

As we continue our journey through Eric Elnes, Gifts of the Dark Wood, we find ourselves with the gift of temptation. Elnes states, that typically it's not the "bad" temptations that we struggle with, it's the "good" ones. Let me expand on that. **We don't struggle with what our society calls 'good versus evil'**. We don't go through our day tempted to commit felonies or crimes, we aren't physically harming ourselves or those around us. Those literal bad choices aren't typically where our struggles lie. **Our struggles, our temptations lie within our good choices.**

Examples Our daily lives are filled with choices and decisions to be made. So many seem ordinary and insignificant. Work has to be done, but someone just stopped by the office to chat. Do I keep working to get it done? Or do I stop to chat? I'm at home folding towels, when one of my kids runs into the room and asks me to come look at what they just made. Do I keep folding the towels? Or do I take a break to see what my child has made?

None of those choices are "bad" choices. Often our temptations don't lie in the 'bad verses good' choices. It's not bad to do your work. It's not bad to connect with someone. It's not bad to fold towels. It's not bad to engage with your kids. The daily choices we're tempted with aren't often bad. We're so consumed with getting things done and meeting goals, that we don't allow the Spirit to work through us.

Example For me, my occupation is pastor. The workload each day varies. It looks different from one day to the next. And it could be that I'm doing good work, good things, but if I'm not listening to those small reminders in my head, I could be passing up life-giving ministry opportunities. While it is a good thing for me to sit down and write out the sermon for Sunday, when I do it, if I keep thinking about someone and wondering how they're doing. Maybe I should stop writing and call them.

Temptation is sometimes disgusted as our everyday routine. We think the temptation is feeling the need to call the person we're thinking about instead of buckling down and writing the sermon. But what if the temptation is actually to buckle down and write the sermon, ignoring the Spirit working through our life, providing us opportunity to have what Elnes refers to as a sweet spot moment in life. We often get so caught up in the "shoulds" and "have-tos" of the everyday, we fail to respond or at times, even acknowledge the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. Perhaps temptation is to go about the everyday and not allow ourselves to get distracted.

It is Lent. It's during this season of Lent that we remember Jesus retreating to the desert for 40 days. We imitate that spiritual discipline by trying to reconnect with God during this 40-day season leading us to powerful events of Holy Week. We encounter temptation throughout Lent, but we're often so self-focused we fail to fully reflect upon the temptations Jesus had during his time in the desert. Yes, we remember that even Jesus

got hungry while fasting, but how often do we think about the fact that there's nothing "bad" about turning stones into bread? That Jesus' temptation wasn't to do evil or to do good. Real struggles, real temptations have to have something good to them for us to be tempted by them.

Those good qualities of temptations can be learned behavior or social expectations. We might be running up against a deadline and honestly think the best thing to do is to stay focused and work. But what if God had a sweet moment, a life-giving moment waiting for you. Don't put so much stock in the "should dos" and societal expectations of life, that you discount real life going on around you. Sometimes the temptation isn't what we think it is. Sometimes the things we think are temptations, those interruptions in life, are really where the gifts of life are found.

During this Lenten season, as we intentionally try to be more like Jesus, may we see everything new again. May we see everything as a new creation. May we see the merging and reconciling splendor of all that is around us, earth and sky, animals and insects. Let us breath in a new respect and be more attuned to the Spirit working in our lives and less committed to our own distorted view of productivity. Let us see the beauty of the everyday. Remembering that those moments aren't the temptation, they're the gifts.