

FEBRUARY 17, 2026 FATHER PETER CHOI

In today's first reading, Saint James reminds us to persevere in temptation, as a crown of life awaits us in the kingdom of heaven. The word temptation means to entice someone to sin, or to lure someone to directly violate God's commandments. Obviously, God doesn't tempt us to sin. So where does temptation come from?

Saint Anthony of Egypt, who as a monk fled the world and went to the desert in pursuit of finding God and seeking wholeness, taught us that there are three sources of temptations: the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's easy to point fingers at the world and the devil, and blame someone, or the circumstances, and think of ourselves as innocent victims of someone else's faults. The truth is, even apart from those external factors, there is also inherent weakness that we all suffer from.

We inherit the weakness from Adam and Eve, which was a consequence of the original sin. According to Father Benedict Groeschel, who was a priest and psychologist, the original sin can be best understood as the original wound. We all inherited woundedness and moral weakness, leaving us vulnerable to temptation and sin. As Saint Paul explained it so well, "I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate." Romans, 7:15.

It's not that we don't know, we often lack the willpower to turn down temptation, or do what is right, not being able to say no to ourselves when we feel hungry in the middle of the night, or inability to say no to things we are addicted to, instead of working on ourselves or getting help.

So what is the best way to calm a temptation? Many saints have warned us about the dangers of temptation. Temptation is like an avalanche: it

starts small, but it quickly builds a momentum, and before we know it, we get trapped.

Back in the '90s, Lays chips used to advertise with a very catchy phrase: "Bet you can't just eat one." So true. I always started with grabbing just one, but I often ended up eating the whole bag of chips. To calm a temptation, the best time to say no is at the very beginning.

Back in the '70s, Walter Mischel, a psychology professor from Stanford University, conducted an experiment called "the Marshmallow Test." Young children who were between the ages of three and five years old were given a choice between having one marshmallow right away, or wait about 15 minutes, and have two marshmallows. The children who waited for a greater reward, known as delayed gratification, were more successful later in life. Especially in academics, health, and relationships.

Often we only see the success, and fail to see all the hard work and failures that got people there. Michael Phelps, who won 28 Olympic medals, went six straight years without missing a single day of training. Including Christmas. It's being committed to training every day, saying yes even when you don't feel like it, and when you have a good reason to skip a day.

You see, greatness is not an accident. It takes discipline, hard work, and sacrifice, that get us there. Matthew Kelly, renowned Catholic author, said: "Our lives change when our habits change."

In order to overcome temptation, saying no isn't enough. We have to turn our life around, and build our lives on good habits. For each bad habit, a vice we struggle with, we have to replace it a good habit, which is a virtue. For example, we replace pride with humility, anger with patience, greed with generosity, and lust with chastity.

People often think that if we just pray harder, God will remove all temptations from our lives, and make our spiritual life easier. But it doesn't work that way. Instead of making it easier for us, God wants to make us stronger, to use our free will and choose him.

When I was eight years old, my mother enrolled me in taekwondo classes. She knew that it wouldn't be possible to remove all dangers, so she wanted me to become stronger, instead. Every time we had to say no to temptation we are choosing God.

Apart from the spiritual battle, sometimes we struggle with sins that are very strong and overwhelming. It might be due to our childhood wounds, or woundedness we inherited from our parents. A few years ago, Sister Miriam James Heidland was giving a healing retreat, and she mentioned that our sins reveal very important details of ourselves. Our sins reveal our brokenness. The same sins we struggle with over and over again, that's where our wounds are.

When you go to your doctor for a medical examination, you may remember your doctor hitting your knee with a rubber hammer. It's called patellar reflex test, better known as the kneejerk reaction. It makes your knee kick, and it's involuntary.

Our emotions do the exact same thing. A situation or someone can trigger us to have the same kneejerk reaction with our emotions. We can feel hurt, angry, or resentful.

Some years ago, as I was driving on a quiet country road, I decided to stop at a yellow light. And this caused the driver behind me to have a complete meltdown, and display violent road rage. Certainly, me obeying traffic laws couldn't have caused so much anger. Something triggered him to feel the anger he suppressed but he didn't deal with.

Whenever I experience a strong negative reaction to someone, or a certain situation, I know somewhere there is my woundedness that I need to be healed from. I'm not responding properly. I'm merely having a kneejerk reaction to an old wound. It's important to know your own history, and your woundedness, and what your triggers are. And that's where we need to invite God in.

The mistake Adam and Eve made when they sinned was to hide from God, and cover their shame. Instead of running to God's mercy, and allowing God's love to heal them. God is our loving Father. God is our healer. Let us turn to God, and rely on his grace to overcome our present struggles. And for God to heal us from our wounds and brokenness.