

Temptations Never Cease. (Numbers 13-14)

James 1:14-15; Joshua 14:6-14

James 1:14-15 starts us with our biblical focus about temptations: “Each one is tempted when, by their own evil desire, they are dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

Temptations touch everyone. Regardless of how long we have been following Jesus, the devil still tries to entice us into sin to embarrass us, negate our influence, and witness. The temptations in the older years are not usually gross sins of the flesh but the more subtle sins of the spirit. They might be long-term attitudinal habits and secret sins.

We are using the Caleb’s story as a mirror for ourselves. Caleb represents faith, confidence, tenacity, will-power, trust, and courage despite the temptations he must have faced, as he stood strong and did not go along with the 10 spies. I wonder how he patiently waited to get into the Promised Land for 45 years? And then how much time did he spend planning and spying so he could take the land of the giants?

Caleb was one of 12 spies of Israel, sent out to look over the Promised Land. All agreed that it was a wonderful land. But only two spies said they could conquer the land. The 10 spies led the Israelites in fear, lack of courage, and disbelief in God’s promise that they could take the land. God became angry and everyone of that generation died, except Joshua and Caleb who lived to take over the land. Then Joshua, the new leader of Israel blessed Caleb, who asked permission to take the fortified land and cities of the giants, as his inheritance.

With Caleb’s story as our background, let’s look at some temptations we often face. **First, is a critical spirit.** This urge may have more to do with personality than age. If you’re optimistic, even-tempered, and pleasant at age 40, you will probably be pleasant, optimistic, and even-tempered at 70. If you are pessimistic, critical and negative at 40, it’s likely that not much will

change in your twilight years – unless God really gets hold of your heart. However, it is true that difficult circumstances, the normal aches and pains of aging, and the tragedies of life leave many adults battling the drift toward negativism.

You might agree this temptation of a critical spirit seems to intensify as we get older. Our patience gets thinner, and we gripe more about unpleasant circumstances. We often feel a loss of influence and criticize people who are now in charge. Dan Webb said: “Criticism is sometimes a way of getting attention and reminding people that once we were important.”

A critical spirit just seems to become second nature to us as we get older. So, we need to **refuse** to become a grumpy old woman and whiny old men! We might get attention with criticism, but we will not make many friends, and certainly will not influence people for good. Seldom do we hear someone say, “Let’s go talk with Mabel, I just love to hear her gripe!”

Former famous and super successful basketball coach, John Wooden, was a master at having a **positive attitude**. He attended a basketball game where his former team played horribly and lost. After the game Coach Wooden was asked what he thought of his former team’s performance.

He smiled a gentlemanly smile and said something like, “Well, anything I would say would be construed as criticism. Therefore, I think it would be wiser for me not to comment on the loss. I’m sure the coach is going to make adjustments as the season goes on.” No wonder he was respected and loved until he died.

Here are some **ideas on how not to be critical**. Look for the positive traits in people. We need to be **thankful** for what we do have. Cultivate **kindness** within the grace and truth that Jesus teaches us. It is important to have the cure for a critical spirit, which is: develop a **positive attitude**. We do not know how Caleb stayed really positive. His nation & people of the same religion had, in a sense deserted him when they disagreed, they could take the Promised Land.

But Caleb *followed his God wholeheartedly*. This is repeated 3 times in the Bible. Numbers 13:30 says, “Caleb silenced the people...and said, ‘We should go and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’” At age 40, he saw all that was positive about God’s plan. At 85, he upheld a positive outlook and avoided a negative attitude, despite living in the wilderness for 45 years, not of his own choosing.

Just a further note about being positive and thankful. Even though these are great traits to cultivate, there are times when we need to talk about our real concerns. We can be so focused on being positive and kind, that we do not openly discuss the issues holding us back from going forward. When this occurs, we tend to make mediocre decisions.

A second common temptation that came out of a survey of seniors is spiritual retirement. This means **backing off from church involvement and spiritual responsibilities** when we get to retirement age. It also means we relax and stop maturing and growing spiritually.

