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HEROES OF TEMPTATION

By Orval J. Nease

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PART 1 -- FOREWORD

Heroes of Temptation is the text of an oft-preached message delivered before young people's conventions and revivals in many parts of the nation. Neither an exhaustive nor a technical study of the subject of temptation has been attempted. It is rather a practical and inspirational approach intended for the encouragement of youth in particular and of new converts in general.

This simple message has been used by the Holy Spirit to help many. Repeatedly we have been requested to place it in printed form. In seeking to comply we offer the message in much the same form as it has been preached. [I did some editing near the end of the book, but endeavored to retain all of the thought put forth by the author. -- DVM]

We humbly dedicate these utterances to embattled souls everywhere. If through its publication some are made stronger and wiser in overcoming, we shall have been amply repaid.

Orval J. Nease

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PART 2 -- SCRIPTURE AND INTRODUCTION

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy)" (Hebrews 11:32-38).

Man is central in God's plan for the universe; not mountains with their peaks pointing like gilded cathedral spires to the heavens, nor carpeted valleys bound down by silver streams that thread their way to the seas. These constitute but the background and surroundings in which the great and crowning scheme of God is to be achieved. God's plan finds its meaning and its fulfillment in man. God proposes Christlike character in men and women redeemed through infinite love.

It is a commentary on what God has made us that -- while God is infinite, absolute, and divine and we are but human, limited, and finite -- God has so capacitated us that it takes what God is to satisfy what we are. God's interest is the building of Godlike character in men made in the image of God and redeemed by the love of God, men who shall fellowship God in communion and service both here and hereafter.

There is something too valuable in human personality to be dissipated at the conclusion of a brief life span. Man, with such infinite designs laid upon him, will span the chasm of death to set foot upon the soils of the eternal. The eternal purposes of Deity are wrapped up in him. Why then do men grovel with mere time values when made in the image of God? It is a part of the divine economy for them to associate with God.

Thus, my friend, in approaching the subject of temptation, we must understand what God's purpose is in the world.

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PART 3 -- TEMPTATION IS COMMON TO SAINTS

Why should I be tempted? Why should any Christian be tempted? Why does not God, if He is good, all-wise and all-powerful -- why doesn't He kill the devil? One answer would be, it would leave too many orphans in the universe. This is one answer, but it is not the answer.

The age-long and ever-recurring problem of evil still harasses the thought-life of men. God has done a potentially hazardous thing in creating men with the power of choice. Whenever He wills that a person be brought into being with the power of choice in his grasp, God sets a self-imposed limitation upon His own infiniteness. Not even God will step in to violate the gift of choice thus entrusted. A man can go to hell if he wills, and no power in earth or in heaven will prevent it. God steps aside, respecting man's decision. On the other hand, thank God, a man can go to heaven if he will, and there is no power in earth or hell that can thwart him. The reins of destiny are in the grasp of finite creatures.

God is not making machines. It is no credit to be good if one cannot be evil. When a man may be bad, but chooses to be good, that is creditable. When one chooses to be bad when he might have been good, that is tragic.

Character is not the magic creation of a moment of time at an altar of prayer. Hearts are pardoned and cleansed in a moment, but character must be formulated with the years. Each individual choice and resulting experience makes its contribution bit by bit to the strength or weakness of character. So, whether we like it or not, it must be said that this is the best possible kind of world that God could permit and yet do the piece of work that He is determined upon -- Godlike character.

Holiness people have been accused of saying that if a man were sanctified he could not be tempted and therefore could not fall. There is only one trouble about such statement -- it simply is not true! Man is on probation, and probation signifies a time of testing. If there is testing, there must be the possibility of failure under test.

