

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, May 4, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

The Message: The Three Kinds of Temptation and God's Antidotes to Temptation (The Invisible Series Part 6)

We are continuing our Invisible War sermon series, and I want to begin this message by recapping what we have learned so far. Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly engaged in a battle—one that takes place within us, against us, or around us. From a biblical perspective, there are three invisible enemies in this spiritual warfare, each determined to harm our souls and separate us from God. The first kind of battle happens within us. This is the internal struggle caused by our sinful nature. The second category of battle is with our spiritual adversaries—Satan and his demonic forces. This is the battle that comes against us. The third kind of war is found around us—in the culture and values of modern society. This is the spiritual conflict that surrounds us in the world we live in.

Last Sunday, we examined how Satan tempted both our spiritual ancestors, Adam and Eve, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He used a similar pattern in both cases, involving three “D” words: doubt, deception, and detour. We also learned that one of the right responses to temptation is to stand firmly on the Word of God. This Sunday, I want us to look at three types of worldly temptation described in one of today's main scriptural passages. I want us to discover how God's antidotes to these temptations are revealed in the life of one biblical character: Moses. Through his example, I also want us to reflect on how to apply these divine lessons to our own spiritual journeys and how to make sacred decisions as followers of Christ.

Now, let us reflect on a command given by the Apostle John to his listeners: “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15). When we hear this statement, some of us may immediately recall another well-known verse: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In his Gospel, the same author, John, describes how deeply God loves the world, especially the people He created. Christ died on the cross to save the world. However, in his Epistle, John seems to urge us not to love the world. So how can we interpret what appear to be two contradictory statements? It is important to understand the context of each passage. In John 3:16, the “world” refers to the people of the world—those whom He loved so deeply that He gave His life for them. But in John 2:15, the “world” refers not to people, but to the value systems in sinful desires and opposed to God's will. However, when John tells us not to love the world, he is warning against the ungodly principles that dominate a fallen world. He identifies them clearly in 1 John 2:16: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” While modern society offers many conveniences and comforts, it also promotes harmful influences that can damage us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Spiritually speaking, we live in a world darkened by sin. And because of this spiritual darkness, many people today are trapped in unhealthy habits, immoral desires, or overwhelming fears.

Now, let us move on to unpack the three types of worldly temptations that pull us away from God. I want us to explore each of these attractions in connection not only to those faced by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and by Jesus in the wilderness, but also to the temptations we encounter daily in our own lives.

The first category is called “the lust of the flesh.” In this phrase, the word “lust” refers to an inordinate craving—one that goes beyond healthy boundaries. This kind of temptation draws us toward physical pleasures that are misused or abused. When Adam and Eve looked at the forbidden fruit, they saw that it was “good for food” (Genesis 3:6). It appealed to their physical senses. Similarly, when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he challenged Him to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:3). This was not just

about satisfying hunger—it was a temptation to misuse divine power for personal gain. Jesus had the power to do it, but that power was meant to serve others, not to serve Himself. This kind of temptation can be described as a craving for worldly pleasure. While it is often associated with sexual desires, it also includes excessive hunger, thirst, or any physical appetite that becomes uncontrolled. There is nothing wrong with physical needs when they are under God's direction. But when they became sinful cravings, they can lead us away from God's will.

The consequences of giving in to the lust of the flesh are described by Paul in Galatians 5:19-21—things like sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, selfish ambition, and drunkenness. Even today, we often hear messages like: "If it feels, do it" or "Enjoy whatever you like." But we must recognize that this is the whisper of the enemy, urging us to indulge without considering the cost. The lust of the flesh tempts us to pursue pleasure without boundaries—whether through sex, food, drugs, entertainment, the internet, or other addictive habits. The danger is not only to our physical bodies but also to our emotional and spiritual health.

The second category of temptation is called "the lust of the eyes." This refers to our desire for material possessions—the craving for things we see and believe will bring us satisfaction. When Adam and Eve looked at the prohibited tree, they did not just see food. They saw that it was "pleasing to the eye" (Genesis 3:6). It sparked a desire for something God had clearly forbidden. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. He said, "All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:8-9). But Jesus knew the truth: only God is worthy of worship. The first two of the Ten Commandments make this clear—God alone deserves our praise, and nothing else should take His place in our hearts.