Our culture has fooled us into thinking, retirement is play time, so save enough money to play. One person defied retirement as “half as much money, twice as much husband.” Men could turn the tables and say, “twice as much wife.”

However, there is no biblical reason to retire from spiritual duties. We all have some maturing to do. And it is good to turn over the reins to younger people. There is not a lack of things to get involved in for Jesus. Younger people want to put their own stamp on the work, like we did. They do not want to be robots, worrying about pleasing their elders, and doing what has always been done. A younger person who loved and cared for his father, told me, “I will never be a part of your church until dad dies.” Knowing his dad, it was hard not to agree with him.

We all need a break, to slow down, a change of routine. But to do so just to travel and play, it is a spiritual problem. I know a couple who went south every year and played golf six days a

week. They did attend church regularly there, and even got involved in the choir. But they refused to be in the choir in their home church. Why? They told me about an incident where one of their children was hurt by the choir director. I encouraged them to work on their lack of forgiveness. We always have spiritual work to do.

Our involvement, spiritual growth and maturity is never finished. The story of Eli, the High Priest, is a sad one, as he got complacent in his old age. It caused a whole lot of problems beyond his own sons. There is a pull, like Eli, to become self-indulgent and spiritually passive when we become senior adults. (I Sam. 2:12-36)

The cure for spiritual retirement is continual service regardless of age. And keep working on our own spiritual health and maturity. Maybe take on a new church job. Go south to offer your skills and do some playing. But do not be self-indulgent. The Bible says in Revelations 2:10b, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”

Caleb was a man who remained eager to fulfill God’s mission. He said, (Joshua 14:10-11) “Just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years...while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out to spy; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.” Caleb could not wait to go fight the Lord’s battles. Rather than stepping away, Caleb was stepping up. He eagerly set out to do the Lord’s work.

Sam had turned 90 and played trombone every Sunday in his church orchestra. He stated, “I must be a crazy old man. I’m 90 years old and I just bought a brand-new trombone!” His doctor said he was as healthy as a horse and it may be due in part to the fact that he has played trombone all his life and continues to exercise his lungs.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus about teaching the older men and women to be examples and train the younger people. They are to be worthy

of respect, temperate, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:2-5).

Job says, (12:12) “Is no wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” The Bible says to senior adults: You are important. We need your voice of experience, the warmth of your love, your example, and the strength of your work ethic. One of my favorite parts of pastoring is meeting seniors, including here at North Star, who stay involved.

One last thought about the temptation of spiritual retirement is: we can always pray, encourage, share our wealth, attend church functions as we are able, and be a resource of wisdom.

Another temptation is an inclination towards inflexibility. Our likes and dislikes can get more set as we age. Our ability to go with the flow struggles with the tendency to be more rigid. It is a guarantee the longer we live the more change we will see. Today we have concerns about major serious moral, political, economic, and social issues close by and around the world.

Nothing really stays the same. Let’s honestly recognize that “the good old days” probably were not as good as we remember. A comedian said, “Nostalgia just ain’t what it used to be.”

Ecclesiastes tells us, (7:10) “Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.”

Change and technology creates feelings of instability & frustration. I am glad you do not hear Mary Jean and I sometimes grouse when we have computer problems! Each of us have our own new stuff that we struggle with. But it also creates lots of opportunities like we have seen with our music. But change always seems to go faster the older we become. Andy Rooney said: “Life is like a roll of toilet paper: The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes.”

In my experience, most people are more able to adjust and go with the flow, than those in the generations after them. Why? Well, people in midlife have finally gotten into power and they want to do things - their way. They have ideas

about church that they must carry out – for their children. So, they fight - hard.

The cure for inflexibility is an attitude that says, “Let’s move forward.” Caleb was 85 years old and he looked ahead, longing to claim new territory. He was eager to climb the next hill, to conquer the next obstacle, to seize the day. He said, “Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day.” (Josh. 14:12)

Sometimes we must be like the 4 women in the retirement home who were playing cards. An older gentlemen walked in they had never seen before. The first woman asked, “Are you new here?”

