

“GOD AND CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES”

December 30, 2007

Scripture reading: Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1-7

The Christmas Holiday Season is one of my favorite times of the year — getting together with friends and family, exchanging gifts and celebrating the birth of Jesus. It's also the season when Joan makes homemade cookies. The first batch is what she calls a “bow tie” cookie, the second batch are these round things... I can resist these. But the *last batch* is special. When she takes them out of the oven, she puts them on a grate like thing that kinda hangs them in space and the smell of them just permeates throughout the house. This turns me into one of the Muppets — the Cookie Monster!

These are not just ordinary cookies — they are homemade cookies. Homemade chocolate chip cookies may be the greatest argument in the world for the existence and grace of God! Now she knows I can't eat only one -- I can eat them till they're all gone. And she knows my stomach's gonna get that woozy feeling and she's going to have to listen to “*Oh, I ate too much*” for the rest of the day. So as I reach out for one, here comes the warning — **Hands Off!** Eat these cookies and you will die a horrible death! You will ooze blood, and your hair will fall out! Horrible stuff — possibly your brains will ooze out of your nose! From every other cookie in the kitchen, you may freely eat, but of these cookies — the chocolate chip cookies — you may not eat, for on the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die!

But I look at the cookies — and I see that they are good for food and pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, and certain thoughts enter my head like;

I bet she hasn't counted them. If I just take one, she'll never know... when she leaves the room I'll take some. Please turn around so I can grab and run.

And they are so good...so good. Just to let you know how good they are, I'm going to pass some out but in a reverse offertory manner. We'll start at the front row. Now just take one and pass them down to the next person in your row. Passing them back and forth in the same row is not fair. When they get to the end of the row, pass them to the person in the row behind you. Just take them and pass them along. Hopefully there will be enough for everybody. **THIS** is just *one* of the reasons why it is so important to sit towards the front when you come to church.

Now here's the question:

Why do we have such a hard time keeping our hands off the cookies in life?

Really bright people—presidents and governors—get caught in humiliating scandals. CEO's keep getting their names in headlines they never wanted to make. Everybody I know—everybody in this room, all of us who look so under control—all of us have felt the pull of wanting something when we know the sign on it says,

Hands off! This is trouble! Stay away!

People will shred their reputations, destroy their marriages, shatter their children, ruin their consciences, trash their relationship with God, end up in a ditch someplace, all to satisfy desires that violate the values they hold most sacred.

At this time of the year, most of us make resolutions about things we would like to change in our lives for the coming year. For most of us what will kill those resolutions will be temptations and the greatest tempter will be advertising. Advertising tempts us with products or services or life styles we think we can't live without. Every major medium is used to deliver these messages-- television, radio, movies, magazines, newspapers, video games, the internet, and billboards. There is no escape.

"It'll make you happy!" and "You'll really enjoy this" are the fundamental messages in advertising for everything from automobiles, to cosmetics, to foods of all kinds, as well as for services such as tanning salons, finance companies who will erase your credit card debt. And even drug companies. One drug for men even has a challenge to it – "if you are healthy enough..." You name any product or service, and I'll bet their advertising is some version of "It'll make you happy!" or "You'll really like this!"

There have been volumes of books written about temptation; a search under books at Amazon.com for titles containing the word temptation yielded 189,361 results; the only ones I couldn't find were *Temptation for Dummies* and *Idiot's Guide to Temptation*.

I don't think there has ever been a more brilliant analysis of the dynamics of temptation than in the verses we just read in Genesis. So I want us to walk through these verses together, and let's take a look at the dynamics that fuel temptation in us and make us keep falling for it.

So, back to the story in Genesis Chapter 3 verse 1. Just a little recap from today's scripture reading: God has created Adam, the man, and has put him in the garden. God told Adam what the deal was to continue staying in the garden, gave him a warning and the consequences of disobedience. He then created the woman, Eve, from one of Adam's ribs – signifying they will walk side by side together as equal partners.

And then this is what happens: The enemy comes and says to the woman,

You must not eat from any tree in the garden. (Genesis 3:1 NIV)

Now, did God say they could not eat from any tree? No, God did not say that. He said they could eat from *every* tree except this one. There were all sorts of trees --beautiful to see and delicious to the taste. To us, eating from trees might not sound very exciting, but remember this is written to people who lived in a barren desert culture. The Garden of Eden would have been like a gourmet paradise. And the serpent says,

Is it true God said you can't eat from any trees?

What is the serpent up to?

The serpent is doing something that happens any time temptation takes place. He's planting a little seed of doubt in the woman's mind about how good God is. He wants her to think to herself,

I don't believe I can really trust God has my best interests at heart. I think if I really obey God fully, I might miss out on something good. I better be ready to set aside what God has said if I really want the good life.

And temptation always involves these kinds of thoughts,

I don't know that I can trust God.

