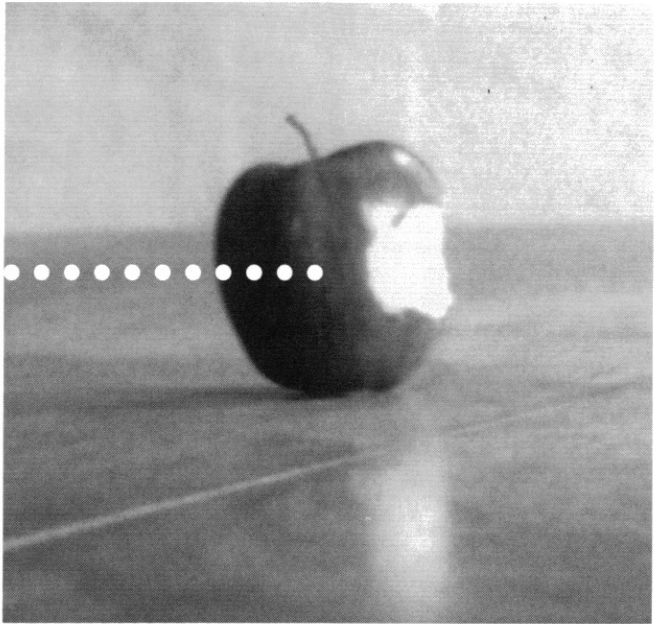


# Study Guide



## **Temptation**

Diogenes Allen



## TEMPTATION

### STUDY GUIDE

by Diogenes Allen  
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## Introduction

The first Christians were called followers of the Way. They sought to follow the path pioneered by Jesus into the kingdom of God. Many of us who have recognized Christ's call to follow him do not feel that we are making all that much progress in the Christian life. Our search for strength and encouragement amid the pressures of life is only partially successful; our desire for a more personal knowledge of God goes largely unsatisfied.

The same situation is faced by people who do not go to church regularly or at all, but who are increasingly convinced that there is more to life than they are able to find, that there is more to life than is included in the secular outlook. But there are some temptations which stand at the entrance to God's kingdom. Even to feel oneself being pulled in two directions is to have found the gateway. In the very conflict, we find our world more wonderful and more dangerous than we ever before realized.

Jesus showed us which temptations are fruitful, which battles are worth fighting because they lead into the kingdom in contrast to those battles which get us nowhere. Just before he began his public ministry, Jesus faced three temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). In facing these temptations, and being victorious over them, he pioneered a

path for us to follow. The temptations are:

- that we can live by material goods alone;
- that we can make ourselves fully secure and invulnerable from all harm;
- that we may find fulfillment in social prestige and looking good in the eyes of others.

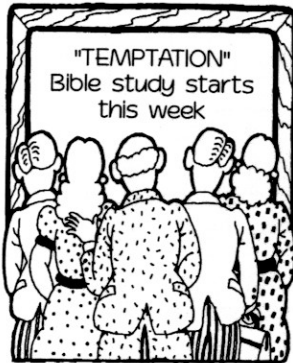
All of us encounter these temptations everyday whether we are churchgoers or not. If we succumb to them, we continue to wander in life. But if we can face up to them, and not be overwhelmed by them, then we are on the path Jesus trod, and we begin the Christian pilgrimage or journey.

In this video and in the opening chapters of this book we examine each one of these three temptations. We see why they are temptations, and how they keep us from a rich, full life. We learn what it is that made them temptations for Jesus, and why we must face them ourselves. We also show how easily we overlook them, not realizing their importance, and how we may recognize and overcome them in our everyday life.

In the book, *Temptation*, we examine what we are to do once we have entered the gateway of the spiritual world. The steps along the way, from the beginning to the final goal of the Christian life are described, showing what it is to follow Jesus in everyday life. Finally, the way Christ's life led to his crucifixion, how we are to be witnesses to his death as a victory over evil, and how we may believe in his resurrection from the dead are all described.

In concrete, biblical terms, the entire Christian life for both beginners and mature Christians is described. What it means to follow Christ today is presented in a practical and intelligent way.