I have listened since childhood to many of the principal holiness preachers of the past and present generation of practically every evangelical denomination in America. I have yet to hear the first minister of authority say that a man could not be tempted or could not fall because he had experienced the blessing of holiness. The nearest statement of this kind I have ever known was in connection with an incident which occurred when I was a lad living in Lansing, Michigan. Mother took my brother and me to a little holiness mission on Ottawa Street. Father was an evangelist and spent long weeks and months away from home. The remuneration from his evangelistic endeavors was often not too lucrative, and many times at the close of a campaign he had little more to send home than a bundle of soiled laundry. This added to Mother's burden of loneliness, and the problems of maintaining the well-being of the household.

The week to which we refer had been a week of that kind. Mother had been unusually pressed. The demands of finance, the problems of discipline, and the pressure of her responsibility had so surrounded and harassed her soul that it had been a hand-to-hand battle with the forces of hell from Monday through Saturday. But Mother knew God and came through with a triumph that God knows how to give to faithful warriors. Sunday afternoon found Mother with her lads seated in the humble mission. The regular pastor being absent from the city, a man of the audience was asked to take charge for the day. When it came time for testimonies, Mother rose to her feet and began pouring out her heart in a rehearsing of the tides of conflict that had waged on the battlefield of her heart during the week just passed. She told how she had been sorely tempted, but how in the midst of her trials God had been her Companion and how her soul had triumphed through an unwavering faith in the God of her salvation. She testified with ringing note that the blessing held and that the Holy Ghost possessed her.

No sooner had she said this than the leader of the meeting sprang to his feet and, pointing his finger directly at her, said: "Sister Nease, sit down! Sit down; you do not have the blessing! Do not dare to stand there and with the same breath in which you have acknowledged that you have been tempted testify to being sanctified. The very fact that you confess you have been tempted indicates there is something within that can be tempted. Sister Nease, you do not have the blessing. Sit down!"

My mother sat down! She sat down because she had the blessing! There was something in me that did not sit down. I did not have the blessing! I rolled my fist into a fighting pose and slid off the edge of my seat. Mother said, "Son, what are you going to do?" I said, "Mother, so help me, I am going up there and make that man take back what he said. I will prove to him you do have the blessing." Mother laid a restraining hand upon my shoulder and, with an understanding smile, pushed me back into my place. I was wrong -- but so was the man on the platform! The difference between us was this: I was wrong in my heart, but he was wrong in his head. No, it does not follow that because one is tempted he does not have the blessing.

Paul and Peter are in agreement regarding this. Peter says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (I Peter 4:12). Paul voices the same opinion when he says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (I Cor. 10:13). No, my friend, Christians are never beyond testing. Temptation is the common experience of the most saintly.

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PART 4 -- TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN

Jesus was tempted, the Scriptures tell us. Yet no one would lay sin at His door. It may be suggested that Jesus could not have yielded; but if there is no possibility of yielding, there can be no genuine temptation. If Jesus could not have yielded and thus fallen, then Jesus was party to a farce; and if the temptation in the wilderness was a farce, then Jesus is not the Saviour that we have thought Him to be. But, thank God, Christ is the Saviour we need! He was tempted; He could

have fallen. But the glorious reality is that, being tempted, He did not fall and because of His victory "he is able to succour them that are tempted."

The enemy approaches at the place of natural appetite, capacity, and instinct. It is no sin to be hungry. God put within us the call for food, that physical life might be sustained. One may, however, pervert that normal appetite for food so that the appetite for food overshadows every other normal function of life. The whole man serves the appetite. He becomes a gormandizer, a glutton, with an inordinate demand for food. The appetite as originally given was of God and intended to serve the physical well-being of the individual. Perverted, it becomes a dominating master which enslaves every other physical capacity.

Acquisitiveness is not necessarily covetousness -- it is the God-given urge to acquire the goods of life. Religion does not make a man shiftless. But when one bows down to this desire to acquire, serving gold and real estate or stocks and bonds, or other of the goods of this physical universe, he perverts the God-bestowed capacity. The acquisitive instinct becomes the channel of expression for the carnal twist in human kind. Greed masters the man and avarice dictates the soul!

