Dealing with Temptation
By Marilyn Meberg

Announcer:
Let's begin with the word of prayer. Father, as we come before You in silence, I pray that we'll be still and know that You are God. Father, in a life of uncertainty and rushed thoughts that so much of a college life student ste-. (inaudible) Father, I pray that we'll claim that You are our refuge and You are our guide. For I know for myself so much I want to know what's in the future. But I can't know that. Father, may I-, may each of us have security in- in You and not security in the unknown. But just to know that You are our God. Father, we commit this chapel to You that You use it and that You give us new perspective for a character that's perfected by You. In Christ's name, Amen.

Every time I decide who's gonna be the chapel speaker my biggest importance is who can relate to the students. And I feel like there's a lot of theologians and there's a lot of people who are spiritually mature but can they really relate to us who are go-, go to a Christian school. I feel that we have different pressures than people who don't go to a Christian school because here we- here we train to know who God is. And uh- here Satan attacks more because he knows that this is the center point of learning who God is. And this morning I feel like our speaker hits those requirements right on the dot. (inaudible) Mrs. Meberg. (applause)
Almost a year ago, I experienced one of the major traumas of my life. I turned 40 (audience laughing). My husband, because this was an indeed momentous event in my life, planned a surprise party for me that would be commensurate with the importance of the event. Now I didn't know what was going to occur and neither did anyone else who was going to come to the party. Other than the fact that everyone was informed, they were to dress up, and to come hungry, that we were going to go out and eat. Other than that, no one knew anything what was- what was going on.

So everyone did, indeed, appear, 16 of them, to go out for dinner; and we loaded into four cars where Ken had reserved a loser spot in Fullerton called George's hamburgers (audience laughing). All the derelicts of the world managed to find their way to George's hamburger (audience laughing). The appearance of George's is, again, commensurate with the kind of people that go there. And as we, unknowingly of cour- of course, none of us knew where we're going to go, as we unknowingly pulled into the parking lot, thinking there's got to be a mistake. We realized there was no mistake because stretched about 30 feet long was a huge banner that said "Happy Birthday Marilyn" which was visible from the street!

Well, in a-, with a degree of confusion, turned into the lot; got out of the car; walked in all dressed up; we sit down at these little tables that are cemented to the cement floor (audience laughing) and you're sitting in a little chair that is also cemented to the cement floor. I guess they're afraid of losing them, I can't imagine why but- (audience laughing) Ken, with
characteristic forethought, had ordered 16 cheeseburgers, 16 order of fries, and 16 Cokes. And he stood there in his vest and suit and tie and shouted out "does anybody need ketchup?"

Well, it was a hysterical time and we were loud and noisy, and got into the spirit of all this quickly. And uh- at the conclusion of this sumptuous feast (audience laughing), two friends of ours, who sing very well, stood up and entered into a rendition of Marilyn's 40 sung to the tune of Alleluia (audience laughing). It was- it was hahaha. After they had sung the first verse then everyone joined in and it was a funereal dirge if ever I heard one; slowly sung, and you know, Alleluia can be beautiful, I have never heard this kind of a rendition but everyone joined in various parts of harmony and it was a very depressing thing to listen to as they sang it over and over and over (audience laughing).

George, who owns George's hamburgers, could not imagine what was going on in the outside of all of this and part of his restaurant. And we left him with a state of confusion. We got into our cars to leave and go back to our house, where more was going to occur. And of course, I didn't have any idea what that would be. As he'd been teasing me during dinner about the fact that I was definitely over the hill, that any good living that it was to be experienced was already in my past (audience laughing). What was, from that point on, of course, was downhill. And uh- I don't know what possessed me but as we stood- we sat at a uh- lied at Commonwealth and Euclid, I leaped out of the car and ran over to Euclid and stuck out my thumb to hitchhike.

And as I said, I did not plan this; I don't know what possessed me to do it but I did do this. And of course, all four cars from this birthday party, the occupants looked at me, "oh Marilyn. Come
You're too over the hill. No one's going to pick you up" (audience laughing hysterically). To my amazement, and believe me it was my amazement because I had not thought through any of the consequences of my action. As I had my thumb out, and I knew the light would change and they would come around the corner and stop and- and rescue me, another car is- or a pickup truck is coming from the other direction on- turns on Commonwealth, sees me, stan- all dressed up, hitchhiking. This is a dirty disreputable looking pickup with a dirty disreputable looking Harley Davidson motorcycle in the back. The occupant of the pickup was a dirty disreputable looking young man (audience laughing). And he pulled over to the curb. So I open the door (audience laughing hysterically) and he looked at me and he said "Lady is anything wrong?"

