

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Ten - How can I overcome my desires to sin?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- We tend to disguise or hide our fears, shortcomings, and failures. We also do the same for our sins.
- Everyone sins, there is no shame in admitting that.
- Our sinful actions are driven by fundamental desires for security, pleasure, self-worth, and comfort. We are meant to place all these desires in God Himself.
- Our desires become sinful when we try to fulfil them with our sinful nature in the lead.
- The Holy Spirit will gently prompt us with desires that are contrary to our sinful nature so we do not sin against God.
- We also need to recognise the arguments from Satan that lead us to be captive to sin (with 10 examples). We need to grow in spiritual discernment and maturity in God's Word so that we do not fall for such arguments.
- We can pray to destroy strongholds of sin and stay alert to thoughts that tempt us in the future.

Watch the lesson online

<https://youtu.be/lrqphpcPda8>

Transcript

Welcome to lesson ten of Love the Lord where we explore how we can overcome our desire to sin with the Holy Spirit's help.

Let us begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect will and perfect character.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin. Confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, "In Jesus' name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen."

Let's begin the lesson for today. So, how can I overcome my desires to sin?

We have all been conditioned to present our best side in public. So, we disguise or hide our fears, our shortcomings, and our failures in order to avoid humiliation, rejection, or punishment. Likewise, we do the same for our sins. Talking about any sin, past or present, makes us feel vulnerable, anxious, and even ashamed. It feels counter-intuitive to open up about them. We prefer to camouflage our sins, compensate for them, justify them, ignore them, hide them, or forget about them. But it is imperative for us to confront our sinful nature because all these coping mechanisms quench the Holy Spirit in us.

Coping mechanisms prevent us from deepening our relationship with God. They only camouflage, justify, or cover up our sinful nature and stifle the Holy Spirit who has come to live in us.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 Do not stifle the Holy Spirit... Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil. (NLT)

We are all sinners, there is no shame in admitting that. If we claim we have not sinned, we call God a liar and show that His Word has no place in our hearts. The challenge for most of us is that we have lived with our sinful nature for so long, that our sinful reflexes have become instinctual and second nature to us.

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. (NLT)

We don't even recognise it when we think or behave in a way that God calls sinful. We may even think that our behaviour is justified. One reason for this is because our sinful actions are driven by some very fundamental desires for security, pleasure, self-worth, and comfort.

These desires are not sinful in themselves. We have these desires because God created us to find all these desires fulfilled in a relationship with Him.

1. God is our primary source of security
2. Relating with Him gives us pleasure
3. He defines and lifts up our self-worth
4. He is our greatest Source of comfort

We find the greatest peace, hope, and joy when we place all our desires in God Himself. Our fundamental desires only become sinful when we try to fulfil them with our sinful nature in the lead. That is how we end up

1. striving, hoarding, fearing,
2. lusting, coveting, stealing,
3. boasting, comparing, envying,
4. complaining, quarrelling, self-indulging and doing many other things that are contrary to God's commandments.

When we try to meet our fundamental desires in our own ways, apart from God, we will instinctively follow the sinful patterns of this world. Take a look at the words in black and see if any of these are some of the sinful temptations are ones you also struggle with and ask God to meet your desires in godly ways instead.

- Strive, Hoard, Fear
- Lust, Covet, Steal
- Boast, Compare, Envy
- Complain, Quarrel, Self-indulge

This is why a relationship with the Holy Spirit is so crucial. He personally leads all of God's children and gives us the wisdom and power to die to our sinful nature.

Romans 8:13-14 ... But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (NLT)

The Holy Spirit will gently prompt us with desires that are contrary to our sinful nature so we do not sin against God. This is where we need to make a conscious choice each time. Will we trust God and obey the Holy Spirit's counsel, even though it seems unfamiliar and foreign to us, or will we follow our sinful nature simply because it feels so familiar and effortless?

Galatians 5:17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other... (NLT)

If we choose to consistently resist the Holy Spirit and slip right back to our sinful nature, we demonstrate that we choose to continue to belong to the devil rather than to God, because Satan has been sinning since the beginning. Just as Satan tempted the very first man and woman to sin, we can be sure that he will tempt us also.

1 John 3:8 But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning... (NLT)

Satan is familiar with our weaknesses, anxieties, and areas of ignorance. He will fill our minds with many arguments that entice us to satisfy our desires through his ways. Satan will use many arguments that sound true, reasonable, and self-gratifying.

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. (NIV)

But we need to remember that Satan works through deception. A deception is not an outright 100% lie. Deception can comprise 98% truth. It is the 2% error that can lead us astray and away from the God we love. This is how Satan successfully deceives the whole world, as well as many believers, into sinning against God.