The desire to look well is but the recognition of the dignity of man -- man made in the likeness of God. To profess to be a Christian is no alibi for slovenliness or unbecomingness in appearance. On the other hand, when one feeds this desire to look well and caters to the standards of a God-forgetting world and the demands of this dominant desire -- carnal pride rules.

It is no sin to resent injustice. One's sense of right is God-implanted. But in one's resentment of injustice, if one develops a spirit of retaliation that would destroy the one who has perpetrated the injustice, then the sense of justice itself becomes unjust and anger and hatred rule the citadel of the soul.

Someone has said that question-asking is the beginning of philosophy. Inquisitiveness is the call of the soul for certainty and truth. If, however, in our desire for reality we permit our questioning to develop cynicism, and cynicism crystallizes into doubt, and doubt casts a cloud which intervenes between the soul and God, that is tragedy. God is the very reality and basis of certainty which the soul seeks. God planted the call for reality within the soul. Reality will stand the test of valid investigation. It must be remembered, however, that the standards of men are not the final basis for determining the truth of the Bible nor the realities of the gospel. Rather, the Bible and the gospel are the standards by which men and their opinions are to be judged. Men fall into doubt and error when they project human reason and finite logic as the final test of eternal verity. He who acknowledges human reason as the final court of appeal will awaken to find he has ignored the telescope of faith, which brings worlds of reality to the soul otherwise unperceived by human understanding. When doubt rules, the God-imparted capacity has become possessed by the fallen bent of a depraved nature.

God has taken humanity into partnership with Him in creation. He has put within the physical being those powers we call procreation. These powers in themselves are not sinful. Parents, preachers, and teachers have too long been silent on these matters and permitted young people with awakening desires and abilities, which they did not understand, to ascertain from unholy sources unclean meanings for the sacred endowments divinely bestowed. These powers in

themselves are not sinful; but when one bows the entire life to serve these appeals and appetites until the whole being is brought under their mastery, then is the God-given function perverted and sin casts its shadow over the horizon of the soul.

When God sanctifies the soul, He does not remove these powers and instincts, but rather cleanses the perverseness and gives control over that which is normal. The illegitimate is removed and the legitimate is controlled. It is toward these God-given powers and instincts that Satan points his temptation and brings his unholy pressures.

When, then, does temptation become sin? The illustration often used in this connection is no doubt repeatedly employed because it contains so much that is true. We may not keep the birds from flying over our heads, for air is free and boundless. But we can keep those birds from finding lodgment and building their nests in our hair. The space given to our hair is limited; but it is our own and may be controlled. This is the inference of the simple parallel. Thoughts of evil fly through our minds, brought to us by suggestions from a thousand sources. We cannot prevent them from coming. These are not sin. On the other hand, when we entertain these thoughts and permit them to find lodgment in our desire, and when the will co-operates with that desire, then that thought becomes the property of the possessor. It is his thought and it is no longer thought of evil. It is evil thought; it possesses the nature -- it becomes sin. When does temptation become sin? When and only when the will consents.

One author has said, "It is often difficult to ascertain at what point the mere temptation terminates and sin begins. In fact, temptation is often so subtle that it partly, and in a few cases entirely, obscures the clearer evidences of deliverance from sin, especially at first.

"We may distinguish between temptation and sin. When evil thoughts or objects are presented to us, if we instantly draw back, shrink from, and take no delight in them, then they are temptations. But if we muse over, take any pleasure in, or are led astray by them, then we sin.

It is not the ocean water outside of the boat that sinks the vessel, though the ocean, compared to the little vessel that floats upon its crest, towers in majesty over it. It is that small part of the mighty ocean that gets into the boat that sends it to the bottom. So long as the will keeps the door of the soul closed, though the temptation may beat wildly upon the door from without, it is not sin. But so soon as the will opens the door and permits temptation to take possession of the garrison within, it is sin. The desire may never find expression in act, but it is sin nevertheless -- sin in possession of the heart.

