

Some of you may remember a commercial that came out in the 1970s for *Life* cereal. Two boys were trying to decide who would taste the new cereal first. Rather than tasting something that might be good for them, they decided to ask their younger brother, Mikey. “Let’s get Mikey to taste it. Here, try this new cereal. It’s supposed to be good for you.” Surprisingly, he liked the cereal—even though it was good for him—and the other boys began eating their breakfast cereal once he cleared the way.

In the opening chapters of Genesis we have a similar situation. We first hear a wonderful story of creation, how God created the heavens and the earth and a human to live in this new place. The human named all the animals, and yet the human wanted a partner, someone with whom to have a conversation, and then thousands of years later to watch a good movie and cry together at night. So God created another human.

Soon after the humans had been created, they heard a voice suggesting, “Try it; you’ll like it,” in

regard to the tasty fruit of the tree of knowledge. “Try just a taste of fruit,” the voice tempted the humans.

“But God told us not to eat of it. We can eat from lots of trees, but the one in the middle of the garden we’re supposed to leave alone.”

“Oh, come on. If you eat of the fruit you’ll know the difference between good and evil. It’ll be good for you. Try it...you’ll like it.”

“Well, that doesn’t sound so bad, and besides, the fruit does look tasty. Maybe just a little bite. Wouldn’t it be nice to have more knowledge?”

I wonder how many of us have ever been tempted to try something we’ve been told not to do?

- Tease your brother or sister even though it gets everyone at home upset.
- Avoid reporting cash income in order to not pay taxes.
- Walk out of the store with an item without paying for it.

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- Call in sick from work or school just to avoid having to go that day.

We hear the tempting words: “No one will know. It will be ok. Try it. You’ll like it.” But often we discover that those tempting things don’t turn out as well as we had imagined. The movie we snuck in to see wasn’t as good as we had imagined. The item we purchased that was too expensive for our budget turned about to be disappointing. “Try it, you’ll like it” turns out to be “We tried it; we did *not* like it.”

And then we have to pick up the pieces of our mistakes. Live with the consequences. Feel the sense of guilt.

We may even sense two thoughts of temptation about our role at church: First, “I don’t need to give an offering; someone else will take care of expenses.” But we know that’s not true, don’t we? We’re all in this together. As writer Maya Angelou reminds us, “When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.” As our stewardship campaign the next four weeks reminds us, each of

our gifts is important. But our value goes even beyond our resources, for your presence here this morning is a blessing to all those around you.

Second, we might be tempted to think: “I don’t need to show up on Sunday; no one will miss me.” We know that’s not true either, is it. Each one of us is important in the life of our church, no matter how much we can or cannot do. Your very presence here this morning makes our worship experience more meaningful. When God’s Spirit moves among us, our sense of energy is magnified by having you here.

There’s a deeper sense of joy when you are here. As writer Mark Twain once said, “To get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with.”

But I know, we all face those voices of temptation, asking us to cut ourselves off from God and one another; telling us we don’t make a difference. Even Jesus’ closest followers struggled to understand how they fit into the plan. For example, they wondered what Jesus meant when he

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prayed, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”

Jesus used the Greek word ἁμαρτίας (*hamartias*), which we translate as “sin.” It’s an old archery term that means “to miss the mark.” Have any of you ever tried to hit a target with a bow and arrow and missed the center bullseye? That’s called missing the mark.

I remember trying to hit the target at church camp several years ago. I followed the directions of the instructor. Held my arm the right angle. Pulled back the bow string. Let go of the arrow. It went flying toward the target—and went over it and into the woods. The next time the arrow went into the ground in front of the target. I missed the mark. That’s the meaning of *hamartias*. To sin. To not be perfect. We all do it, and that’s why Jesus reminded us of God’s forgiveness. But there’s a catch. It’s related to how we forgive others. “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” When others miss the mark, forgive them, for you and I have missed the mark and God has forgiven us.

I think that’s especially important as we begin our journey together with me as your pastor. You and I are beginning something new, and we’re likely to make some mistakes along the way. I may accidentally say something that someone misunderstands. I may suggest an idea you don’t like, and so we have to figure out how to hear one another. We may try something new together and it doesn’t work. I may forget your name after you have told me countless times. We’ll miss the mark from time to time, but that doesn’t mean we stop trying, just as this past year at church camp I decided to try the bow and arrow again. When I let go of the arrow, it flew straight and hit the target—for the first time! I was so excited. I had accomplished something new, and that’s what I know we will do here together. We will accomplish something new. We will keep trying. And when we mess up, we will forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

But sometimes we find it amazing and hard to believe that God forgives us and gives us a second

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chance, for we often have a hard time letting go of those mistakes we've made, as was the case with a little boy in the supermarket one day with his mother. He was having a particularly naughty day and his mother had forbidden him to touch anything else in the shop. While mum was going up an aisle she heard a huge crash, and turned around to see her son standing with a can in his hand beside an aisle full of cans. He'd decided to grab a can from the bottom of the display and had sent hundreds tumbling down.

Well mum's face went bright red, a mixture of embarrassment and anger. She stormed down the aisle, picked the boy up and placed him firmly in the child seat in the trolley. "Don't you dare move another inch young man!"

After a few minutes had gone by the boy plucked up some courage and said "Mummy, you said the other day that when God forgives our sins he buries them at the bottom of the deepest ocean didn't you?"

"Yes son," mum replied through clenched teeth.

"And you said that it didn't matter what we did, God would never drag those things up again didn't you?"

"Yes son."

"Well mummy, I've got a feeling that when we get home you're going to go fishing."<sup>1</sup>

Trust that God forgives your sins. Know that you can offer forgiveness to one another. Try it, you'll like it.

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<sup>1</sup> Source unknown, from <http://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/forgiveness/>