

*Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, April 27, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.*

**Title: The Process of Temptation and One Proper Response to Temptation  
(The Invisible Series Part 5)**

According to Scripture, as followers of Christ, we are constantly engaged in a spiritual battle, whether we realize it or not. The Bible identifies three enemies in this warfare, each determined to harm our souls and separate us from God.

The first battle takes place within our own hearts. This is a continuous and often invisible struggle caused by our sinful nature. Even the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest champions of faith, experienced these inner conflicts during his spiritual journey. Despite his deep love for God and his sincere desire to do what was right, he often found himself doing the very things he despised. Paul openly shared his desperation in Romans 7:24: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" His words show us that we are not alone in our inner battles. Even the most faithful believers face them just like we do.

The second kind of battle is with our spiritual enemies: Satan and his evil forces. Whether we like it or not, we are at war with the devil. His goals are to deceive us, tempt us, and destroy our spirits. The influences of evil often manifest through destructive behaviours and temptations that pull us away from God. This is the battle that comes against us. Today, and again next Sunday, we will explore this particular area in greater depth: how Satan's temptation works, what kinds of attractions are out there, and how to overcome them in our faith journey.

The third battleground is the world we live in. Modern society, while providing many benefits and conveniences, also presents ungodly values and unholy influences that can harm us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our secular culture often attempts to tear us down... Because of this spiritual darkness, many people today are caught in unhealthy habits, immoral desires, or overwhelming fears. This is the battle taking place in our world.

As a result of the power of these invisible enemies – within us, against us, and around us – life is not always easy. Today, we will particularly look at the process of temptation and one of the right responses we can choose as we face these attacks in our walk with God.

Before we dive into the sacred lessons from today's scripture readings, I want to begin with a few reflections on the texts. In the Book of Genesis, the very first book of the Old Testament, we encounter the first recorded battle between our spiritual ancestors, Adam and Eve, and the serpent, who is often understood to represent Satan. This spiritual war took place in the Garden of Eden, the paradise God graciously gave them to live in.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, we see another crucial battle: this time between our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the tempter, Satan. This confrontation occurred in the wilderness after Jesus had fasted for forty days. From God's perspective, both of these battles – one in Eden and one in the wilderness – have had profound consequences for humanity. Because of Adam and Eve's defeat in their moment of testing, we lost not only our place in the Garden but also our direct relationship with God. Their disobedience brought consequences such as physical death, spiritual separation, and emotional struggles like shame, guilt, and bitterness.

On the other hand, because of Jesus Christ's victory in His moment of testing, we have received the opportunity for restored minds and renewed hearts. His triumph has brought us forgiveness, eternal life, and the possibility of experiencing heavenly joy, true satisfaction, and lasting fulfillment. These two contrasting responses to temptation – Adam's failure and Jesus' faithfulness – help us understand the nature of the spiritual battles we face today.

Now, I want us to take a closer look at how each of these temptations unfolded. Interestingly, I've noticed that Satan's strategy in both situations was quite similar. And in many ways, his tactics have not changed much at all. The enemy still uses the same methods to tempt us today. These methods can be summarized with three simple words – each beginning with the letter "D": Doubt, Deception, and Detour.

The first step in Satan's strategy of temptation is doubt. He almost always begins here. His initial attack usually comes in the form of deceptive questions – questions that target our trust in God and our understanding of His Word. Let me share an example from our Old Testament reading this morning. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent asked Eve: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" We know the obvious answer to this question is no. In fact, God had said the opposite. In Genesis 2:16, He declared, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." Adam and Eve had been given the blessing of enjoying the fruit from every tree in their God-given paradise – except for one. The only restriction was not to eat from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17).

But notice what the serpent did. While pretending to quote God's command, Satan twisted it and planted a seed of doubt in the hearts of Adam and Eve. He subtly questioned God's love and the freedom God had generously given them, simply by inserting that one small word: "really." We see the identical strategy in our New Testament reading today. The tempter approached Jesus in the exact same way. Twice, he said, "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3,6). In other words, Satan was saying, "Are you really the Son of God? Then prove it. Show me your power." He was trying to plant doubt in Jesus' mind – doubt about His identity and His relationship with the Father. But let us remember what had just happened. Only one chapter earlier, in Matthew 3:17, God publicly declared Jesus' identity at His baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Immediately after that incredible moment of divine affirmation, Satan came and questioned it. And that is how he often works in our lives too. Just when we receive hope from God and encouragement through His Word, the enemy tries to pull those blessings away with doubt. Can you hear the devil's whisper? "Did God really say not to do that?" "Is that really such a bad thing?" "Are you really sure about what you heard?" Once again, that is how Satan attacks us. He doesn't always begin with a bold – faced lie. Instead, he begins with a question – one that makes us doubt God's Word and question His goodness.