*Diogenes Allen*



## How to Use This Video for Small Group Study

### About this Video

This video is based on Dr. Diogenes Allen's book, *Temptation*, and while it is designed for use by small groups in five sixty-minute sessions, it can be modified for use in other study situations. Video segments run from 11 to 30 minutes each, and have been edited as follows:

- Part 1 is a condensed version of Dr. Allen's initial presentation and can be used with Study Guide questions from Parts 2-5 for a single two-hour study.
- Parts 2-4 review specific sections of Dr. Allen's presentation, but with greater detail and includes questions and discussion with Dr. Allen's on-camera study group.
- Part 5 captures the final discussion between Dr. Allen and his study group, and is optional for use with Parts 1-4, or just with Part 1.

### Before the Sessions Meet

**Leader preparation:** As facilitator of the group, it's important to remember that you don't need to be the "expert," but you will want to be well prepared by doing the following:

- Before the first session, read through the entire Study Guide. This won't take long, and it will give you a sense of how the study sessions are put together. Then focus on the appropriate section prior to each session.
- If possible, read Dr. Allen's book, *Temptation*, focusing particularly on the first three chapters.
- Before each session, view the video segment you will be showing so that you know in advance what your group will be seeing. Jot down any impressions or questions of your own that come to mind.
- Keep in mind that watching video is a passive activity, and that it is through the discussion that the material will be absorbed and remembered. Be prepared to move quickly into the discussion once the video is over.



**Equipment setup:** Well before the meeting, check to make sure the television and VCR are set up and working.

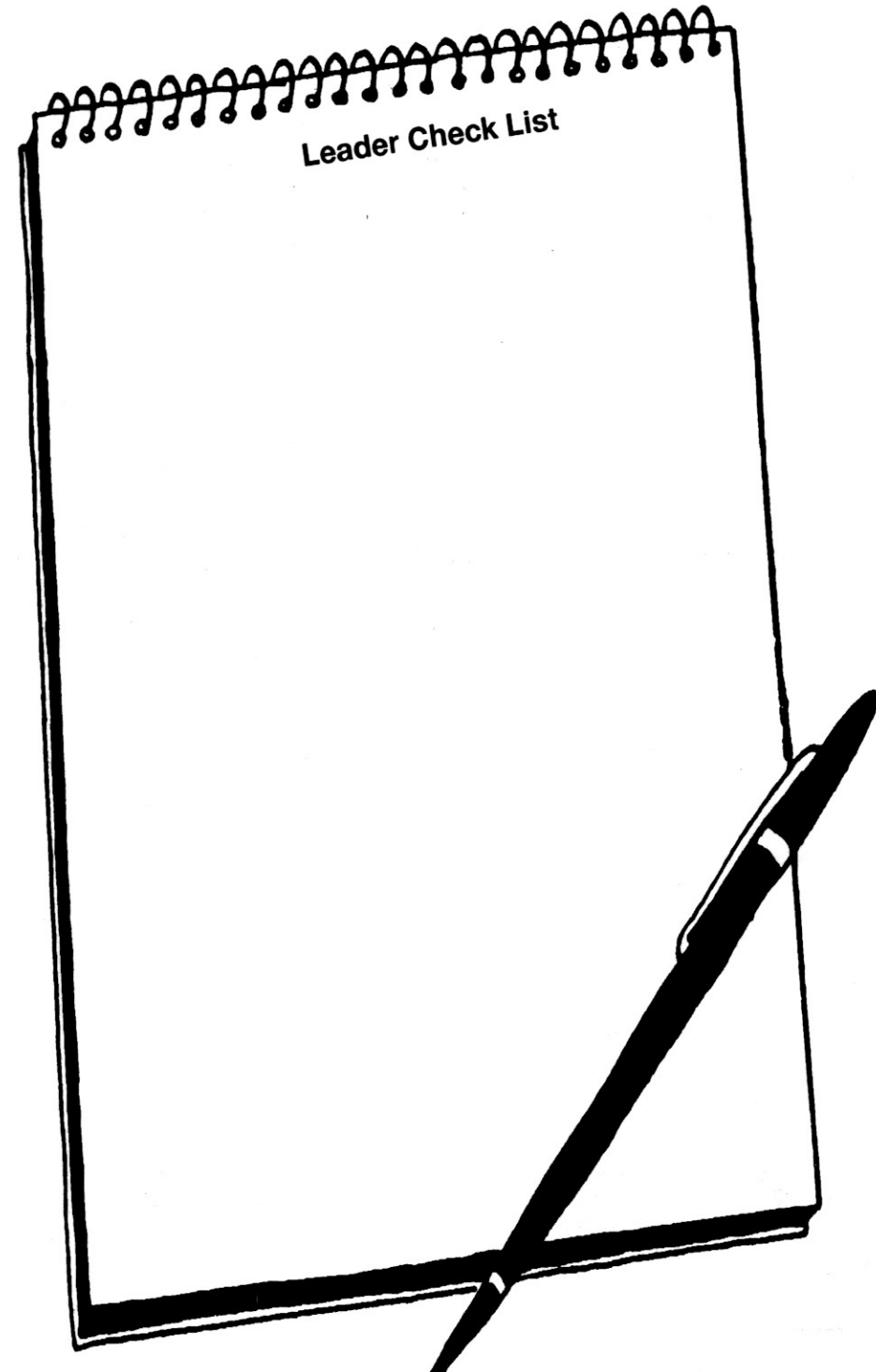
- You will need a nineteen-inch screen for up to six people to view comfortably, and a twenty-five inch screen for up to twelve people. A larger group will need a larger screen or more than one monitor hooked up to the VCR.

