

Bad Idea Bears

From [Avenue Q](#):

Bear 1: "Hey Princeton, what are you doing tonight?"

Princeton: "Probably just watching tv."

Bear 2: "You know what goes great with tv? Beer!"

Princeton: "I'm unemployed, I can't afford beer."

Bear 1: "You can afford a six-pack."

Princeton: "Well, maybe a six-pack."

Bear 2: "You know what's better than a six-pack? A whole case!"

Princeton: "A case of beers? No, I can't get a whole case."

Bear 1: "But you're on a budget! You're wasting money in the long run if you don't buy in bulk!"

Princeton: "Well I guess that makes sense."

Bears 1 and 2: "YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYYYYYY!"



“Bad Ideas”

Gen. 2:15-17, 3:1-7, Mt. 4:1-11, Rom. 5
Lent I, Feb. 10, 2008, Hope Church, Lynn Japinga

There is a musical currently running on Broadway called Avenue Q. It is a parody of Sesame Street, and it uses puppets along with people. The musical tells the story of Princeton, a young college graduate with an English major and no job. He has moved to New York City to find his purpose in life, but he is having some trouble. He keeps getting distracted by the Bad Idea Bears, who have a number of suggestions for him.

Scene from above.

Temptation can be funny. Lots of humor is built on the temptation to buy shoes, or eat ice cream, or spend money that you don't have. We've all had our own Bad Idea Bears who say: Don't bother studying for that test. Or, you can play addiction solitaire instead of writing your sermon. Or, you can skip church on a snowy day!

But in the Garden of Eden, temptation was a matter of life and death.

God created this man and woman, the storyteller writes, and put them in a garden. There they had a task. They had freedom. And they had a limit. There was one tree that was forbidden.

Then this serpent appeared and asked a question. Did God say you cannot eat of any tree in the garden? Notice how subtle that is ... the serpent doesn't come right out and say Buy some beer, like a bad idea bear. He just raises some doubt about God's intentions. The woman replied that no, there was just the one forbidden tree. If we eat it ... or if we touch it, she added, we will die. You won't die, the serpent said. If you eat from that tree, you will be as smart as God! Your eyes will be opened, and you will know good and evil!

So what's the problem? Wisdom, clear vision and knowledge are all good things. So the woman took the fruit, and she gave some to her husband, who was with her and in on the whole discussion. He was not innocently plowing a back field somewhere.

The man and woman listened to the serpent, and to their own desire for knowledge. They refused to live within the limits God had set. They thought they knew better. They questioned whether God had their best interests at heart.

The results were devastating. When their eyes were opened they did not suddenly possess the knowledge of God! They saw that they were naked, and now that made them ashamed, and they hid from God. They had listened to bad ideas. And the result was not wisdom and clarity, but fear and shame.

Jesus had his struggles with temptation as well. But the temptations the devil offered were not necessarily such bad ideas. How about turning stones into bread? Think how useful that could be for a hungry world. And what a good way for Jesus to draw people to his preaching. Or what if Jesus did a daring and impressive trick? A great swan dive from the top of the temple? Surely God would send angels to carry him gently to the ground. And wouldn't everyone want to listen to such a powerful, magical person? Finally the devil then promised Jesus power and influence over all the kingdoms of the world. How tempting to have all that power without having to earn it. It would be so much easier than the cross.

These were all *sort of* good ideas. But Jesus recognized them for what they were. He was being tempted to obey the devil rather than God. He was tempted to go for a miracle rather than long term struggle. He was tempted to misuse his power. The devil was telling Jesus that his plan to preach and teach wasn't good enough. The devil had a better way. Make bread! Be dramatic! Make friends with the powerful!

This is how you will succeed. But Jesus said no. What God has called me to do is good enough.

Jesus could say no to the bad ideas because he had a very clear sense of his vocation. He knew who he was and what he was called to do.

The temptations that we encounter are a little different from those Jesus faced. We don't have the power to make bread from stone. We don't have an option to rule the world. But what are the bad ideas that come to us?

One voice might be saying: You NEED this.

- You need to get drunk in order to have a good time at this party.
- You need to say mean things about someone in order to be popular.
- You need to check out those internet sites after everyone else has gone to bed.
- You need to eat that bag of Oreos and then make yourself throw up.
- You need to take those pills because life is stressful and you have to unwind.

You do not need to follow the rules and you will not get caught.

You can cheat on your income tax, or on a test. You can make an illegal business decision. You can do something dangerous and nothing bad will happen to you.

The most dangerous idea might be this. You are not good enough.

If only you were more attractive, or lost a lot of weight, or ran marathons.

If only you worked harder, and accomplished more.

If only you made everyone around you happy.

If only you were nicer, more obedient, less outspoken.

If only you were more assertive and powerful.

You might hear this bad idea that you are not good enough from your parents, or your spouse, or your employer. You might hear it from our culture. You might hear it from religion. And when we aren't good enough, it is very difficult to trust, in God or each other. It is very difficult to confess our brokenness. It is very difficult to see other people as valuable.

The serpent told the man and the woman that God's word to them wasn't good enough and they believed him. They listened to the bad ideas. They did not trust God.

The devil told Jesus that God's way was not good enough, but Jesus did not listen. He knew what he was called to do. He trusted God.

What about us? We hear bad ideas every day telling us that if we do more or buy more we will be happy. We try to prove ourselves. We try to prove our worth. We are afraid.

What if we listened to God's ideas instead? What if we listened to God's voice? Sin is powerful. We are broken people. But the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ is even greater.

What if we listened to God's ideas? You are accepted. You are loved. You belong. You are good enough. Amen.