



FIRST STEPS

STUDIES TO BEGIN YOUR WALK WITH CHRIST
By Marlon Furtado

“Why I Still Struggle With Sin”

WHY DO I STILL SIN?

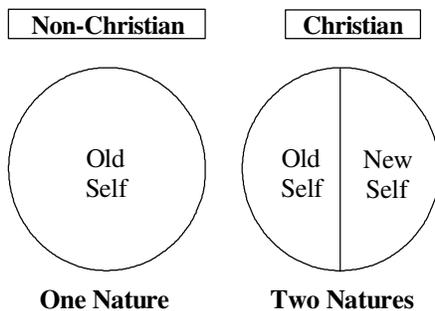
Now that Jesus lives in you, you will notice that you have a desire not to sin. Nevertheless, all Christians still experience times when they knowingly choose to disobey God. Why? What's wrong?

It is very important to understand what is happening because many new Christians become disillusioned when they find there is still a struggle. They wonder if something is wrong with them. They question whether they are saved at all. They wonder if Christianity will really work for them.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS SIN?

Ephesians 4:22, 24 says, "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...and to put on the **new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Before any of us becomes a Christian, we only possess a **sin nature**. That is our "old self". It doesn't mean we are always mean or cruel or wicked people. It means, rather, that we want to live independently of God. We don't want Him telling us what to do. This sin nature is present in everyone from the moment of birth and is why we experience a natural tendency to do things that we know are wrong. You've noticed that parents never have to teach their children to be selfish. Parents never have to teach their children to lie or blame others in order to try to get out of trouble. This kind of behavior comes **naturally** to every one of us. It's evidence of our sin nature.



When you received Christ, He gave to you another nature, a "new self". This new nature inside of you explains why you are experiencing a deep, authentic desire to please God. This new nature desires to involve God in every part of your life and follow Him every day.

DISCUSS: How have you seen your values changing since receiving Christ?

It would seem, then, that this new nature should result in always being obedient to God and striving to please him. But every Christian finds that there is an on-going struggle against sin. The reason this battle exists is because even though Jesus gave us a new nature, a "new self," **He never removed the old one**. If He had taken away our old sin nature, then it would be *automatic* for us to never sin again. But, that is not the case.

Ephesians 2:1-3 identifies this internal sin nature we struggle against and the two external sources of temptation that intensify our struggle. We will cover those on the next page.

*"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this **world** and of the **ruler of the kingdom of the air**, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our **sinful nature** and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."*

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF TEMPTATION?

In addition to the *internal* struggle of your old nature trying to reassert itself and lead you away from God, there are two other very powerful *external* forces that constantly work to trip you up and lead you into sin.

1. The world

1 John 2:15-16 says, “Do not love the **world** or anything in the **world**. If anyone loves the **world**, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the **world** — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the **world**.”

The *world* refers to the general philosophies and values of life held by those outside of Christ. Think of the *advertising world* or the *entertainment world*. They certainly do not promote godly living. Rather, they encourage people to live for themselves, not for God. You will not find encouragement to walk with Christ from the majority of people in this world.

2. The devil

1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the **devil** prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

The devil wants to ruin your life, and he is very subtle. He won’t show up on your doorstep and force you to commit some hideous sin. He works behind the scenes, much like a movie director is never on screen. The devil tends to put thoughts or suggestions into your mind. He will use the people and systems of the world to try to trip you up.

The devil tries to get you to satisfy your physical drives and appetites in ways that are not appropriate. He tries to get you to focus on material possessions until you confuse your “needs” with your “wants”. He strokes your pride so that you take credit for your successes and blame others for your failures.

The devil is like a fisherman who covers his hooks with something that looks tasty and tantalizing. If the fish refuses the bait, it will continue to live. But if it takes the bait, it will be caught and unable to escape.

You can catch the devil at work, though. When the following types of thoughts run through your mind, you know that he is nearby, whispering in your ear:

“Don’t worry; no one will ever know.”

“Everyone else does it, so why not me?”

“It’s only a small thing.”

“I deserve to have it.”

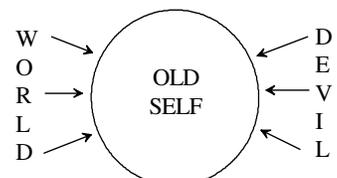
“I can’t live without it.”

“I know it’s wrong, but God will understand.”

“If God really loves me, He won’t withhold this from me.”

You and I **will** be enticed, or tempted, to sin. That’s unavoidable. But we always have the choice of saying “NO” to the temptation. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, “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.”

The world and the devil tempt your old nature to live independently of God, to disobey Him, to live with yourself on the throne, and to find your pleasure in things rather than in God.

