



“Strike Zone”

Matthew 5, James 1

Small Group Plan

Consider two stories from the Old Testament. Each has two players, a man and a woman.

In the first story (2 Samuel 11), a man sees a beautiful woman bathing, and after watching her for a while, he seduces her even though she is married. The woman becomes pregnant, and the man has her husband killed.

In the second story (Genesis 39), a woman sees a handsome man, and even though she is married she repeatedly tries to seduce him; but he refuses, even though it leads to his imprisonment.

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- Who are the characters in these two stories?
- What similar themes do you find?
- How do the two men differ?
- How do these stories illustrate the temptations we face today?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— UNDERSTAND THE SIN PROCESS —

James 1:12-15

¹² Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

- How do trials (v. 12) differ from temptations (v. 13)?
- What is God’s role in each?
- God does not tempt (v. 13), but how can temptation change our relationship with God?
- How does temptation progress into sin?

- Think through the temptation process:
 - ✓ **THE LOOK** – “he is dragged away”
 - ✓ **THE LUST** – “by his own evil desire”
 - ✓ **THE LURE** – “and enticed”
 - ✓ **THE THOUGHT** – “after desire has conceived”
 - ✓ **THE BIRTH** – “it gives birth to sin”
 - ✓ **THE GROWTH** – “when it is full-grown”
 - ✓ **THE DEATH** – “gives birth to death”
- Where is the turning point? What the most difficult part of the process? Explain.

— SHRINK THE SIN STRIKE ZONE —

Matthew 5:27-30

²⁷ You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

- Why does Jesus place the act of adultery and the thought of lust in the same category? How are they connected?
- What does Jesus mean by using such radical statements about our eyes and hands?
- If we are addicted to a sin, what kinds of habits or practices should we be willing to “gouge out” or “cut off?”

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- God does not tempt, so who does? Read John 8:44. What is Satan’s “native language?” What has always been Satan’s ultimate goal?
- How have you handled trials and temptations in your life?
- What are the most common trials of your friends and associates? What temptations do they face most often?
- How have your desires changed since you began to follow Jesus?
- Some have used the spiritual discipline of Fasting as a place to learn how to deny themselves. Discuss how denying yourself food could be a place to practice denying yourself other, more dangerous, hungers.
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. How has God provided you with “a way out?”
- Read Matthew 4:1-4. How can scripture be a weapon to resist temptation?
- Close by asking God for His lessons from trials and His protection from temptation.