The second step in Satan's strategy of temptation is deception. After planting seeds of doubt about God's assured love – in both Adam and Eve, and in Jesus – Satan moved to implant deceptive thoughts in their minds. Let me read again from today's Old Testament passage. The serpent said to Eve: "You will not certainly die" (Genesis 3:4). But we remember what God had clearly said to Adam in Genesis 2:17: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." What a contradiction! God had already warned that eating the forbidden fruit would lead to death – not only physical mortality but also eternal separation from the Lord. Satan's lie directly opposed God's truth. He downplayed the consequences. He twisted the truth. And as a result, Adam and Eve did exactly what God had commanded them not to do. Satan lied to them, and they believed him.

Now let us turn to our New Testament reading from Matthew. After trying to make Jesus doubt His identity as the Son of God, Satan took Him to the holy city and placed Him at the highest point of the temple. Then the tempter said: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you... they will lift you up in their hands'" (Matthew 4:6). Satan quoted Scripture, but he misused it. He took a promise originally given to the people of Israel during their 40 years in the wilderness and manipulate it to deceive Jesus. It was a deceitful use of God's Word, an attempt to lead Jesus into testing God's care by jumping from the temple. Satan is a master of deception. He doesn't always tempt us with obvious evil. Instead, he often uses just enough truth to make a lie sound convincing. According to John 8:44, Satan is called "the father of lies." Jesus says, "When he lies, he speaks his native language." This is important for us to understand how fluently Satan lies. His lies often sound like half-truths, and he will even quote Scripture out of context to mislead us. Satan articulates his lies perfectly. His deception is so subtle, so smooth, so convincing that we may not even recognize it. That is why it is so important to know God's Word – not just parts of it, not just quotes – but in its entirety and proper context, so we can tell the difference between truth and deception. Because the consequences are completely different. Satan offers lies that lead to death and separation. Jesus offers truth that leads to life and restoration. Because of Satan's dishonesty, Adam and Eve were exiled from paradise, returning to the dust from which they came from (Genesis 3:19). But Jesus, through His victory, has opened a new way – a way for us to be resurrected with Him, to recover eternal life, and to live in the land God has promised to all who believe and repent.

The third step in Satan's strategy of temptation is detour. After planting doubt and spreading deception, the enemy often presents an alternative path—one that seems quicker, easier, and more appealing than God's way. Satan loves to offer shortcuts, and he promises fast fulfillment of our desires. Let us revisit our Old Testament reading. After making Adam and Eve question their freedom and deceiving them about God's intentions, the serpent said: "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). This was a complete lie. God had already created Adam and Eve in His image. They were made to become more like Him through fellowship with God and obedience to His Word. But Satan offered a detour – a shortcut to godlikeness that involved disobedience. He essentially said, "You don't need to wait on God. You don't need to trust His timing. You can be like Him right now – just take this fruit."

Now let us turn again to our New Testament reading. We see a very similar pattern. The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and said, "All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8). Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut – a detour from the path of suffering and sacrifice. "You don't need to go to the cross," the tempter whispered. "I can give you the crown without the cost. Just bow once, and all of this is yours." But Jesus did not take the bait. He knew that true glory comes through the cross and obedience, not through compromise or disobedience. And this where we must be alert. Satan still tries to deceive us with spiritual detours – tempting us to fulfill our desires in ways that bypass God's will. But every detour away from God's path leads us not to life, but to destruction. Adam and Eve followed the detour and lost paradise. But Jesus rejected the detour and made the way back to paradise possible for all of us.

We have now walked through the process of Satan's temptation – both in the lives of Adam and Eve and in the life of Jesus. As I mentioned earlier, Satan's strategy has not changed since the Garden of Eden or the wilderness where Jesus fasted. He still follows the same pattern: Doubt, Deception, and Detour.

Today, Satan still comes to us quietly and whispers questions that make us doubt God's love and His Word: "Do you really believe that, with all your freedom, you can't do this or that?" "Do you really think God still loves you – after all the mistakes you've made?" Then he follows with deception: "Just do it once – it won't hurt." "Everyone else is doing it." "You'll feel so much better afterward. You deserve this." Next, he offers a detour – a shortcut to fulfill our longings in ways that go against God's truth: "Why wait? Why deny yourself? You can have what you want right now, if you just do it your way." Temptation is a process. It is not just a single moment. It is not an isolated event. One step leads to the next – doubt leads to deception, and deception leads to disobedience, and all of it, in the end, leads to sin.