This kind of temptation can be called worldly possession. It is the belief that having more will make us feel secure, successful, or significant. This is why advertisements, catalogues, flyers are so effective—they appeal to our consumer instincts. The more we see, the more we want. And before long, we start believing that happiness comes from simply having a little bit more. The lust of the eyes shows itself in the form of greed. We begin to long for what we do not yet have: a nicer house, a better car, the newest phone, or the latest appliance. Whether we can afford it or not, we feel driven to possess it. This temptation captivates our hearts, replacing contentment with comparison, and gratitude with dissatisfaction. But we must remember: no earthly treasure can take the place of God's eternal provision. Our true security is found not in what we own, but in who has us—our Creator.

The third category of temptation is called "the pride of life." This refers to our desire for power or recognition—the temptation to elevate ourselves in the eyes of others, or even to put ourselves in the place of God. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was "desirable for gaining wisdom" (Genesis 3:6). They believed it would make them like God. This was a temptation to rise above their God-given place and grasp for divine authority—something that belongs to God alone. In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted in a similar way. Satan took Him to the highest point of the temple and challenged Him to jump, saying that angels would catch Him and protect Him (Matthew 4:5-6). This was a temptation for Jesus to gain instant fame and admiration through a dramatic display without the suffering of the cross. But Jesus resisted, knowing that His mission of Salvation would be accomplished not through spectacle, but through sacrifice.

This kind of temptation can be called worldly power. It is driven by a deep greedy desire to make a name for ourselves, or to prove our self-worth on our own terms. Interestingly, the word "sin" has the letter "I" right at its center. That is a powerful reminder that sin often comes from an "I-centered" life rather than a Christ-centered one. The Bible reminds us that true greatness is found not in exalting ourselves before others, but in humbling ourselves before the Lord.

We have now examined all three temptations. Together, they represent the primary forms of temptation the world offers: pleasure, possession, and power. These things are not sinful in themselves. In fact, they are part of how God created us. They are essential to living a healthy purposeful life in this world. Without these passions, we would not thrive or even survive. The issue is not desire itself, but what we do with our desires. The danger comes when these longings push us beyond the boundaries God has lovingly set for us. When our desires become excessive or run contrary to God's will, they become sinful.

Now, let us turn to the example of Moses, and observe how he responded to these worldly temptations. Moses provides a powerful testimony of faith and reveals for us God's three antidotes to temptation, expressed through the sacred decisions he made.

Firstly, by faith, Moses chose to suffer with the people of God, identifying himself with them rather than enjoying the temporary pleasures available to him in Egypt (Hebrews 11:25). As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses had access to a life of luxury, comfort, and privilege in the Egyptian court. He could have enjoyed every pleasure and convenience imaginable. But instead, he chose to stand with the people of Israel—his people—who were suffering under Pharaoh's oppression. This was not an easy decision. From a worldly perspective, it made no sense. Who would willingly give up royalty to be associated with slaves? But Moses saw something deeper. This is a critical lesson for us as Christians today. We must admit that sin is often pleasurable. It feels good. It can seem exciting and attractive. That is part of the temptation. If sin appeared ugly or miserable at first, no one would be drawn to it. But sin approaches us with false promises of satisfaction, while hiding its destructive consequences.

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with physical and emotional enjoyment. The problem is the "lust of the flesh"—when our natural desires become uncontrolled, self-centered, or step outside God's boundaries. These inordinate cravings can lead us into harmful addictions and spiritual emptiness. Moses did not pretend that Egypt had nothing to offer. He knew the world he lived in was full of tempting pleasures. But he also knew those pleasures were temporary. And he understood that the joy found in walking with God was eternal. That is why he chose suffering with the people of God over the fleeting enjoyments of sin. And like Moses, we too must remember: the pleasures of sin may last for a moment, but the joy of holiness last forever. Just as Jesus declared in the wilderness, we must also declare: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Let us hunger and thirst not for the cravings of this world, but for the righteousness of God. Let us look into the spiritual mirror of the Word of God and ask the Lord to restore His image in our hearts. As we do, our lives will be filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Secondly, by faith, Moses chose to pursue the blessings God promised in heaven, rather than seeking the earthly riches of Egypt (Hebrews 11:26). As a member of Pharaoh's household, Moses could have stored up great wealth and lived a life of luxury and ease. Yet despite all of that, Moses rejected those riches. Why? Because, as today's Epistle says, he was "looking ahead to his great reward" (Hebrews 11:26). Instead of focusing on the treasures of Egypt, Moses, by faith, set his sights on the eternal rewards God had prepared for him. This is a powerful picture of how the Bible defines faith: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Moses' decision is the antidote to the lust of the eyes. We must ask ourselves: Where are our eyes fixed? What we look at, long for, and chase after often determines the path we usually take. Like pleasure, possessions are not sinful in themselves. Money, for example, is a gift from God and is necessary for daily life. But the love of money, as the Bible warns, is "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