Now I could not resist the temptation to keep following this sequence of activities through. And I looked over at these cars and the light still has not changed! And my husband is looking horrified (audience laughing), absolutely horrified. And everyone else, the smile has now left faces and they are steering the- (audience laughing), noses pressed to the windows. And I look back at them and I just couldn't help it and I said, "Look, would you go along with a joke?" And he says, "well yea! what?" So I explained to him that I had just turned 40, everybody was giving me a bad time, that we'd had this party at George's. And he said, "Hey! Are you Marilyn?" (audience laughing hysterically) I said, "Yes I am. How do you know?" He said, "Well, I was gonna get a hamburger at George's and I was scared. I didn't know what was going on in there." (audience laughing)

So I asked him if he would just drive me home and I assured him that of course he would be flanked by the members of my birthday party, in case he had any ideas, because I was so
compelling. So I got into the truck, shut the door. The light changed and believe me, he was indeed surrounded by the cars belonging to my party. -drove along. He didn't say anything! -had long dirty hair-. I mean, he was bad looking! And I thought "now Lord I don't know if I'm justified in praying this prayer because I brought this on myself but I-. Do take care of me" (audience laughing).

After a few moments, he looked over at me. He said uh- "What do you do lady?" And I said, "What do you mean what do I do?" He said "wh-. Do you work or anything?" I don't know why I asked that. Now, the last thing in the world I want to do is tell him I taught at Biola. So I said "well, yes. I- I- I- I do work some." And he said, "What do you do?" "I- well, I teach." "You teach? What do you teach?" Now this is getting a little bit uncomfortable and I said "well you won't believe what I teach. I mean I hate to tell people what I teach." He said "I bet you teach English." (audience laughing) I said "yes, as a matter of fact, I do. I teach-." "Where do you teach?" "Uh well, I teach uh- at a um- a school not far from here." (audience laughing)

He said, "you're teaching high school?" "Uh- well no- no I don't." I don't know why I kept this up! He said, "well, you teach in college? J.C.?" "Uh no. No I don't." "Where do you teach?" I said, "well I teach at a uh- at a liberal arts college in La Mirada." There's a pause, and he said, "Biola?" (audience laughing) I knew I was doomed and I said "yes Biola." Now I'm sorry for whatever will fall upon the college as a result of this experience but I said "yes, I do teach at colle- at Biola college." He said, "isn't that the real religious place?" And I said "yes." He said, "Are you one of those?" And I said, "I sure am."
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He paused for a moment and then he got real serious and began to justify his life to me. He said "You know, I used to be religious myself." And then he went on to tell me about a divorce. He was 32 years old. He didn't have a regular job. I hated to speculate what he did to earn a living, truly. And uh he didn't have any children by that marriage. He and his wife are good friends; that he had thought a lot about life, and on and on and on. And I began to think "good grief, I wonder if this is ordained of the Lord that I am actually sitting in this pickup, listening to this character tell me about his life."

So I talked to him about the person of Christ. Can you imagine witnessing under these circumstances? And uh that any failures that he was struggling with in his life were not important, it was the now that it was important, that the God of the universe loved him, and on and on and on. If I had had, I think, another mile, I think I could have won him to the Lord but as a result, we pulled up in front of my house in the middle of um a little bit of sermonizing. And he looked at me and he said "my friends are never going to believe this." And I said, "mine aren't either." (audience laughing) And he left and I have not seen him again, fortunately. Now my husband came over to me in the - standing in the driveway, and he looks like a hornet. He said "Why did you do that?" And I said "I'm sorry. I could not resist the temptation. I mean, it just- it just got bitter and bitter and bitter, and I couldn't resist it."

