

The Call of the Wild

It happens in a moment. Something deep within cries out for satisfaction. Cravings are strong and will not be denied. Louder and clearer now, rationality weighs the pros and cons. Do you give in, or do you fight? The call, the enticement, that whiff of something delicious is different for each person. For LaShawn, a 27-year-old screenplay writer, the call of the wild was screaming for her to break her diet with a chocolate muffin. This year, like every year, she started off with resolutions and diets, but the cravings for the chocolate are just too strong. Can LaShawn ignore the call of the wild, or will she fall victim again to her desires?

Meet Ray, a 38-year-old married father of two and an information technology expert. He receives the call from the wild quite frequently. His struggle has always been with pornographic Web sites, and while at church recently, he committed to abandoning them. Yet something within him just keeps triggering, and urges fire back strong. Temporary fulfillment feels good, but the mental pain of guilt afterward depresses him. Does Ray get on the site again, or can he ignore the call of the wild?

Jamie, a 42-year-old high school teacher, has been married for seven years. Her call came from an old boyfriend who found her on Facebook. He knows she is married, but makes sexual advances anyway. With little attention from her husband, a lack of intimacy and communication, Jamie feels tempted by the conversation. Her marriage is really suffering. Can she ignore the call of the wild?

The compulsion to pick up the phone, take a bite, or connect online seems undeniable. Like LaShawn, Ray, and Jamie, many want to be free, but do not know how. Even Paul, in the Bible, complained that "I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway" (Romans 7:18, 19, NLT).* In verse 23 Paul speaks of two members warring inside of him. This is the classic battle between flesh and the Spirit. To give in to the wild, or fleshly side, is a choice to please self. To fight urges and deny the desires from the flesh is a choice to please God. The choice lies within.

YOUR WORST ENEMY:

Allow me to share a harsh reality. The devil is not our worst enemy. That's right! The reality is that "self" is our worst enemy. Satan has no power over us. Jesus said in Luke 10:19, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." The devil cannot make anyone do anything. He may tempt, but it is we who decide to give in.

The first requirement Christ gave His disciples in Luke 9:23 was to deny self. If we claim Him, then we embrace the concept of discipleship, and with discipleship comes the practice of discipline and denial of self. The call from the wild is a cry out from deep within to please self. To successfully fight off self, drastic measures must be taken.

Jesus' disciples were accustomed to casting out demons. One day they met a possessed boy, but could not cast out the demon. Jesus came in after them and easily set the boy free from the demon. The Word of God says in Mark 9:28, 29: "And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.' "

We pray to God to help us overcome things, but when was the last time we prayed and fasted over a specific problem? Fasting is another way to practice self-denial and completely lean on God.

After His baptism, Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. After His fast, Satan tempted Him. Jesus, who was physically weak at the time, was spiritually strong and able to pass the test. When we add fasting to our prayer life, God honors our sacrifice. We build a stronger sense of self-control, powered by the Spirit of God. This empowers us to deny self when the call of the wild comes. LaShawn, Ray, and Jamie are real people who found success in this battle. Each of them found victory over the call of the wild by prayer and fasting.

Further, it is the power of the Holy Spirit working within us that gives us the strength to deny the call of the wild.

Also know that the very fabric of character is being weaved with every decision we make. If character is the only thing we will take with us to heaven, God will allow temptations to come that give us the chance to unravel character flaws.

Finally, observe Christ and His sacrifice for us. Remember the temptation He suffered. He too—even He—got the call from the wild in the Garden of Gethsemane. Burdened and plagued by our transgressions, He actually asked God the Father if there was another way to save humanity. Thankfully, however, Jesus quickly ended His prayer with “not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Be of good cheer, my friends; you can have the victory over self. Whether it is that slice of cake, cheating on your spouse, viewing pornography, or the social pressures you face. All of these are chances to ignore the call of the wild, “deny self,” and embrace the Spirit of God. In that very moment of weakness, remember the sacrifice Christ made, and follow His example: Not our will, but God’s will be done.