When our desire for wealth becomes greater than our desire for God, we are on dangerous ground. Jesus spoke clearly about this: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). If we do not fully trust and worship God, we may try to fill the emptiness in our lives with

material things. But the Bible describes such efforts as “broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13). These temporary solutions may offer short-term comfort, but they ultimately leave us dry and unfulfilled no matter how much we collect. If we ever feel this kind of emptiness, we must respond like Moses did by faith, valuing God’s eternal treasures over the world’s temporary wealth. And like Jesus, we must boldly say to the enemy, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (Matthew 4:10). Everything we have belongs to God. He owns it all—everything in heaven and on earth. When we truly recognize this, we can use our resources not only to care for ourselves and our families, but also to store up treasures in heaven by serving God and loving others.

Thirdly, by faith Moses chose to refuse being known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, rather than seizing the power and position that came with being a potential successor in Egypt (Hebrews 11:24). As many of us know, Moses’ story began in a time of crisis. Pharaoh had issued a horrific decree to kill all the newborn Hebrew boys. But, by faith, Moses’ parents hid him for three months. When they could hide him no longer, they placed him in a basket and set him afloat on the Nile River. Miraculously, he was rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised with all the advantages of royalty. The Bible tells us that Moses was educated in all the wisdom the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), and he had access to a life of opportunity and influence within the royal court. But when he grew up, Moses made a courageous decision: he chose to identify with the people of Israel, even though it meant hardship, persecution, and the loss of everything the palace had to offer. In those days, Egypt was the most powerful empire in the world, while the people of Israel were enslaved and powerless. Yet Moses did not try to live with one in Egypt and one in Israel. He made a clear and faithful choice to stand with the people of God, knowing that true power comes not from a throne, but from faith in the living God. This choice is the antidote to the pride of life. Once again, just like pleasure and possessions, power itself is not sinful. But we must be aware that power often brings the temptation to control, to dominate, or to elevate ourselves.

Like Moses, by faith, we are called to reject “identification with the world” and instead choose “identification with Christ.” As Christians, we must say “yes” to Christ’s values and “no” to the values of the world. We cannot walk both paths. Jesus said, “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19). And just as Jesus responded to Satan in the wilderness, we must also say: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test (Matthew 4:7). God is not a genie to grant our wishes; He is the Almighty Creator, worthy of our reverence, trust, and obedience. So, like Moses, by faith, let us value our identity as children of God above any earthly position or power. No matter what the world offers, our greatest privilege is to be called His own.

To conclude, today, God is calling us to make a firm decision—to choose like Moses, to identify with the people of God rather than the world. As followers of Christ, by faith, we must “choose life, so that we and our children may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Our choices matter. What we choose will not only shape our future but also the future of those we love dearly. So, how do we choose life every day? How do we resist temptation and overcome the invisible battles within, against, and around us? Jesus gave us the clear answer: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Christianity is not a one-time decision; it is a daily commitment. To walk this path, we are all called to deny ourselves through daily repentance, to take up our cross with courage and confidence, and to follow Him with all our heart, soul, and strength. When we do this, with the Word of God as our compass, we will not walk in defeat. Instead, we will walk as victors, more than conquerors in our spiritual battles. We will live, not to gratify the flesh, but to glorify the Lord, our Captain, our Redeemer, our Strength. Amen!

**In preparing this sermon, I was inspired by Rick Warren’s “Invisible War” series, based on texts from Genesis 3:4-13; Matthew 4:1-11; Matthew 16:21-26; Hebrews 11:24-26; and 1 John 2:15-17.*