Just before the group gathers, make sure the TV and VCR are turned on and the tape cued to the right spot so that the tape can be rolled with just a flick of a button. You may want to ask a group member to be responsible for playing the tape, so that you can concentrate on leading the discussion.

**Room setup:** While a circle is the best way to seat a group for discussion, it may not be best for viewing the video, depending upon the size of the group.

Consider some kind of flexible seating for the group that will allow a good view of the video and circle seating for the discussion that follows.

If the group is larger than twelve, consider breaking into smaller groups of four to eight members, to allow everyone an opportunity to participate.



## “The Path to Heaven is Paved with Good Temptations”



*Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11*

Most of us think that temptations are negative things that we are supposed to avoid or run away from. But there are some temptations that are not only valuable, but actually the gateway into the Kingdom of God. Those temptations are the three that Jesus encountered in the wilderness, as described in Matthew 4:1-11. If we would follow him, we too, must wrestle and come to terms with the temptations of **material goods**, **security**, and **prestige**.

In this session, we start with an overview of the topic. The purpose is to help the group get acquainted: with each other, and with what may be a new perspective on temptation.



### Warm up *10 minutes*

Take a moment to introduce yourself, and then have the group respond to this question:

- How would you define “temptation?”



### Watch the Video *25 minutes*

You’re about to see Dr. Diogenes Allen speak in a new way about temptation. As you watch, consider this:

- How do common definitions of temptation differ from Dr. Allen’s perspective?



## Notes



### Discuss *25 minutes*

1. How does the common definition of temptation differ from Dr. Allen’s view?
2. Has Dr. Allen’s perspective changed your view? How?
3. Dr. Allen described an attorney who seemed to “have it all,” yet ended his life in a jump from the Golden Gate Bridge. What was your reaction to this man’s decision?
4. Dr. Allen says that one reason so many of Jesus’ teachings don’t connect with people is that they don’t know how to “be still,” as in Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.” Why do you think we have such a hard time “being still?”

## 1st Temptation: Material Goods

Scripture: *Matthew 4:1-11*



**Y**ou may have seen the bumper sticker that says, “Christ is the answer.” Many people interpret this to mean that belief in Christ puts an end to all our struggles. Dr. Allen suggests that to the contrary, Christ directs us to where we need to be struggling. And we can discover what we ought to be struggling with by looking at what Christ struggled with.

In this session, we look more closely at the temptation of material goods. The purpose is to show how the tension between genuine need and the desire for something more can bring us closer to the Kingdom of God.



### Warm up

15 minutes

Have a member of the group read Matthew 4:1-4 and then ask the group to respond to this question:

- What kinds of things or material goods “hook” you? Why?



### Watch the Video

11 minutes

In this video excerpt, Dr. Diogenes Allen looks in greater detail at the temptation of material goods. As you watch, consider this:

- How do material goods get in the way of your relationship with God?