Friends, in our battle against the devil, we need to remember this: each of us has our "own triggers"—our own "hot buttons." When those triggers or buttons are pushed hard enough, we may react in destructive ways. Often, temptation begins with something natural. God has given us good desires – for love, for knowledge, for pleasure, for possessions, for success. But when those desires become uncontrolled, they can become dangerous. Think of fire. On the stove, fire is useful – it helps us cook and prepare food. But when fire is out of control, it can burn an entire house to the ground. In the same way, our God-given passions must be kept in alignment with God's will. Since we were created in God's attributes, He gave us the gift of freedom. We were not designed to live as robots. We, as God's masterpieces, have the power to choose. But while we are free to make our decisions, we are not free from the consequences of ungodly choices. The moment we decide to walk outside of God's will, we begin to lose the very freedom we were given and may become slaves to sin. And Jesus said in John 8:34: "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

But, friends, there is good news in the same Jesus who overcame Satan's temptation in the wilderness. So, what are we supposed to do when Satan attacks us with doubt, deception, and detour? We need to do what Jesus did. Jesus defeated every attack of the devil by using the Word of God. Let us pause for a moment and consider again how Satan tempted Jesus. Three times, the devil tried to lure Jesus into acting outside of God's will. And each time, he used Scripture. All of Satan's temptations in our Gospel were based on quotations from the Bible – specifically from the book of Deuteronomy. But here is the problem: as I mentioned earlier, he twisted and manipulated God's Word. He quoted Scripture out of context, using it to justify his evil intentions. Jesus recognized the lies. He didn't argue with Satan. He didn't negotiate with him. Instead, Jesus simply responded

with truth. Each time, He said with divine authority: “It is written...” It is written...” It is written...” Jesus declared God’s Word confidently and courageously – and Satan was defeated.

Let us remember what Jesus taught us through His responses: first, we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Yes, we are physical beings, but we are also spiritual beings. We need more than food; we need the nourishment of God’s truth. Second, we are not to test the Lord our God. God is our Creator. He is not to be treated casually or tested for our convenience. His name is holy, and He is worthy of reverence. Third, we are to worship the Lord our God and serve Him only. No one else deserves our adoration, our attention, or our devotion, only God. Satan wanted Jesus to doubt God’s love, to be deceived into sin, and to choose an easier, detoured path. But Jesus discerned each temptation through a spiritual mirror, the Word of God, and He responded with truth, confidence, and courage. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us: “The Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” God’s Word is not just words on paper– it is a spiritual weapon. It is a sword in the hands of those who believe. But to use that sword effectively, we must know it. We must read it. We must meditate on it. We must let it dwell us richly, like a cow chewing its food more than once to digest it properly. And we must return to the Word again and again until it nourishes our souls deeply and shapes our hearts completely.

Friends, our enemy, Satan – the Liar – knows this. That is why he often uses his three favorite tools: noise, crowds, and hurry. He tries to keep us busy, distracted, and overwhelmed, so we won’t have time to hear God speak. But consider King David, who is believed to have written many of the Psalms, including the one in our reading today. Think of how busy he must have been, as king of Israel, with countless responsibilities, endless meetings, and numerous decisions. Yet, in the midst of all that, he made time for God. He wrote that even in the middle of the night, he would rise to read the Holy Word. On behalf of all of us, he asked the famous question: “How can a young person stay on the path of purity?” (Psalm 119:9). Whether we are young or old, this is a question we all wrestle with in a broken world. And what answer did he give? “By living according to Your Word.” Then David went further and said to God: “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). The Word of God is not just a book to be read – it is a source of supernatural power. When we love the Holy Bible, when we let it become like a spiritual sword in our sacred adventure, we are able to overcome temptation and boldly walk with God in victory.

To conclude this sermon, let us remember: being tempted is not a sin. One of the great reformers, Martin Luther, once said something insightful: “You cannot stop birds from flying over your heads, but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair.” Temptation will come. That is a fact of life. But when we entertain it, enjoy it, or allow it to take root, it turns into sin.

James, in our Epistle reading, explains the consequences clearly: “After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:15). Temptation might feel like fun at first, but it leads to spiritual death. It separates us from the very God who longs to save us. But here is the blessing we must hold onto: “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). God sets before us “life and death,” “blessing and curse” (Deuteronomy 30:19) and we have a choice to make in our journey of faith.

Christianity is not a one-time decision; it is a daily commitment. To choose life over death, blessing over curse, every day, we are invited to read the Word of God, reflect on it deeply, examine our hearts through it, confess and repent of our sins, and rededicate our lives to Christ. When we do these sacred endeavours, with the Word of God as our guide, we will become more than conquerors in our spiritual battles and we will live to glorify the Lord, our Captain, as true overcomers. Amen!

\*In preparing this sermon, I was inspired by Rick Warren’s “Invisible War” series, based on texts from Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7; Psalm 119:9–16; Matthew 4:1–11; and James 1:12–18.