The woman corrects the serpent, but notice one inaccuracy in her account of what God says. The woman says,

No. God said we may eat the fruit from the trees of the garden, but God did say, "It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die." (Genesis 3:3 NLT)

Did you catch what she said? She claimed God said,

You must not touch it.

God never said that. In her mind, she's making God a little severe, a little unreasonable, so that she'll be justified when she disobeys Him. And this is what we do. She is **rationalizing** doing what it is that she knows full well she wants to do.

One time when I went to the freezer looking for something to eat for lunch, I noticed a Ziploc bag I hadn't seen before. So I took a look. Guess what was in it – chocolate chip cookies, lots of them. She's been holding out on me.

So I had to rationalize what I was about to do. I thought to myself "God must have led me to them – He wants me to have them - I'll just take a couple - I bet she hasn't counted them. I bet if I just take one, she'll never know." I bet if I went down to Hy-Vee I could find some that look just like these, and she'll never know. And if she tries one and it doesn't taste right, it must have been caused by freezer burn.

This goes on all the time. The capacity of the human mind to deceive itself and rationalize doing what the heart wants to do is staggering. And part of what I want to do in this message is say to you:

If you're walking down that road and playing in your mind with rationalizing doing something that you ought not do, just stop for a moment today and face reality.

In Verse 4, the serpent, the tempter, says to the woman,

You won't die!" the serpent hissed. "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil. (Genesis 3: 4-5 NLT)

When the serpent talks about

knowing good and evil,

he is not saying,

If you eat this fruit, you will gain moral discernment.

Moral discernment is a real good thing. But what the tempter says is,

In eating from the tree, you will be declaring, “Now I get to decide what’s good and what’s wrong quite apart from God. Now, I’ll call the shots in my life. Now I’ll do what I want to do.”

And the tempter is saying,

You ought to do this, because you deserve to do it. You are entitled to it! You are entitled to this fruit. And if you don’t get it, it’s like your rights have been violated.

We live in a Culture of Entitlement. We live in a world where we are so used to feeling entitled for whatever we want that if we don’t get it, we are ready to sue somebody. A woman suing a fast food company over hot coffee; a psychology professor who was sued for sexual harassment because he had mistletoe at a Christmas party. And here’s another one. A psychic was awarded \$986,000 when a doctor’s CT scan impaired her psychic abilities. Shouldn’t she have known not to go to that doctor?

We live in a world where we stand there and look at the cookies. And if we look at those cookies long enough, I guarantee our minds will come up with a way of saying,

I deserve those cookies. I am entitled to those cookies. They ought to be mine.

We play those games in our minds, and they lead to all kinds of things that we don’t think we’re entitled to—like guilt, and shame and secrecy and pain.

Notice something else in this story. The tempter always strikes at people’s most vulnerable points. In Chapter 2, verse 16, when God gives the original command, He gives it to the man. It is just Adam who is present. So presumably, the woman will have to get her information about what God said from the man. A couple of questions at this point for women:

How many of you have ever known a man who does not have communication problems, who will always give detailed accounts of his conversations? Ever known a man to have problems along those lines?

Well, the serpent goes after the one who was not directly present to hear what God said. And notice this, she does not involve the man in her decision process. This is the power of hiddenness. She doesn’t say to Adam,

Adam, the serpent says we should eat fruit from the forbidden tree, and I’m toying with the idea. What do you think? Do you think it would be a good idea?

She chooses to keep her temptations hidden. Why does she do that? I’ll tell you what I think. She hasn’t walked through the door of sin yet, but she’s decided she doesn’t want to let anybody else close it for her. She wants it kept open. That’s the way temptation works. She knows if she tells another person about what she’s tempted to do, they would make her think about realities she doesn’t want to think about. So she doesn’t say a word. She just stays hidden.

If you’re wrestling with the temptation to engage in some activity like alcohol, gambling, adultery or pornography, despite harmful consequences, and your keeping it hidden - tell somebody. Find a trusted brother or sister, and tell them what you’re going through. And, if you’re on the receiving end: if somebody tells you about something they’re wrestling with, you’re on holy ground, so take it seriously. Keep confidentiality, pray for that person, love them, and hold them accountable.

Eve doesn't do that. This is the ultimate crossroads of her existence, and she keeps her temptation hidden. And that makes the next step pretty much inevitable in her life.

In verse 6, it says,

The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too. (Genesis 3:6 NLT)

Does it strike anybody here that the man is a little passive in this story? Sin is often that way. If you're parents, you know about this. When your kid does something that's foolish, destructive or stupid, parents always ask the same question. What question do parents always ask when kids do something like that?

Why? Why did you do that?

And kids always give the same answer. They're taught this before they come out of the womb! They always give the same response. What does a kid say?

I don't know.

Of course they don't know! If they knew what they were doing, they wouldn't have done it in the first place! Real smart people go for the cookies all the time, and if you ask them when they're in a ditch someplace, and they've trashed a marriage, or a career, or a conscience,

Why did you do it?

they'll answer,

I don't know.

Now at this point in the story, you wonder,

How is God going to respond? Will God just give up in disgust on the whole project of humanity now that sin has entered the picture?

God comes to walk with them in the cool of the day. That's a picture of God's intimate communion with them. God still wants to be close to them even though they've defied Him, even though they don't want to be close to Him. And they're hiding. And God says,

Adam, where are you? (Genesis 3:9 NLT)

I personally think that's one of the most fascinating statements in Scripture. Have you ever wondered why this all knowing God would ask Adam, "Where are you?" He's not confused. It's not like He doesn't know. He's giving Adam the opportunity to freely choose to confess, to come back into relationship. And Adam says,

I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked. (Genesis 3:10 NLT)

That's the first mention of fear in the Bible. There was no fear before the fall.

And God says to Adam,

Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten the fruit I commanded you not to eat? (Genesis 3:11 NLT)

And Adam reflects on the importance of taking personal responsibility for his actions, and summons up all of his courage and says,

It was the woman.

Not just “the woman,” he says,

It was the woman YOU gave me. (Genesis 3:12 NLT)

Whose idea was this woman thing in the first place? Was it my idea? No, it wasn't my idea. No more of this “bone of my bone” stuff. Remember that

bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh? (Genesis 2:23 NIV)

No more of that. Now it's

the woman You gave me,

and now blaming enters human history. And that too becomes a part of being stuck in temptation and sin and guilt, because we just don't want to face up to the truth about ourselves which is:

I want what I wanted, when I wanted it!

We try to find somebody else to pawn it off on. So God pronounces judgment. God at this point describes the pain that has gripped the human race ever since the fall. From the moment the man and the woman ate the fruit, all of the darkness of this world entered into it, and in a way, every time that we sin...every time we defy God...we repeat what they did.

There's one other aspect to God's response that I want you to look at. You might not have noticed it before. This is in Chapter 3, verse 21. It says,

the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.
(Genesis 3:21 NIV)

Up to this point, you might remember, Adam and Eve were running around in stitched fig leaves, and they looked very “fashion-challenged,” so God decides to give them a makeover. *Divine Eye for the Depraved Guy*, you might call this part of the story. And God becomes a tailor, and He makes their clothes. God says,

I don't want you to have to hide any more, so I'll cover you. I'll clothe you, so that when you come into My presence, you won't be overwhelmed with a sense of guilt or shame anymore.

God does not want sin to get the last word. He does not want their sense of shame to keep them from running to Him like His little children.

When our kids were small we used to play a game when I came home from work called “Daddy home.” It was a simple game. I think that in the beginning, when God came to walk in the garden,

it was like that. Adam and Eve just came running to Him. And then, one day, they didn't run to Him, because they were covered with sin and shame. God says,

I'll cover your shame.

But notice something else. The writer says that He made their garments of skin, which means that for the first time in history, blood is shed—innocent blood. It never happened before. This blood is shed so that their shame might be covered, so that their fellowship with God might be restored.

God set the stage right here at the beginning of the Bible, because the day would come when a child would be born...a son of Adam and Eve...one of their descendents...only this Child would get it right. He would be, the Scriptures say, tempted in every way just like us, but He would not fall, not sin, not eat the fruit. Jesus knew and experienced our human condition, He made it part of the Lord's Prayer,

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Mt 6:13 NIV)

And through His love, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, whatever guilt or shame you've brought into this place gets covered, and you can run into the arms of a loving God unhindered by any sense of your own brokenness or unworthiness. That's for you.

This is what I want to say to you today more than anything else:

No matter what you've done, no matter what temptation you've given into, no matter what temptation you're struggling with right now, God has not given up on you.

He hasn't. And God still is in the tailoring business. God will still clothe people in the righteousness of his Son, Jesus Christ, so they can be freely in His presence. God will do that for you right now.

I want to invite you—whatever you need to say to God, whatever you're struggling with, whatever you need forgiveness for—use these moments to talk to Him right now. Take this as a moment between you and God to talk to Him about whatever you need to talk about to be *fully* restored by His infinite grace.

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Right now some of you may know you face a decision that you have to make. There are times that resisting temptation seems like a hopeless cause. Its grip and seduction seems totally overwhelming. Resisting certain temptations seems as futile as trying to hold back the tide.

If you feel overwhelmed by a temptation that's bigger than you, remember, the Apostle Paul writes that no temptation overtakes us, God will be with us, God will make a way so you can stand up to it. And if you feel you have done something that has disqualified you from God, or there's something you've got to get straightened out before you come to him, then listen to him right now as he says, I love you right now, in this moment.