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PART 5 -- TEMPTATION MAY BE OVERCOME

God has never promised that we would not have trial and heartache, pressure and disappointment, temptation and testing. He has rather promised that in the midst of temptation He would prove His grace sufficient and in every temptation "make a way to escape." It is evident that the heroes of faith, whose records are written in Hebrews eleven, overcame. We too may overcome!

We may overcome by using the same weapons that Jesus used in His wilderness triumph. He unsheathed the sword of truth and, wielding it with unerring aim, cried to the tempter, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." At the next assault Christ met him with, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Satan was finally repulsed with, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

As Christian warriors, we should familiarize ourselves with the use of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." We should know God's Word! In it is to be found the pointed "Thus saith the Lord" that makes hell stand back. These are promises of divine utterance that bring strength and courage to the tempted soul.

The great hymns of the Church were born in the hours of soul pressure and inspired during the heat of battle. Thank God for the old hymns that have given strength and courage to millions of embattled pilgrims. The devil cannot withstand the thrusts of the "sword of the Spirit."

Again temptation may be overcome "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11). "The word of their testimony" is dependent upon the efficacy of "the blood of the Lamb." He who testifies gives evidence that the miracle-power of redemption has been made effective in his life. There are times when the Christian warrior must stand alone in the heat of the battle, though for the moment deserted by his comrades. He must lift his head and voice and declare before three worlds his faith in and his fidelity to Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, whose efficacious atonement cleanses from all sin.

The Christian cannot make his testimonies of loyalty to Jesus Christ dependent merely upon his religious feelings. Religion basically is not indicated nor measured by one's feelings. If one has the religion of Jesus Christ at all, he is as much a Christian when he does not feel good as when he does feel good. It is a matter of faith derived from the assurance of right relation to Jesus Christ. The man who permits his utterances of love concerning his wife to be exhausted by their first public avowals when they stand before the representatives of church and state will find that affection cooled by the demands of passing experiences. He who renews his vows of love to the object of his affection will find not only the heart of the one beloved made glad, but his own soul enriched, and his own allegiance strengthened by the fact of those repeated expressions.

It brings satisfaction to the heart of Deity when faithful followers, though under the cloud of pressure and isolation which obscures for the moment the face of their Beloved, cry out of the spontaneity of their love and loyalty as Job of old, "Though Thou slayest me, yet will I trust Thee." What satisfaction must have accrued to the heart of God as Paul and Silas sang at the midnight hour in the chains of the inner prison at Philippi! Such attestations of love and reaffirmations of faith put the tempter to consternation.

James records the third method of overcoming temptation. He declares (4:7), "Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." First, the life must be yielded to divine Providence -- a spirit that refuses to chafe under circumstances which cannot at the moment be explained. Second, not only must we be submissive to God, but there must be a

positive assertion of the will in definite refusal to the suggestions of sin. In the last analysis, there must be an exercise of the will which marshals every power of personality to rise in holy wrath against the suggestions and advances of the evil one.

I remember reading that Martin Luther upon one occasion, when seated in his cell alone as a monk, sensed the presence of the enemy so near that he seized the inkhorn at his side and, with all the moral strength at his command as well as the physical exertion necessary, threw the inkhorn at the devil. We are told that the devil "skedaddled." This word "skedaddle," if you have not learned, someone has playfully said, is the "Greek" word for getting away in a hurry.

As a boy I heard Father tell of the sainted Martin Wells Knapp, who bowed in his home wrestling with the problems that brought their pressure to bear upon his soul. The presence of the tempter became so real that, in his strength of desire to repulse him, he picked up a stick of stovewood and let go at the representative of hell with all the powers of his ransomed being. The devil took the "Greek exit." [Skedaddled!]

