher said, "Well, you both got the highest score."

"That's just a coincidence," the boy said.

"Maybe," the teacher replied, "but you both got one wrong."

"Coincidence," the boy said.

"Maybe," the teacher replied, "but it's the same one."

"Coincidence!" the boy insisted.

"Maybe," the teacher said, "but she wrote 'I don't know' and you wrote 'I don't know either.'"¹

Temptations are nothing new. They've been around for a long time, and the Bible contains numerous stories about temptations. When the Hebrew word *nasah* or the Greek word *peirazō* appear in the Bible, translators have used the word *temptation*, but they have also used the word *testing* to try and convey the meaning. As people of faith have struggled with this sense of temptation or testing, they wondered about its source. Why are we tempted? What brings us to times of testing? Maybe you have asked those same questions at some point in your own life.

Some temptations may be rooted in our biological needs, such as someone without money who is hungry can be tempted to steal food. Other temptations seem harder to understand. Some people may experience a temptation so strongly that it may feel as though an outside force is pulling at their lives, which led some to personify temptations and attribute them to what Matthew's Gospel calls "the Devil."

Depending on the translation of Bible you read, Jesus encountered either "temptations" (as in the *NRSV*) or "tests" (as in *The Message Bible*), but regardless of the word used, the struggle is personified as coming from a devilish figure.

The first encounter is related to the issue of food, for Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days without much food—and I imagine he craved something tasty! He was tempted to use his power to create bread out of stones. We might find this an odd temptation, but if we think of it as a temptation of economics, we might compare it to use of today's credit cards. Imagine a tempter coming to us and saying, "You really want that latest electronic gadget, right? Well, take this ordinary plastic card and turn it into an iPad." It's the temptation to take economic shortcuts.

Here's how *The Message Bible* tells us about the next temptation:

For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all

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their splendor to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."²

Wouldn't that be tempting? To have control over everything for our own pleasure? Just imagine—telling everyone what to do and how to live their lives. Wait a minute...how many of us would like to have someone with that much power over our lives? Maybe it's not such a good idea.

So onto the third temptation, high atop the temple, where Jesus was given the opportunity to jump and be saved by God's angels who surely would not let him fall. In a sense, it's a temptation to use religion for one's own end. Jesus was taken to the temple and urged to jump by the voice of temptation: "Go ahead Jesus. No matter what you do, God will be there for you. It doesn't really matter what you do."

Today we might express the temptation like this: "Go ahead, church people. Do whatever you want. The church will always be there for you. Sleep

in. Forget about tithing and offerings. Avoid helping out. When you encounter a crisis, just jump—the church will always be there to catch you."

This third temptation sounds inviting, doesn't it? A shortcut to religious needs. And the second was just as much a temptation: a shortcut to get power over others to make them do what we want. And that first temptation sounds very inviting: a shortcut to get whatever you want regardless of the cost.

These three shortcuts aren't fulfilling, and I think they remind us that we don't always get what we want when we want it. Instead, they invite us to cherish what we have in life rather than chase after the temptations of what we lack. In other words, be happy with what we do have.

I wonder if there's an app for that—a happiness app? Happiness may not be as simple as checking our phones or computers, but sometimes we may find ourselves searching for a shortcut to happiness, as was the case for one man who went to a monk and demanded "I want happiness."

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The monk paused for a moment, pondering how to address his request, and then he replied, “First remove the *I*, for that’s ego that gets in your way of happiness. Then remove *want*, for that’s desire that clouds your vision of happiness. After removing *I* and *want* from “I want happiness,” all you have left is happiness.

It’s like what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote a letter to the church in Philippi as he sat in jail. There’s a popular verse that’s often translated as “I can do all things through him who strengthens me,” but in a recent Bible translated called *The Voice*, the translators noticed the original Greek language did not contain the word *do*. When looking at the context of what Paul wrote, he might have sent us a text message stating it this way, “I can be *content* in any and every situation through the

Anointed One who is my power and strength,” for right before this verse Paul wrote “I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.”³

Being happy doesn’t require us to take unfulfilling shortcuts in life, and it doesn’t require a smart phone with an app for happiness, for it’s even simpler than that. Being happy means being content with what we have, right here and now. As we travel through Lent for the next forty days on our way to Easter, may you cherish what you already have, especially the presence of Christ’s love that surrounds you every day, in the midst of struggles and in joy, God is with you every step of the way.

¹ <http://www.churchofboca.org/tsermons/110109.htm>

² Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: The Bible in contemporary language* (Lk 4:5-7). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Php 4:11-12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.