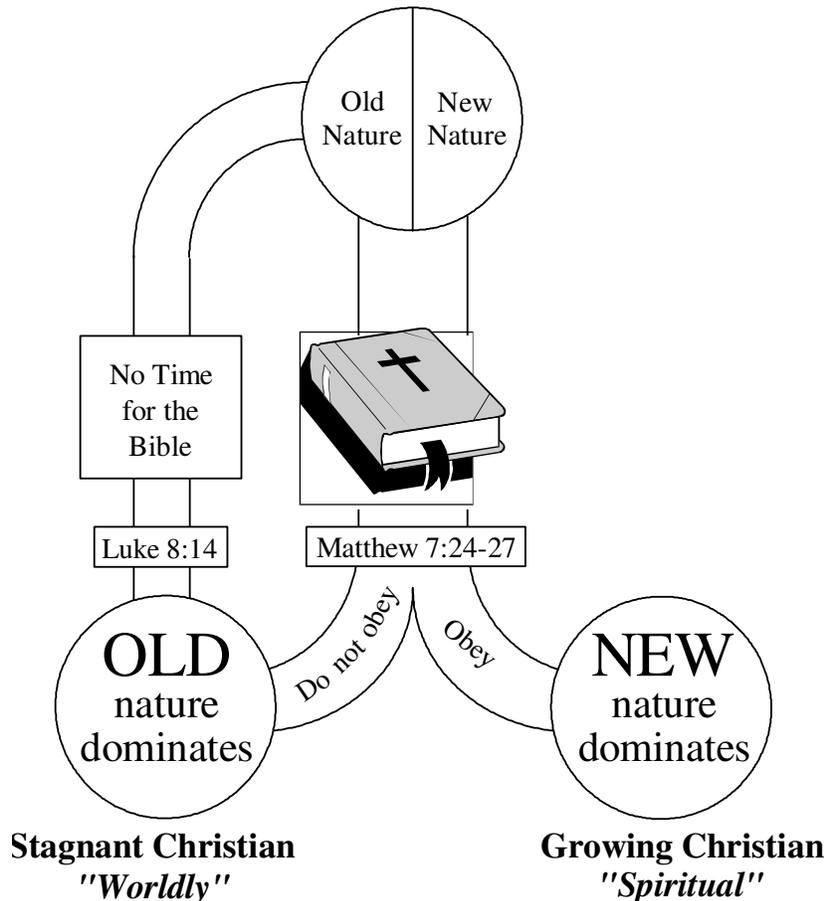


HOW CAN I OVERCOME TEMPTATION?

- **Take the Offensive: Feed my new nature**

The path on the left depicts the Christian who does not make time to read or study the Bible. The result will be a weak and worldly Christian whose life is dominated by the self-centered nature. Their old habits and attitudes will remain strong.

In **Luke 8:14** Jesus said, *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*



The path in the center shows the Christian who regularly reads and studies the Bible. But notice that it is not automatic that they will become a growing, spiritual Christian. Only if they obey what they read in the Bible will the new nature dominate and equip them to better fight against temptation. If they gain knowledge, but do not obey, they will stagnate.

In **Matthew 7:24-27** Jesus said, *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

Jesus gives us the best example of using the Bible to fight against the devil's temptations. In **Matthew 4:1-11** we find that the devil presented three major temptations to the Lord. And each time (verses 4, 7, 10) Jesus quoted verses from the Old Testament. He was demonstrating how important it is for us to know and apply the Scripture to our lives.

- **Take the Defensive: Flee temptation**

2 Timothy 2:22 *“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*

1 Corinthians 6:18 *“Flee from sexual immorality.”*

1 Corinthians 10:13 *“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.”*

For example, let’s say a man is an alcoholic before he becomes a Christian. After receiving Christ, he should not buy beer and put it in his refrigerator to prove to himself that he can withstand it. We should not expose ourselves to things we know are wrong. Rather, we should seek to avoid those places and situations that are tempting to us. When temptation confronts us, we should look for a way to get away from it as fast as we can.

If you refuse the temptation, you will continue to walk in victory and your **new self** will continue to get stronger. But if you give in to the temptation and sin, you will find your **old self** getting stronger and your power to resist further temptation will grow weaker.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SIN?

What happens if we give in to temptation and sin? When we do, the Holy Spirit convicts us, making us feel bad about it. This is God’s way of showing us when our actions or attitudes displease Him.

- You **don’t** lose your **salvation**

What are we to do when we sin? Do we lose our salvation and need to receive Jesus all over again? No. In an earlier lesson you read that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you. You are held securely in God’s grip. You are His child, you bear His name now, and He will never throw you out of His family.

- You **do** lose your **fellowship**

Just as in any relationship, when you offend a friend or loved one, you do not feel at ease with them until it is cleared up. You cannot enjoy your relationship with God until you admit your sin and ask His forgiveness.

Psalm 32:3-5 *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

PRAY: Let’s pray for each other to be quick to take the Lord’s way out of temptations that confront us.

LET'S OPEN YOUR BIBLE

Look up the following references.

James 4:7

_____ yourselves, then, to _____. Resist the _____, and he will flee from you.

James 1:13-14

God is never to be blamed for the temptation. He cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He _____ anyone. The temptation comes from my own _____.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest [speaking of Jesus] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been _____ in every way, _____ as _____ are — yet was _____ sin.

1 John 1:9

When I sin, I am to _____ my sins to God. He is _____ and _____ to _____ my sins.

1 John 2:2

God does not want us to sin, but when we do Jesus comes to our _____.

Psalm 119:9

The writer asks how a young man can keep his life pure? He answers by saying that it's only as he lives according to _____.

Summary:

Before you became a Christian, your sin separated you from God. Upon receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, you immediately became a child of God. All of your sins were paid for by Jesus on the cross. Therefore, now when you sin, it breaks your **fellowship** with the Lord, not your **relationship** with Him.

Sin does displease the Lord, so you should try not to sin. The devil will continue to tempt you. You must daily submit, or surrender, your will to God and resist the devil's lures. But if you sin, don't try to hide it from Him. When you fail, simply admit it to Him (that's what it means to "confess"). Ask Him to forgive you. When you do, God will immediately restore your fellowship.

Don't wait until the end of the day to ask God's forgiveness. As soon as you become aware that you have sinned, admit it to Him. The sooner you do so, the sooner your enjoyment of God will return.