## Notes



### Discuss

35 minutes

1. Are not material goods, good? Why then are they a temptation?
2. Do you think it's wrong in God's eyes to have nice material possessions while others have less? Why or why not?
3. How many possessions should we have?
4. Remember a time when you thought, “If I only had\_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank. Do you still feel it would fulfill your life? Why or why not?
5. How do we respond to our children's desires to possess those things that other families and children have?

## 2nd and 3rd Temptations: Security and Prestige

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11



One of Jesus' great challenges was convincing other people who he was. When Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, do this or that," he implied that such acts are what the Son of God would do. Jesus could have chosen to prove himself in this way, but to have done so, he could not have blazed a trail for us to follow to God, since he would not have started from where we are. Instead, Jesus chose to be vulnerable to hunger, bodily harm and rejection. He chose to trust in God's care, in order to open the kingdom for us to enter.

In this session, we look more closely at the temptations of security and prestige. The purpose is to help us understand that resisting temptation means renouncing what is merely good in order to receive from God what is best.



### Warm up *10 minutes*

Have a member of the group read Matthew 4:5-11 and then have the group respond to this question:

- Under what circumstances is it the hardest for you to trust God?



### Watch the Video *18 minutes*

In this video excerpt, Dr. Diogenes Allen looks in greater detail at the temptations of security and prestige. As you watch, consider this:

- If the things that tempt us are good things, why is it important to resist temptation?"



## Notes



### Discuss *30 minutes*

1. Are we to ask God to protect us from harm?
2. How are we to prepare ourselves for adversity?
3. How do you think security tempts us to evil? How does prestige tempt us to evil?
4. If people are equal in the sight of God, how does this affect the way we look at ourselves? How we treat others?
5. How can we respond to a culture that determines our value based on wealth, prestige and social standing?



## Responding to Temptation

*Scripture: Matthew 7:14*



**E**very temptation is an experience of being pulled in two directions. But according to Dr. Allen, the fact that we do experience this tension is actually a good sign. It signals God's presence even as it provides the entrance to the Christian life. Our hunger for more than material goods; our growing ability to face human suffering and learn from it; our striving to be more fair and our awareness of the need for forgiveness, all move us toward a different world and a new reality. The person we are to become starts to emerge, but we must receive it and become it over a period of time. When we have endured these temptations, we are then able to be taught by Christ, to receive the truths he has to offer us, which is finally himself.



### Warm up *15 minutes*

Have a member of the group read Matthew 7:14 and then have the group respond to this question:

- What do you do when you are faced with temptation? Does it help?



### Watch the Video *21 minutes*

In this video excerpt, Dr. Allen looks in greater detail at how temptations are the gateway to spiritual growth. As you watch, consider this:

- Is the "good" worth it, even if I get hurt?

## Notes



### Discuss *25 minutes*

1. Does the Christian life as a spiral staircase describe your experience of life? How?
2. How does our culture make temptations more difficult to deal with?
3. How is Christ's death good news?

## Reflection by the Group



**H**ave you noticed how much trouble writers of fiction have when they try to imagine “heaven?” Or how Biblical writers have to resort to metaphors when they describe the kingdom of God, or the life that is to come? What is to come and what we are to be are only partially known in the changes taking place in us as we make our pilgrimage. But all things come to those who wait, and we are to take one step at a time: faithfully to resist evil, to love that which is good, and to grow in our love for the one who came and the one who sent him. God will see to it that we arrive at the place where we are supposed to be. We will get there even if we waver in our conviction about a goal that is so distant our minds and hearts cannot hold on to it all the time.



### Warm up *15 minutes*

Have a member of the group read Romans 7:15 and then have the group respond to this question:

- What is your reaction to Paul’s admission to his inability to totally control his actions? Can you identify?



### Watch the Video *30 minutes*

In this final portion of the video, Dr. Allen briefly reviews the three temptations, and his study group shares questions and issues that have been raised for them by during the study. As you watch, consider this:

- What issues or questions have been raised for you during this study?



## Notes



### Discuss *15 minutes*

1. How has this study changed your perspective on temptations?
2. What issues or questions have been raised for you during this study?
3. Has the study changed the way you will deal with future temptations? If so, how?