Revelation 12:9 This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. (NLT)

This is why Jesus has referred to all of us as confused and helpless sheep, and why He came to be the good Shepherd who will look after us when we are lost and lead us back to safety, time and time again.

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (NLT)

This is also why it is so crucial to be familiar with God's Word and to seek the Holy Spirit's counsel, because only this will lead us to the absolute, 100% truth.

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... (NLT)

But if we allow our desires to go unchecked, we make it easy for Satan to deceive us. The more we let sin grow in our hearts, souls, strength, and minds, the more Satan will build his stronghold in us and the more we die spiritually. Satan brings death, Jesus brings life.

James 1:14-15 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death... (NLT)

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit will free us from the power of sin that leads to death when we seek Him for the truth. God does not condemn us for our desires nor does He want to remove our desires.

Romans 8:1-2 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. (NLT)

In fact, He will fulfil all our hearts' desires when we place our delight in trusting and obeying Him alone.

Psalm 37:4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. (NLT)

Therefore, the first crucial step in overcoming our sinful behaviour is to invite the Holy Spirit to examine and reveal what's really going on in our hearts and minds.

Psalm 26:2 Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; (NIV)

For instance, we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us:

- How am I being tempted by Satan?
- What desire is it based on? Is it a desire for security, pleasure, self-worth, or comfort?
- What sinful response do I need to repent from and un-learn?
- Teach me to trust God to fulfil my fundamental desires.
- Teach me to resist Satan's temptations.

The second crucial step is to stay alert and recognise when we are being tempted by Satan, our great enemy, to sin. Are you aware of the logical-sounding arguments that the devil tends to use? We will now show you ten of these. Please count all the ones you believe you may have fallen for in the past.

1 Peter 5:8 Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (NLT)

Number one, "God will forgive me anyway."

The truth is, God is full of grace and forgiveness when we repent but we should not take Him for a fool. If our husband or wife repeatedly commits adultery, even after apologising, would we still want to stay in the relationship? It would be better for us to never have been married to them in the first place. This is essentially what 2 Peter chapter 2 verses 20 to 21 tells us about how God feels and views us when we deliberately sin against Him, over and over and over again.

2 Peter 2:20-21 And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. (NLT)

The Bible states that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross does not cover our wilful and deliberate sins. It will only lead to God's judgement, not His grace.

Hebrews 10:26-27 Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. (NLT)

Number two, "No one will get hurt."

The truth is, when we sin and engage in behaviour that God calls evil, we end up hurting our relationship with Him. We bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30-31 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live... Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. (NLT)

Number three, "No one is watching."

The truth is, God is everywhere and He watches everything all the time, both the evil and the good that we do. We cannot escape His presence.

Proverbs 15:3 The LORD is watching everywhere, keeping his eye on both the evil and the good. (NLT)

Number four, "Everyone else is doing it."

The truth is, following Jesus often means taking the road less travelled. The Bible reminds us that the "gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." On the other hand, the "highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way." As followers of Jesus Christ, we do not follow the masses.

Matthew 7:13-14 "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (NLT)

Number five, "I can't stop myself."

The truth is, it can indeed be hard to resist our fleshly impulses to sin if we try to do it on our own strength. Thankfully, God promises to give us everything we need for living a godly life by His divine power.

2 Peter 1:2-3 May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life ... (NLT)

With God, we can trust that everything is possible. When we commit to following God and allow the Holy Spirit to renew us, He will lead us to freedom. Sometimes, this can entail fasting and praying for God's deliverance from spiritual strongholds that Satan and evil spirits have built inside us.

Matthew 19:26 Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible." (NLT)

Number six, "Someone forced me into it."

The truth is, any accomplice to a crime will still be liable to the law. It is the same with God's Law. It doesn't matter why we sin or if we felt pressured into it, ultimately we will still have to answer to God. The Bible calls us not to fear those who try to manipulate or coerce us into sin, because they cannot touch our souls. Our souls are eternal and worth protecting. If someone is doing something that will lead them to hell, we certainly need the wisdom not to follow them into eternal torment.

Matthew 10:28 "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (NLT)

Number seven, "I need to keep the peace in my family."

The truth is, some cultures highly esteem reverence for and obedience to one's elders, no questions asked. Therefore, choosing to follow Jesus' command over and above our family's expectations, can cause painful divisions. We find that our families may see us as ungrateful traitors and treat us like their enemies.

Matthew 10:34-36 "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household! (NLT)

Yet Jesus has made it very clear that if we want to be His disciple, we need to prioritise His commands over and above everyone else's. That includes our father and mother, our spouses and children, brothers and sisters.

Luke 14:26 "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. (NLT)

This does not mean that we dishonour them, we are called to love them as God loves them. It means that we need to stand firmly on God's will for us, and explain ourselves in a gentle and respectful manner.