I have a friend who is on campus crusade staff called me last night. She knew that I was going to be speaking to this chapel this morning. And she wanted to know what I was talking about. And I said "I'm going to talk about temptation." And she said "you're talking about temptation?" She said, "well it's good that I called you because I know how to handle temptation." I said "well
that's great. That'll be a good introduction. I need to know that myself. I've had a few experiences where I have failed miserably in that arena. She said, "yes, I not only know how to handle temptation, I know how to rid my life of it completely." I said "well what do you do?" She said, "I yield. (audience laughing) You get rid of all temptation when you yield. Does it stain your life? Of course" She said, "then you have guilt. And that's another thing." She said "Are you ever going to speak on guilt?" Yielding to temptation of course is not the answer. And I am interested and curious about the way people do handle temptation.

I'd like to ask you without you responding verbally and audibly. How do you handle temptation? How do you deal with the temptations that are in your life? Many Christians deal with temptation by removing the object of temptation. If you, for instance, are on a diet, you avoid bakeries; you avoid Marie Callender. If you have a tendency to be a gossip, you might avoid those other people who have a tendency to be a gossip; you avoid circumstances in which you might find yourself prone to gossiping along with the others. Possibly you've had drugs in your background; you avoid the people who are still involved in the drug culture. You avoid the source of temptation. And there are times when that is indeed a very wise thing to do.

Many Christians insulate themselves. They set up a series or a list of rules for themselves, by which they rigidly adhere, in the attempt to rid themselves of temptation; in the hope that they will not yield to that temptation. And there are times, as I said, when that is indeed effective. But I don't think it's the answer. Insulating ourselves from life and from potential temptation is not the answer most of the time. To use an analogy that I find helpful, reminded you- some years ago of a submarine called the thresher that went too deep in the ocean and burst into fragments,
millions of fragments, because it could not withstand the enormous pressure of the ocean. In
spite of the fact that that submarine was so tremendously encased in steel and protective metals,
it could not withstand the pressure that came from the outside and it burst.

Scientists have devised a method by which they can now get to the very bottom of the ocean and
withstand that pressure in a little steel ball. One scientist gets inside, and there's a little window.
He looks out that window and slowly he is lowered to the floor of the basement- of the floor of
the ocean. And he peers through that little window and he watches the life around him, if indeed
there is any life. And when that first expedition went to the bottom of the ocean, they wondered
if they would find anything alive. How on earth could anything survive the pressure that exist at
the bottom of the ocean? And yet, to the amazement of that scientist, as he peered out of the little
window, the most beautiful exotic delicate little fish swimming around, eyeing him with
tremendous curiosity. Not one of those fish were wearing little suits of armor. None of them
wearing little helmets to protect them from the tremendous pressure found at the bottom of the
ocean.

They had thin skin, as exotic as any fish swimming at the surface. Now you see that little fish or
those many fish have a built in resistance to pressure. That built in resistance to pressure comes
from within their own bodies. And it is made to withstand the pressure from the outside of their
bodies. I fear that at times, as believers, we are somewhat like the scientist in the steel encased
ball. And we peer out through the window at life, insulated, carefully protecting ourselves from
temptation. And yet, we are not a part of life at all.
I think God means for us to be more like the fish than like the scientist. I think God means for us to experience this freedom of the fish than the insulation of the scientist. He means for us to experience inside the resistance to pressure. Now how is that done? I believe the answer is found in Romans. In Romans we have a marvelous verse that talks about the renewing of minds. It says "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Many of us are careful about temptation by being careful about the people with whom we associate. We deal with safe people. We go to safe parties. We read safe books. We go to safe movies. We are insulated because our minds have not been adequately renewed, and it is possible to not be conformed to this world. It is possible to be so transformed that you need not be so insulated from what is going on around you.

The key to that is the renewing of the mind. To renew means to start over, to start afresh, to begin again. To be conformed to this world of course is to do what the world does. We don't want to do that. We can resist that through the renewing, the beginning again, with our minds. Of course it is the Spirit of God that produces within us the strength to renew the mind. But practically speaking, there is an amazing progress that you can experience as you use your mind related to temptation.

I'd like to give you three suggestions that are helpful to me. Excuse me (cough). The first one is: with my mind, I replace destructive thoughts with constructive thoughts. I replace thoughts of temptation. Now let's assume you are struggling with some specific temptation and it's getting to you. With your mind, put other thoughts in your head. Pray for someone else, possibly. Someone else whose needs you are aware of, that are enormous. Get your mind off yourself and maybe on
someone else. Or, just to get your mind off the temptation itself and praise God; praise Him for who He is; what He is doing in your life; what He is going to continue to do. Or you don't even have to be spiritual about it. There are times that with your mind you can think "I'm going to read a good book. I'm going to call a friend. I'm going to start a project." Get busy. Divert your mind. With your mind, replace thoughts that are tempting to you and about to get the best of you.