The late George B. Kulp often related how the enemy one time surrounded him with the plausible suggestion that he sidestep the ministry for a period, that he might take advantage of a lucrative investment which would enable him to live independently of the charity of his parishioners. Certainly he did not intend to yield, but it did look feasible. He found himself figuring the probable gains when he ought to have been praying. The cloud of indecision became so dense that it intervened between himself and his Lord in his prayer life and in his ministry to his people. Indecision is always dangerous. The seriousness of the struggle seized him and, going into his bed chamber alone, he closed the door, pulled the shades, and addressed the tempter somewhat in this fashion: "Mr. Devil, regarding that matter we have had under consideration, I now have my answer for you. My answer is, No, Mr. Devil, NO!" Any who knew Rev. Kulp can all but hear the stamping foot and the penetrating voice as his soul crystallized its resistance against the suggestions of the enemy.

May I ask you, was it the inkhorn from the hand of Martin Luther; was it the stick of stovewood thrown by Martin Wells Knapp; was it the stamping foot and the penetrating voice of George B. Kulp that made the devil seek cover? No, my friend, these were but the physical accompaniments characteristic of the individuals who were giving expression. It was the will of these men forged into a mighty blow that repulsed the powers of darkness as an army is routed by superior forces. Personality crystallizing through the will must hurl itself against the suggestions of the arch-tempter. The will must say no! To those who thus employ the powers at their command in the repulsing of the tempter is the reinforcement of heaven guaranteed. These may be listed among the overcomers.

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PART 6 -- TEMPTATION MAKES HEROES

Temptation is the kind of "stuff" out of which God, plus our co-operation, makes Christian heroes. When I was a lad living in the country, the farm became a part of my very being. I wandered up and down the lanes, climbed the fences, and crossed the meadows. I knew where the

earliest spring flowers grew, where the birds built their nests and the woodchucks burrowed their holes. I knew where the crawfish and the bullfrogs could be found along the banks of the little stream that gladdened the meadow. The woods on the back of the farm were my special delight. I greeted every tree by name -- the beech, the maple, the elm, the oak, the hickory, and the pine. Often I talked to those trees, for we were on intimate terms, and they seemed to respond to me with a language I understood.

A few pine trees over in one corner were unusually well-groomed fellows. One day I remarked to them how beautiful they appeared. Every spray of needles was neatly placed. So symmetrical were they it seemed an architect must have drawn their blueprints, pointing their spired crests like minarets toward the heavens. "Pine trees, you are mighty fine looking fellows," said I. "No trees in the forest are so well-groomed as you." They replied with proud tosses of the head, "Yes, my boy, we are glad you noticed it. We have given a good deal of attention to appearance, and it has been said that we are the most beautiful trees in the woods. Yes, young man, it pays to look well."

Climbing through the barbed-wire fence, I entered the pasture, where just over the brow of the hill was an old oak tree standing alone. The ancient tree was gnarled and twisted and knotted and bent. I said: "Old oak tree, as compared with those fine-looking pines, you are not in their class at all. Do you claim to be a tree?" The shaggy oak looked back understandingly and seemed to say, "Yes, lad, I am a tree all right, but God made me an oak tree."

Time slipped by and one night a great wind arose. Brother and I occupied the room under the eaves. We pulled our heads down under the coverlet, trying to shut out the sound of the screeching wind and the rattling shutters as the storm broke over the little farm. It seemed but a short while until we awoke and Uncle Charlie was calling from the foot of the stairs, "Boys, there has been a bad storm. Come down and see the damage that has been done." We hurried into our clothes and, without waiting for breakfast, went out to examine what had taken place in the night.

I was not particularly interested in the fact that shingles had been torn from the woodshed nor that a limb was broken from the old Northern Spy apple tree. I wanted to know how my friends of the timbered community had fared. Drawing near the woods, I fancied I heard a requiem as subdued breezes acted as mourners for the passing of my friends of the forest. The pine trees lay prone upon the ground with their roots bare in the morning sun. I cried out in dismay, "What is the meaning of all this?" They replied: "It is a sad story. We gave more thought to externals than we did to rootage. The wind took us from an unexpected angle and, without protection, we soon lost our footing and now we are but a monument to the neglect of the deepening of our inner life." I all but dropped a tear as I bade farewell to the models of forest beauty now fallen.

