

Hebrews 4:15 We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

You may have heard of the term *captology*. It's a technology that is designed "to change people's beliefs and behavior." Social media has used it to get us to upload our pictures and divulge our personal information so that others can know where we vacation, what diet we are on, how funny our dog is, or how frustrated we might be with our lives.

The technology is used to get us to click on links, buy stuff, or watch the next YouTube video and the next and the next so that we watch all accompanying commercial ads, of course. The designers understand human nature and have a well-laid-out plan to manipulate our behavior.ⁱⁱ

Of course, this is nothing new. Someone has been at work on that since Adam and Eve. And we all know who it is. He hates us. He has enough of an understanding of our sinful nature that he knows how to use it, and use it well. It is the heart of his war plan to hurt us and turn us against our gracious God. You know how successful he was against Adam and Eve in Eden. And we all know how he has won battles against every single of us.

But you and I are not the real prize. No, the real prize, the real object of his full wrath was our champion warrior. If the devil could bring down Jesus, he could win, not just some skirmishes against the likes of you and me. No, the devil could win the war.

And certainly, our champion warrior Jesus was under attack throughout his mission, but when Jesus entered his public ministry at age 30, the devil stepped it up. He was desperate to destroy the world's

Savior. In fact, the word *diabolical* comes from the name Matthew uses to describe the devil when he came to test/tempt Jesus in the desert: evil to the core.

And as Matthew (4:1-11) gives us the account of the skirmish between Satan and Jesus, he records that Jesus did not hide from this battle. In fact, the Holy Spirit actually led our Savior into the desert to fight. God's purpose in doing this was to show Satan that the perfect man, Jesus, was the perfect substitute and would win where Adam and Eve had failed.

See if any of this sounds familiar to your own skirmishes with Satan: At a time of weakness, Satan offered just what Jesus was craving. And when Jesus fended him off with the Word of God, Satan came back with a twisted take on God's Word. And when Jesus fended him off once again, Satan attacked what was most important in this life, offering an easier way. Jesus responded with a blow that would end the skirmish, ***"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"*** (Matthew 4:10).

And while that skirmish was done, without a doubt, the devil made many more attacks on Jesus. Yet Satan never won. In these skirmishes, Jesus always overcame Satan's attacks. And that was certainly good for him, but here's the thing, it's even better for you and me. You see, he knows what it's like to be in the heat of battle. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, ***"We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."***

In a national religious survey on temptation, people said they struggled most with

- worry;
- lack of self-control (eating too much, too much time on social media, overspending);

- lust (including viewing pornography); and
- lying/cheating.

Amazingly, when asked why they gave in to temptation, a few said they enjoyed it or that it got them away from their real life. But most said they didn't even know why.ⁱⁱⁱ

Does that sound like you? I know it sounds like me. These skirmishes with the unholy trio of the devil, the world, and my sinful flesh, these skirmishes come along and I so often find myself on the losing side. I can easily understand losing when it's me vs. Satan. I should even be able to have a better showing when it's me vs. the world. But me vs. me, come on. I should be able to do better. I should be able to win every time. But I don't. We don't. We are losers, and not just day-to-day. We should be losers forever. Lost for eternity.

But again, my friends, ***“We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”***

The good news is that Jesus didn't come to this earth just to see if he could keep his own commandments. It wasn't simply an *exercise*. Rather, he faced those daily battles and the final battle with the devil because none of us could. Humanity needed a *perfect* someone who would be our hero, our substitute, our stand-in who could qualify to take our place at the justice bar of God. Jesus is that one. He did this for you, loving you, completely.

No, our great hero has not left you alone to face the temptations and trials of your enemy. He promises to protect you and rule

over all things—Satan included—for your good. When you face temptation, he has your back. As Paul assured the Corinthians: ***“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it”*** (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When you are hurting, Jesus knows what it feels like. When you have problems, Jesus is the solution. When you're overpowered, he strengthens you through Word and sacrament. When you're burdened, you can shift the weight to him. When you talk to him in prayer, you are not talking to some far-off God. He hears the words of your heart and relates to your angst. Over and over again, his words and his life all reinforce how great his love is for you, from day-to-day and forever. Because finally, and most importantly, come what may in this life, Jesus has taken away the guilt of every one of your sins. By offering the sacrifice of his perfect life on your behalf, God has forgiven them all. He is God. He is one of us. And he cares for you!

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
take it to the Lord in prayer.*

ⁱ Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI

ⁱⁱ <http://captology.stanford.edu/resources/thoughts-on-persuasive-technology.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-explores-the-changing-shape-of-temptation>