The man replied, “Yes. I just moved in today.”

The second woman asked, “Where did you move here from?”

The fellow looked down at the ground and said, “I moved here right out of prison.”

The third woman asked, “What were you in for?” He replied, “I murdered my wife.”

The fourth woman’s face lit up and she asked, “So, you are single then?”

That is being really ***flexible!*** Plenty of adults in the Bible and church history, ***made changes*** so that God’s purposes could be accomplished. The Bible and church history is full of stories of people of all ages, breaking the status quo. Why? Status quo leads to stagnation and stagnation leads to decay. More of the same does not bring different and better results. So, let’s avoid the temptation of being inflexible.

Another temptation is ***feelings of regret.*** We all have various memories of remorse, shame, guilt, and sorrow for things we did, or did not do. King David, Joseph and his ten older brothers, Peter are some biblical examples. But there is no time to wallow in self-pity, to feel unworthy, and to miss the joy of forgiveness. There is no season to not appreciate today, because of mistakes of yesterday. Sometimes people refuse leadership roles or to try new things, because of feelings of fear or past hurts or inadequacy. So, their past

hinders their remaining years. And this impacts the health of the church.

It is human nature for good people to remember our most glaring mistakes. Some Hall of Fame athletes were asked to list their three most memorable moments in sports. Almost all of them included one or two instances of failure. Like they struck out in the ninth with the bases loaded. Or they missed a free throw that could have won the game. Sometimes the best Christian people remember their failures. Like they made a commitment to obedience, purity, and excellence, but deviated along the way.

The cure for regret is to totally and fully accept the incredible forgiveness of God. Isaiah 1:18 says, “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” There is no sin you have committed that God cannot forgive and forget. Some of the people God used in the most significant ways made huge mistakes!

Abraham lied - twice. David committed adultery. Peter denied he knew Jesus. Paul persecuted Christians to their deaths. Moses murdered. So don't allow regret of your past to hold you back. Christ's death on the cross forgives us if we put our trust in Him. His blood can make the foulest sinner clean. Let's not allow regret to keep us from maturing, learning, and involvement in Christ's work.

Confess the sin or regret, learn from it, accept God's forgiveness, and move on. Do not let Satan hinder your faith and spiritual growth.

Another temptation is our **tendency to worry**. Some of us are worry warts and some of us are bored, so we worry. There are plenty of things to worry about, but it sucks the joy out of life. But simply, ***the cure for excessive worry is trusting in God*** who is faithful in all things. Jesus said worrying cannot do anything positive for your life. It cannot add a single hour. It cannot add inches to your height. It will not change the outcome of tomorrow.

Have you watched bowlers after they release the ball, talk to it; contort their bodies; wave their arms from side-to-side; hop on one foot; tilt their heads; all in the vain attempt to correct the ball's trajectory? Has all that energy and effort, ever changed how the ball goes? Worry simply is a demonstration of a lack of faith.

Caleb trusted God to see him through He knew for a fact victory was in God's hands. Concerning his upcoming battle to reclaim his portion of the Promised Land, Caleb said, (vs. 12) “You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there, and their cities were fortified and large. But the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.” The opposite of worry is trust & maintaining confidence that God is in control. With His help we can get through any problem and overcome any obstacle. Someone said: “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.”

Isaiah 46:4 offers us this wonderful promise. “I will be your God through all your lifetime, yes, even when your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you. I will carry you along and be your Savior.”

One final cure for temptations of all kinds is: praise. Worship is an important tool to fight temptation. We cannot worship our Savior too little. Honoring, thanking our Creator, recognizing the Almighty's work among us, is a keyway to help us keep the right focus. The less we focus on ourselves and the more we focus on where our vision, healing and hope comes from, helps keep temptations under control. I cannot over state this important tool we have been given.

Caleb is an inspiration because he kept patiently serving, kept on changing – being flexible, kept on focusing and planning for the future, kept on being positive about people, and kept on trusting his Creator would take care of him. And of course, the Almighty Creator did. May you and I follow in Caleb's steps as we approach his age and the future.