Secondly, with my mind, I think through the consequences of yielding to that temptation. With my mind, I think it through. Now if I'm on a diet and I'm looking at a piece of Marie Callender cream cheese pie, and I look at that pie and I think "Oh that would be so good." And I am caught up with how gratifying it would be to eat that piece of pie and if I stop there with that temptation and do not consider the consequences, I will probably yield to it. But with my mind, I will go beyond the satisfaction that will be momentary of yielding to that temptation, and consider the pounds that I will have added that will be evident the next day.

Now more seriously and more practically, you all, I know, struggle with sexual temptations that are enormous and overwhelming. The desire to express yourself in this manner is normal and natural and you know that. But now is not the time. The temptation to express yourself, the temptation to realize the fulfillment and the pleasure and the joy is overwhelming. Think through the consequences with your mind. Walk it out all the way until you realize the consequences in your life and the life of the partner, your career, your position with Christ, though He would forgive that and He would use your life, your life would not be ruined, it would not come to an end, your ministry would not be ineffective but you would be scarred and you would remember it. God doesn't; "as far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from
us and He remembers them no more." But you do. The consequences are great. Is it worth it? Think it through with your mind.

And lastly, and this works the best for me, with my mind, when I am tempted, I focus on the person of Christ and His love for me; that melts me every time. When I consider the fact that God cares for me so much that even the hairs of my head are numbered; that in the womb, as we learn in Psalm 139, I was formed very carefully, specifically, to the pattern that God had ordained. I am overwhelmed how important I am to Him. I am overwhelmed at the consideration that the God of the universe cared so much that it was worth the life of Jesus. It was worth the suffering, the humiliation, for me! That no matter what I do, I am not condemned because of what Jesus did for me on the cross. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That's love. And it is that love that sustains me often in temptation. I don't want to spoil that. When God loves me that much, when the person of Christ lives within my person, I want to return to Him the love He has given to me. I am so grateful. It means so much, the temptation isn't worth it. I don't want to pay that price.

How do you handle temptation? By the renewing of your mind. You are transformed through Jesus. You are renewed through the Spirit, and you consciously, with an effort, continue to keep your mind where Christ would like it to be. Now I want to say this and it almost negates everything else I've said. All of you, all of us, have some form of temptation over which we cannot seem to get victory or control. Ultimately, you will. Ultimately, I will.
There is a worse sin than yielding and that's hopelessness. When you think, "I have done it again. I am too embarrassed to even look God in the face. I yielded again. I'm not gonna make it. I'm not a decent Christian. I might as well hang it up." Now that's hopeless. That's sin. That's worse than whatever you did when you yielded. God is a God of forgiveness. He's a God of support and love. And when you find yourselves accused, and the little voice says "who do you think you are calling yourself a Christian? You haven't got what it takes. How many times have you prayed about that sin? How many times have you given into it? You're a phony. You're a sham. What do you think God's gonna do with you?" You know whose voice that is? That's not the voice of the Holy Spirit. That's Satan. Jesus said that Satan is to be recognized because he's an accuser of the brethren. When you are accused, made to feel little and worthless and small; that's Satan and you get victory over that. God does not accuse us. He saved us. He loves us. And He supports us.

How do you deal with temptation? With the renewing of your mind and the realization that that is a life-long project. None of us are perfect. But except positional in Christ, we are totally without sin. Let's pray.

Father, in Your word we are re-minded. Let this mind be in You, which was also in Christ Jesus. The realization that we can actually have the mind of Christ is mind boggling, and yet You have promised that the mind of Christ is ours. Father, may we focus on who You are and what You are making available to us. And may we, with our whole hearts and strengths and mind, commit ourselves to the renewal that will give us the opportunity to overcome temptation more consistently than perhaps we are now. Commit each one of these young lives in this room to You. Thanking You for the plan that You have for each life and for the victory that You have
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over whatever their temptations are. Make this day special, Father, because of our time with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.