

Q 7.4 How does one overcome the temptation to consume products of animal cruelty?

In addition to living with conviction and taking practical steps to align your lifestyle with your convictions, it is also important to equip yourself with the right spiritual tools for overcoming temptation: Trust in God to help you overcome the temptation, forgive yourself when you fall short, flee from temptation, ask others to pray for you, and be motivated by love.

Living with Conviction

Once you are convinced that it is good to show kindness, goodness, and mercy to animals, then the next step is to live in accordance with this conviction by no longer needlessly consuming products of animal cruelty. It is easy for some people to align their actions with their convictions. For others it can be a challenge. It is nonetheless very important to align your actions with your convictions. According to James, it is sin to act contrary to your conviction about what you know is good: *“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them”* (James 4:17, NIV). The purpose of this study is to assist you in overcoming the temptation to act contrary to your conviction about showing kindness, goodness, and mercy to animals.

Practical Steps

There are practical steps you can take to align your lifestyle with your convictions. These will diminish the strength of the temptation. For instance, you can get creative and veganize your favorite foods by replacing animal products with plant-based substitutes. You can also try new things you hadn't tried before, looking up recipes and searching for restaurants with vegan options. You can also ask experienced vegans for assistance. To be used in conjunction with these practical steps, this study focuses on equipping you with the spiritual tools for overcoming the temptation to consume animal products.

Trust God for Strength

As with any of life's struggles and temptations, it is important first and foremost to rely not on your own abilities to overcome them but instead to trust in God to help you: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding"* (Proverbs 3:5, NIV). In his letter to the Romans, Paul recounts his own struggle with trying to live according to his own convictions: *"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it"* (Romans 7:19-20, NIV). Although we may struggle with temptation, God gives us power to overcome the temptation. For instance, when the thought enters your mind that it's impossible for you to overcome the temptation, do not believe that deceptive thought. Instead, pray to God for strength to overcome the temptation. Then you will prove that thought wrong because nothing is too hard for God: *"Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'"* (Luke 18:27, NIV). Keep trusting in God's power to help you overcome these

obstacles you face, and keep praying for God to make a life for you that is free of these old habits that you no longer desire to continue repeating.¹

Show Yourself Grace

In addition to trusting in God to help you, remember also to forgive yourself when you fall short. Be vigilant not to make a habit of falling short though.² If we fall short, we are told to repent each time and to forgive each other each time.³ That includes forgiving yourself, *“And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors”* (Matthew 6:12, NKJV). We all fall short of perfection,⁴ but we have a perfect God strengthening us to stand strong in the face of temptation. God knows we are weak,⁵ and He shows us unmerited grace, but God’s Spirit is strong and willing to help, *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41, NIV). For example, if you are visiting parents and your mom makes your favorite meatloaf, pray for self-control as evidence of the Spirit of God in you.⁶ While being tempted in the wilderness,

¹ “We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6, BSB).

² “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9, ESV).

³ “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” (Matthew 18:21-22, NKJV).

⁴ “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NIV).

⁵ “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13-14, BSB); “And yet He was compassionate; He forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them. He often restrained His anger and did not unleash His full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return” (Psalm 78:38-39, BSB).

⁶ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, BSB); “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls” (Proverbs 25:28, ESV).

Christ showed that by speaking the Word of God in response to any temptation, you will be given the power to overcome it.⁷

Flee from Temptation

In addition to trusting in God and showing yourself grace, another powerful tool for overcoming temptation is to flee from it.⁸ Don't put yourself in a position to be tempted beyond what you can bear. Instead of giving in to temptation, seek out and find the way of escape that God provides for you, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13, NKJV). Think of temptation as the fire in a burning building and the way out is the fire escape. For instance, if you are going to an event that might not have a vegan option, either bring one to share or eat before you go. Do not even give the devil an opportunity to tempt you: *"and give no opportunity to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:27, ESV). In the beginning, humanity's original mistake involved giving the devil an opportunity to tempt them rather than fleeing from the temptation.⁹ It is a trap to contemplate the merits and allure of the temptation. It results in destruction, *"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things"* (Philippians 3:19, ESV). Early church writer Jerome highlights this point, *"the first man, obeying his belly*

⁷ "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil"; "Away from Me, Satan!" Jesus declared. "For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" Then the devil left Him, and angels came and ministered to Him" (Matthew 4:1;10-11, BSB, quoting Deuteronomy 6:13).

⁸ "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22, NIV).

⁹ "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:6, NIV).

and not God, was cast down from paradise into this vale of tears... Care must be taken, therefore, that abstinence may bring back to Paradise those whom satiety once drove out."¹⁰ Even under social pressure to conform, it is important to flee from temptation. Doing so not only renews your own mind but also proves to those around you what God's good and perfect will is: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

Pray with Others for Strength

Also ask others to pray for you: *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16, NIV). Jesus says where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there in our midst.¹¹ And anything we ask in His name, according to His will, He will do for us, *"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"* (John 14:14, NKJV). Pray together in groups of two or three for the power to overcome your temptations, and believe that the power will be granted to you.¹² By the power of Christ we are able to do all things, *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength"* (Philippians 4:13, BSB). Some things are more of a struggle for one person than they are for another, so don't compare yourself to others. Instead come together with other believers to encourage each other in your walk with God, assisting each other in the areas you each struggle

¹⁰ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium 22.10

¹¹ "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20, NKJV).

¹² "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22, NIV); "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6, NIV); "The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29, BSB).

with individually, *“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11, ESV).

Be Motivated by Love

In order to overcome the temptation to consume animal products: Trust in God to help you overcome the temptation, forgive yourself when you fall short, flee from the temptation, and ask others to pray for you to overcome the temptation. Most importantly, however, be motivated by love: *“Do everything in love”* (1 Corinthians 16:14, NIV). Focus on showing love to animals¹³ instead of dwelling on the difficulty of refraining from consuming them and their products. Focus also on the love you have for God and for His kingdom, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (John 14:15, NKJV). As Author Danielle Nussberger puts it, *“Abstaining from meat and other animal products becomes a means of controlling selfish human appetites that wage violence against the peaceable kingdom by halting its all-inclusive solidarity and thereby impeding union with God in Christ.”*¹⁴ Instead of joining those who raid the kingdom by violence,¹⁵ pray for God’s peaceable kingdom to come on earth as in heaven.¹⁶ When motivated by love—for God, for His kingdom, and for His creatures—the most powerful force in existence will empower you—the power of love, *“And now these three*

¹³ “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8, NIV, referencing Proverbs 10:12). See also Proverbs 12:10.

¹⁴ Nussberger, Danielle. “Vegetarianism: A Christian Spiritual Practice Both Old and New.” In *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals*. Edited by Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker, 166-179. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012. Priebe, Matthew. *Animals, Ethics, and Christianity*. Galt, CA: Ask the Animals Productions, 2018, page 167.

¹⁵ “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it” (Matthew 11:12, NIV).

¹⁶ “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, BSB).

remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV).