1 Peter 3:15-16 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. (NLT)

Number eight, "It's my body. No one can tell me what I can do with it."

The truth is, our body does not belong to us anymore. Jesus paid a high price for us, therefore we should honour God with our body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (NLT)

Number nine, "The Bible doesn't call this a sin."

The truth is, God will not leave us in the dark with regards to what He calls sin. For example, the Bible does not specifically mention the word, pornography, but it has plenty to say about what we are to do with our bodies, eyes, and imaginations. We can be confident that God's Word provides us with all the principles we need to live according to His commandments.

Matthew 5:28-29 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell... (NLT)

And when we humbly seek the Holy Spirit for God's will, we can trust that the Spirit of truth will lead us to the answer.

John 16:8,13 And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... (NLT)

Number ten, "This looks good and right to me."

Perhaps one of the most beguiling of deceptions that Satan can use is to tempt us to pursue plans that look good to us but which will lead to spiritual death in the end. For example, if a guest comes into our home and rearranges our furniture because it looks better to them in that way, without asking for our opinion,

they sin against us — even if they might have good intentions. It is the same way with how we treat God sometimes.

Proverbs 16:25 NLT There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death. (NLT)

When we go ahead and make plans that look good to us without first praying and asking the Holy Spirit to direct us, we rebel against God and add to our pile of sins against Him.

Isaiah 30:1 “What sorrow awaits my rebellious children,” says the LORD. “You make plans that are contrary to mine. You make alliances not directed by my Spirit, thus piling up your sins. (NLT)

How is your tally so far? Which of these 10 arguments have you heard and followed? Satan’s arguments will always sound good and logical to us, because our enemy will appeal to our human understanding and wisdom. We need to be aware of the thought patterns that we hold onto because they can lead us into Satan’s trap, if we’re not careful.

Let us read 2 Timothy chapter 2 verses 25 to 26 together, “*Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.*” (2 Timothy 2:25-26 NLT)

If you are ready to renounce the thought patterns that have led you to become captive to sin and to Satan and quenched the Holy Spirit, we have a guided prayer for you. In the meantime, please take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to show you the thought patterns that weaken your determination to overcome your sinful nature. Could it be some other thoughts such as,

1. “God doesn’t care about me.”
2. “There is no point resisting.”
3. “Just one more last time.”
4. “This is my only hope.”
5. “I can’t lose out to others.”
6. “I am hopeless, I can’t change.”
7. “I have to do it my way.”
8. “God made me like this.”
9. “It’s God’s fault.”
10. “God takes too long to answer me.”

Or are you tempted by other types of thoughts? Feel free to click pause here if you need the time to reflect and take some notes for yourself.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to repent from relying on our own human interpretation, opinion, and persuasion because no one knows God's will for us better than God Himself.

Let us read from Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 to 7 together, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil."* (Proverbs 3:5-7 NLT)

One aspect of having a healthy fear or reverence for God is to understand sin from His perspective. God alone is the One who set out His Law, He decides what is sin and not us. Therefore it is important for us to seek the Law Giver's opinion and wisdom first and foremost.

James 4:12 God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy... (NLT)

God's Word has divine power to destroy our mental and emotional strongholds. We use it to destroy arguments and opinions that Satan raises in our heart to keep us from God. As believers, we are called to take every thought captive to obey Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (ESV)

Our enemy, Satan, may try to trip us up but in reality, he has a limited tool kit. The more we study God's Word and grow in spiritual discernment through constant practice, the less effective Satan's tools against us will be.

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (ESV)

If you are ready to renew your mind and turn away from the arguments that have led you to be captive to sin, here is a guided prayer.

1. Review all the arguments that you have taken note of that have led you to be captive to sinful patterns
2. Then renounce them one by one in Jesus' name
3. Command all spiritual strongholds in your heart to be destroyed
4. Invite the Holy Spirit to convict your thoughts to obey Jesus from here on
5. Thank God for His unfailing love and help

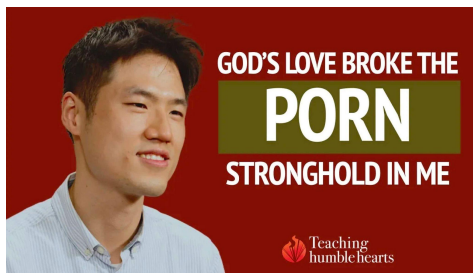
You're welcome to click pause here and recommit your thoughts to following Jesus. We hope today's lesson gives you a useful snapshot of how your thoughts can respond when you are tempted to fall back into sin in the future.

Here are the two reflection questions for today, please prepare your answers before your group meets. There is also a testimony to watch. We pray that you will be blessed. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. From now on, how will you respond to anyone who tempts you to follow Satan to sin?
2. Are there ungodly relationships you need to consider cutting out from your life?

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes