

Series: STAPLES - November 8, 2009

**SAYING NO...WHEN YOU NEED TO SAY NO!
Genesis 3:1-13; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:12-13**

1. I was looking out of the window in my office several weeks ago and...**behold, a parable!** You may have heard of the parable of The Good Samaritan or The Prodigal Son; I call this one **The Parable of the Dead Skunk and the Crow.**

-See, the deal is that several week ago, a skunk got hit over on Castlemore—you may have smelled him cause he was there for a while. So, I watched this crow land—not right on the skunk, but on the side of the road. He looked at the crow; walked around a little—then walked right up to the skunk. I **know** he wanted that skunk! But a car came, so he trotted off back to the side and hid in the grass.

-He did this dance—walk over, car came, trot back. He didn't want to end up like the skunk—he just wanted to eat him. Started out again—and a car came—so he half flew, half trotted back to the safety of the grass.

-Then **another** crow came and joined the dance. Back and forth, back and forth. I don't know what ultimately happened, but I **did** notice that the skunk disappeared.

a. As I watched that crow dance with the dead skunk and the traffic, I thought about how we dance with temptation. For some reason, stuff that we **know** stinks—like that skunk--is attractive to us. We don't go right up and jump in—we dance. We dance with whether or not to do it and whether or not we'll get caught. Has anyone ever done the dance?

b. **Everyone** faces temptation—I do, you do. The question is—is it **inevitable** that we will eventually go for the skunk? Or—is it possible to say **no!** and mean it. -Paul, an early leader, described this dance perfectly with these words. See if you can relate:

**And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway...I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?
(Romans 7:18-19, 21-24 NLT)**

-Paul doesn't leave us with a big question mark. He answers his own question with these words:

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. (Romans 8:1-2 NLT)

- c. The amazing news is--Jesus defeated sin and death on the cross—and made it possible for the most powerful force in the universe, the Holy Spirit—to live in us and give us the power to say **No** when we need—for **our** sake...for **everyone's** sake--to say **No!**

2. In describing this struggle, this early leader, Paul, talked about something called the **sinful nature**—which is the pull we all feel towards destructive things. It's important to know **why** it's in us—and have an understanding of temptation. Let's take a look at where it started—which is found three chapters into the very first book of the Bible. **Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Genesis 3:1-7 TNIV)**

- a. As evil and sneaky as serpents are—the one tempting Eve to rebel here in this account was not a reptile. We find out later that it was a manifestation of the ultimate rebel—Satan.

Satan's goal there and ever since has been to destroy **everything** God has created and loves—especially us.

-Satan's is a **deceiver**. To come in a red jump suit with horns, fire and sulfur would be too obvious. He **always** works in the shadows—sometimes even posing as an **angel of light**. If you read this account carefully, you will realize how familiar it feels.

First, he twists what God has said to a ridiculous level in mock sympathy for Eve. He's trying to get her to feel sorry for herself—and suspect God's motives. He wants the **one fruit** God has forbidden to be squarely in the spotlight. Eve's first mistake is engaging in the conversation. Listening. Attempting to defend God's reputation, "Well, it's bad, but it's not **that** bad..." Do you see the dance going on here?

-Well, once he has her attention, Satan just blatantly calls what God has said a lie. "You won't **die!**" He twists God's motives; implying that God is kinda insecure in his role—and is afraid people will have the same knowledge and powers as Him.

-Once Eve begins the dance—the dead skunk and the crow—she’s finished. Her focus is now solely on the one fruit she doesn’t have and has never tasted. Notice the progression:

*She noticed that it was **good for food**

*It was **pleasing to the eye**

*...And also **desirable for gaining wisdom**

-How many of you think this one tree **really** stood out from all the others—like it looked better, smelled better, was more nutritious...? I don’t. I think the fact that Satan put the **spotlight** on it created discontent; doubt. A sense of **need** for it.

-And I don’t think Adam and Eve fell for it in 5 minutes. Remember, they were perfect people in a perfect world, but there was this nagging thought: “Hmmm. I wonder what **that** fruit from **that** tree would be like....? And I think their curiosity grew—and their trust for God diminished. Just like us.

- b. The reward for their defiance was a downward spiral of exposure and shame and cover-up. Like us, they eventually found themselves hiding from the one who had given them **everything**—and blaming everyone else but themselves for the problem.

-They had no idea how death would touch them and their family—and the trainwreck their rebellion would create.

2. I want you to look at the three basic areas where Eve was tempted. Eve noticed three things:

*The fruit was good for food. Eating is a very basic physical desire.

*The fruit was pleasing to the eye. Anyone here ever see things that you find beautiful—and think, “I’ve **got** to have that!”

*The fruit to be desired for gaining wisdom. This appeals to the desire we have to **know**; to be esteemed by others. Anyone ever tempted by something that appeals to your pride? Your need to be known; seen as important?

- a. Ironically, Jesus was tempted in these three areas as well; He was tempted to turn stones to bread to satisfy his hunger. He was shown all the kingdoms of the world by Satan; “I’ll **give** them to you if you worship me!” He was tempted to gain a following by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple.

-Now, listen to quote from John, disciple of Jesus—and see if you can spot these three same areas:

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions.

These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. (1 John 2:15-17 NLT)

-Did you see it? These are natural desires we have. Sin is the twisting of normal God-given desires for things like food, water, pleasure, comfort, beauty, belonging, sexual release and self-esteem.

These desires are not wrong; the temptation *usually* travels along the lines of taking a short-cut. And it's usually the *same old stuff*—and we keep falling for it! Why? Man, *good question!*

- b. Temptation is no respecter of persons! And it doesn't matter how *brilliant* you are, how *spiritual* you are, how much you have, how much you don't have. Everyone faces it—and either says—*yes...or no!*

-There are a *lot* of case studies on temptation in the Bible.

*When Cain, Adam and Eve's firstborn was jealous of his brother Abel—and angry, God warned him:

“...Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” (Genesis 4:7 NLT)

Attitudes precede actions. If you're jealous or angry or hurt or insecure—that stuff *leads* somewhere. In Cain's case—murder.

*Moses struggled with anger. His anger caused him to murder and get thrown out of Egypt. It was an act of temper that eventually kept him from going into the promised land.

*Think about David. David's was this incredible man who lived a life pleasing to God. But one night when he wasn't where he should be, he fell for his friend, Uriah's wife—had sex with her—and had Uriah killed to cover it up. He almost destroyed his family with his example. What you learn is that *everybody* struggles with temptation—and giving in is *never* worth the price-tag! And we don't *have* to fall! That's the *good* news!

3. I think the first question we need to answer when it comes to dealing with temptation is, **what is my particular struggle?** I have weak areas—and so do you! If you don't have a clue what they are, that's a *real* problem. ***Let's just say together; I have PROBLEMS! Name it! Call it!***

- a. Sometimes it's helpful to think of *why* it is a weakness. What is it in you that makes you vulnerable in that area? What are you looking for? And when you take a swan dive into the cesspool—do you actually find it? Do you find your needs for love, security, recognition or self-esteem met? Do you feel better about life?

-Just like roots feed both weeds and huge oak trees, there is usually a root structure hidden in our lives that feeds our behavior. The roots under my sinful behavior are **not** dipped in the stream of loving God and putting Him first—or loving others as myself. The roots are solidly dipped in a river called **me**. Self. Me **first!** Putting myself before God and others.

-I mean, really! Can anyone name a sin that **doesn't** have to do with self? **Self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love, self-centeredness, self-ishness, self-preoccupation?**

- b. Sometimes the question comes up, “So, why did God even **put** the tree in the middle of the garden where He placed Adam and Eve? And why doesn't He just eliminate temptation altogether?”

-I don't want to give a shallow answer to that—cause it's a profound question. I do know this. One of God's most amazing gifts to humans is free-will; the ability to choose God and love God—and the alternative; to **not** choose or love God. Real love **always** involves choice. James, the leader of the early church, puts it like this:

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. 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. (James 1:12-15 NLT)

-And Paul, the one who described the wishy-washiness of his own heart, says:

If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT)

-Anyone know how they harden steel? They heat it white hot and pound the daylights out of it. Somehow our inner life is strengthened when we are tested—and stay standing.

God doesn't **tempt** us—but gift of free will He's given us makes temptation possible. When we are tempted—he's **right there; engaged with us!** Because of Jesus—**He understands what we're going through!**

- c. Some of you are saying about now, “Come on, Ken! Is that the best you can do? God allows us to be exposed to stuff that can kill us—because He wants us to be strong?”

-No. That's **not** all. *I* have to engage. And **you** have to engage. Cooperate. Work with Him. How?

*Sometimes you need to **run the other direction!** Paul, a veteran in the faith told his understudy, Timothy, that he needed to literally **run** from the love of money. Paul told the Corinthian people—who were absolutely enmeshed in a culture saturated with lust—like ours--to run from immorality, not wallow in it.

*Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, told people that if using their hand or eye inappropriately was going to destroy them spiritually, they needed to cut it off. Now, he was exaggerating for shock value—but sometimes radical surgery **is** in fact necessary. If you have a job that is corrupting you and destroying your marriage—what do you think you need to do? **Quit** would be the right answer. Or if the internet is twisting and destroying your mind—what do you think needs to happen? Cancel the internet service.

-If you're dating someone who's going in the wrong direction and taking you with them—what do you think you need to do? Do **radical surgery**—cut the relationship. Jesus said, "Disability is better than death!"

- d. Let's just be honest about what we sometimes do. We minimize the problem. Like an alcoholic or drug addict, we tell ourselves lies about how bad the problem is. As we're destroying and enslaving our lives piece by piece, we comfort our own stupidity by saying things like, "Oh, I can quit anytime I want."

-Think of it like this. Imagine you've got a fire in your house—and it threatens your furniture, your heirlooms, your vehicles, your family—everything of value. What do you do? **Throw water! Call the fire department!** That just makes sense, right? Yet, when it comes to temptation we are just as likely to throw a bucket of gas on it!

*We have a problem with bitterness and anger toward someone. God tells us to choose forgiveness. What do **we** do? We're just as likely to mentally rehearse what the person has done to us—and drag the bag of grudges, slander and other garbage behind us like it's full of gold!

*We have a problem with lust that is eating at us from the inside out. Jesus suggests radical surgery. But we're just as likely to throw more gas on the fire by visiting porn sites and mentally storing and reviewing all the images we've collected.

*Jesus once asked a guy who'd been flat on his back and making excuses for 38 years, **Do you WANT to get well?** And that's really the question, isn't it? We live in a culture that plays games with sin. That views God as a prude—as the great party-pooper in the sky—because He says the stuff we're messing with will kill us. Sin is a ball and chain. It's a cancer that eats away at everything you love—and it **is** lethal. Do you **want** to get well?

4. There's an organization that does exceptionally well in helping people overcome addictions that are killing them and everyone around them. Anyone know what it is?

Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill Smith, one of the founders, had destroyed a career in finance because of his drunkenness. In 1934, he met God—and it changed his life. He was able to stop drinking. But when he was on a business trip in 1935, he experienced an almost unbearable urge to start drinking again. In desperation, he called another former alcoholic to help him stay sober. So in 1935, two former drunks started AA, mainly drawing their 12 principles from the Bible—and now there are over 100,000 AA groups worldwide.

- a. The biblical principles AA uses are **blatant**. In fact, they seem to practice the truth of the Bible better than many believers. Right at the start, they admit that they are powerless when it comes controlling their alcoholism, drug addiction—or whatever they face. They **get** it—that only God has the power to restore their sanity.

-I think believers think that just so they make a quick confession and trip to the communion table, there's nothing really wrong with turning around and diving **right back into the cesspool!** Sometimes believers in Jesus go for **years** and never get to Step 3 of the 12 step program—where they consciously turn their lives **and their wills** over to the care of God, saying, **God I need HELP—and I'm willing to turn my life totally and completely over to you!**

-Friends, from personal experience—it is **only** when we will give ourselves as a living sacrifice to God that He can fill us with His Spirit and renew our minds; change the pride, the lust, the greed, the selfishness that infests the corners of our lives. **Have you ever in your life done that! Have you ever invited the Spirit of God to fully possess you—and pour His power into your heart?**

- b. There's another step they take that I'm sure we're deficient on. This is how they put it: **I made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself; then admitted to God, to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.**

-That, friends, takes **courage**. A **searching** and **fearless** moral inventory. In other words, "I want a full diagnosis. I don't want to play games. I don't want to just pretend I'm okay anymore—I want to be healed; I need **changed!** Have you ever done that?"

-But they don't end there. Step 8 says, **I made a list of all the persons I had harmed and was willing to make amends with them—and I made direct amends to such people wherever possible—except when to do so would injure them or others.** That's tough stuff. To go and clean up the past. To admit where you've been wrong, humble yourself, and make things right. Question. When was the last time you told someone you were wrong and made things right? Has it actually been that long since you've been wrong or hurt someone?

-Want to know why this works? It's biblical. See, I'm convinced that temptation wouldn't be **nearly** as tempting if we humbled ourselves before God and others—and cleaned up our messes. Instead we're more likely to plow ahead

in life because we're too terrified to do that—or too arrogant to admit that we need to.

- c. There's one final, powerful principle buried here that is essential to overcoming stubborn temptations. It's having the courage and wisdom to **pursue** accountability. AA is quite relentless about this. They are **committed** to each other. Help is only a phone call away. Again, they get it. They are **one** drink away from sliding back into the pit of alcoholism.

-An organization called XXX Church.com deals with porn addiction the same way. Accountability. They set up people's computers so one or two other people know **exactly** which sites you're visiting—and will call you on it.

- d. You may be thinking to yourself, "Come on, Ken! You're handing out AA stuff to deal with spiritual temptation! What do you think we are--addicts?" Short answer? Yes. Jesus put it like this,
"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin." (John 8:34 NLT)

5. The words the Bible uses in telling us how to deal with sin are very revealing. Stark, actually. Words like, **put to death, take off, cut off, get rid of, resist, flee, choose life—not death.**

-In fact, what we sometimes see as our private little battle with a few misdemeanors—the Bible describes as cosmic warfare. Listen to this description Paul—a battle veteran—gives:

[W]e are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. (Ephesians 6:12-13 NLT)

- a. This is not some minor skirmish, friends; this is war. Like it or not, you and I have a spiritual enemy who will **take us down!** Our souls, our influence, our mission, our peace, our joy—and our ability to love outside of ourselves is at stake.

-See, it's not just about me...or about you. It's about those we touch—or could touch—with our lives. It's about those we help—or could help. It's about what we **could** say YES to—if we say NO to destructive things that waste our bodies, money and influence.

-It's about the people who have to travel with--friends, partners, kids. It's about being so **busy** throwing gas on fires—and trying to put them out that we don't have time for what counts.

-But at the core, it's about which Kingdom gets furthered. The Kingdom of Jesus—which is about renewing and restoring the Shalom of God **everywhere—into every corner of this world.** Or...furthering the Kingdom of darkness—which is all about disrupting and destroying the shalom—the

goodness, rightness, justice and peace—of God. The truth we all have to face is—which Kingdom are you working for?

- b. And that brings us to the bottom line in this struggle we face. Probably the most difficult challenge. And it relates to what we talked about last week.

Who's boss. Who runs the show? Let me get specific. There's a passage in the book of James people sometimes quote that says,

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. But that by itself isn't at all true. Let me read the whole verse:

God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:6b-7 TNIV)

-There is absolutely no reason why Satan would run from anyone here. He's not scared of us! But when our hearts are bowed to the King of the universe and our lives are fully possessed by the sin-killing power of the Spirit—**that** is something to reckon with.

- c. There are some important things we need to do in this process of overcoming temptation. Things to stay away from. The principle of accountability—**asking** for the help of others. Sometimes we need counseling to help us understand **why** we're tempted in the areas we are. We may even need a structured environment—like rehab—to get out of the ruts we've traveled in **way** too long. -But there is a bottom line, I believe—and that's this flat-out submission of **our** will to God's. It's this moment where we present our full selves to God and invite **His** Spirit into the control center—into—no excuses; no begging and whining—just, “God, I want you to have **all** of me. Just as I am. My mind. My heart. My habits. My relationships. My body. My desire for money and attention. My sex drive. My obsession with companionship, with being liked, with being important, with being admired. **ALL OF IT!**

-He's promised that if we would submit our wills to His and ask for His power—he would totally renew our minds and transform our lives.

Q & A

6. I've got **great** news for you this morning! God is **waiting** to pour the power of the Spirit into your heart. If—**IF** you will submit to Him. And when that happens, His power is greater than any addiction, any temptation—anything that will ever be thrown at you! Satan has been defeated; God can and **will** give you the power to say **NO**, when you really, **really** need to say **NO!** Will you cooperate? Will you choose life?