My steps turned to visit my oak friend of the pasture lot. I reasoned that if the pine trees were blown over, having about them the enrichment and protection of the grove, then the lone sentinel of the pasture lot must have been blown out of the community. Coming over the brow of the hill, I heard what I imagined to be the gnashing of a giant's teeth and the spitting of his hands together. I soon came upon my oak, more rugged and grizzled than before. "Old fellow," I cried, "are you still here?" He replied: "Yes, son, I am still here. That wind last night merely loosened my roots, enabling me to put them about another large boulder. It will take a stronger wind today to

unseat me than it would have yesterday. Boy, step back, for I have just issued a challenge to the north wind to go home and get his big brothers and come back for a real battle. North winds are the kind of elements out of which I build oak tree fiber and sinew. It takes battle with the north wind to produce these."

It was my privilege to be entertained in the home of a Brother and Sister Wilson while holding a meeting in our First Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. Brother Wilson worked for the State Highway Department and had his office in the state capitol building -- a building that cost the state nearly fifteen million dollars. Ascertaining what time the guide could show us through this magnificent structure, I arrived at the state building early the next morning. The crowd had been so large that he had left to make his sight-seeing trip earlier than the hour appointed. I found one of the caretakers and, placing a coin in his hand, asked him if it would be possible for him to show me through the building. Looking first at the size of the coin and then at me, he said: "Yes sir, I will show you through this building. I was here before this building was ever constructed, and I have seen every stone put in place. Yes sir, I will take you places where even the guide doesn't ever go." We wandered down corridors, lobbies, chambers, and office rooms lined with marble from Italy, floored with granite from Vermont, canopied with polished stone from France until one's face was reflected from every side like a visitor in the hall of mirrors.

Finally my guide extracted a large key from a ring which hung at his belt and, placing it in the lock of a massive door, said, "Now, I will take you where the guide doesn't go." Into the chambers of the judge of the supreme court of the state of Nebraska we went, where the very appointments and architecture inspired awe. Great panels of polished black walnut covered the walls of these chambers. The burl and the grain in the wood were as perfect as though an artist had drawn them. The matched sections, carefully selected by skilled artisans, looked as though nature had grown according to pattern.

Rubbing my hand over the surface of a panel, I said to the janitor guide: "You have shown me marble from Italy, granite from Vermont, and polished stone from France. Pray tell me, where did this wonderful black walnut come from?" With eyes that spoke volumes he replied, "I will tell you, that is the glory of this place. This is black walnut from Nebraska. There is no black walnut in the world like that which grows on the windswept prairies of the grand old state of Nebraska." I said, "My friend, I did not know that black walnut grew in Nebraska. How does it develop this unusual burl and artistic twist in the grain?" He replied, "Friend, that is the wonderful part of this story. The scientists tell us that the secret of their beauty is found in the fact that these black walnut trees stand alone. The hot blasts of wind in the summer and the cold, bleak currents of the winter make the lone walnut bend and bow and creak and moan. It is the creaking and moaning that makes this burl and that produces the fiber that takes the polish. I tell you, there is nothing like it in the world. It takes wind-swept prairies to put burl in walnut."

It takes the gales of oppression, the disillusionments and reverses of disappointments, the persecutions and temptations of hell to develop sterling quality in the souls of men. Standing alone upon the wind-swept prairies of life, like lone sentinels, builds God's heroes.

It takes positive reaction to persecution and battle to produce Christian fiber in the soul. Temptations in a certain sense are often very profitable, though in themselves troublesome and grievous. Temptation resisted is the diet of faith's heroes.

"They were tempted," states our text. God's heroes win their right to be inscribed on heaven's honor roll of faith through fidelity and steadfastness under temptation. Some have thought that only those who were cast to lions, sawn asunder, and thrown to wild beasts could ever win a place on God's service flag. But "Heroes of Temptation" are as worthy of a place of honorable mention and reward in the program of Deity as those who have won their martyr's crown. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

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THE END