

Battle-Tested

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FIGHT - For What Matters Most - NK | May 17, 2026

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn to Matthew chapter 4. I am loving the theme of this new series, Fight. The Scripture refers to the Christian life as a fight, a war, a struggle. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 4 - we'll actually look at this in the last message in this series:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

— 2 Timothy 4:7

And so we're going to talk in this series about things that we need to fight for. Last week was Mother's Day, and we talked about fighting for our family and our children. On Father's Day, we're going to talk about fighting for our marriage. We're going to talk about fighting for the lost. We're going to fight through some things. Many Christians experience persecution or suffering, and how do we fight through suffering and persecution well?

Today, we're going to talk about something that we need to fight against, and that is temptation. If you're taking notes, and I encourage you to, the title of the message today is "Battle Tested."

All of us experience temptation. It doesn't matter if you're 8, 18, or 80. We all experience temptation. It is normal and it is natural. The Bible says it is common to all of us. But we are called in Scripture to not give in to that temptation. We're called to fight.

Now, the reality is, for those of us who are followers of the Lord Jesus, we know how tough it is to say no to temptation. It could be something as simple as saying no to a dessert that we know is not good for us. I said simple, not easy. It can be as complex as crossing a line morally. We could be tempted to cheat on our spouse or to steal from our company or business.

Bottom line, temptation is a reality. We're all going to face it. It is imperative as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that we learn to have victory over it. If not, we will live defeated lives, constantly living in guilt, thinking that the Christian life is absolutely impossible. There's no way that we can make it through this journey in a consistent, victorious way. We have to learn how to say no to temptation.

The best example we have in Scripture of someone who fought temptation and won is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our ultimate example in this. He is our inspiration. He has been battle-tested in this area. And so today, let's look at Matthew chapter 4 and see how Jesus said no to temptation. He shows us the way.

Here's how we're going to outline this passage. We're going to look at the definition of temptation. We're going to look at the origin of temptation - where it started and how it started. We're going to look at the tools of temptation, the tools that Satan uses on every single one of us to tempt us to fall away from the Lord. And

then we're going to look at how we can defeat temptation. We're going to do all of this in the next 30 minutes. You ready? All right, let's get after it.

Matthew chapter 4. The Bible says this:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered, "It is written,

*"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,"

and

*"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."*

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

*"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."*

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

— Matthew 4:1-11

After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. That might be the greatest understatement in all of history, all right?

It's also interesting that the devil knows the Bible as well as we do, maybe better.

The Definition of Temptation

Let's look first at what I'm calling the definition of temptation. It's very interesting when you do a word study on this. The word "temptation" and the word "testing" are the exact same words in the Bible, very closely related. How you choose to read or interpret the word depends totally upon the context and the intent of the one giving the test or sending the temptation. In other words, tempting and testing are really just different sides of the same coin.

Now, we know from Scripture that God doesn't tempt anyone. James writes in James chapter 1, verse 13:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

— James 1:13

In this passage that we're looking at today, Matthew chapter 4, it's very clear. Jesus gives Satan a name in verse 3. He calls him "the tempter." In verse 1, we're told that Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. So we can say with confidence that temptation comes from Satan.

However, when you read Scripture, we can also say with confidence that testing comes from God. I read it this morning in Proverbs 17. It's the 17th day of the month, so that was my Proverbs reading. I think it's verse 3:

*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
and the LORD tests hearts.*

— Proverbs 17:3

James, in that same chapter, talks about trials and about God not tempting anyone. He also talks about tests:

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

— James 1:2-3

Here's the point that I want to make. I want us to broaden our minds as it relates to temptation. Oftentimes, when we read "temptation," we think of it in the negative connotation, which makes sense because it is the enemy who tempts us. It's the enemy who is trying to hinder our faith and cause us to fail. He wants to lure us and entice us to evil. He wants to cause us to choose to disobey the Lord. That's certainly his M.O.

However, I want us to take a step back and realize that the very temptation coming from Satan, if you flip that coin over, could be a test coming from God. Again, it's the same word. The meaning changes depending upon the purpose and who's doing the sending.

Satan definitely tempts us. He wants to weaken us. He wants us to fail. He wants us to fall. But God tests us in order to strengthen us, build our faith, make us stronger, and cause us to stand.

Warren Wiersbe puts it like this: "Temptation is Satan's weapon to defeat us, but it can become God's tool to build us."

Commentator William Barclay writes, "Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, but it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal."

Read 1 Peter. Trials and testings come our way for the purifying of our faith.

Barclay continues, "Temptation is not the penalty of being a man. Temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use."

We see this truth, this temptation and testing, played out right here in Matthew chapter 4. Look back at verse

1. Look at what the Bible says:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

— Matthew 4:1

Notice who's doing the leading here: the Spirit of God. On one side, it's a test. He's being led into the wilderness by the Spirit. But for what purpose? To be tempted by the devil. So we see the test and we see the temptation.

Listen, it needs to be said here: It is not a sin to be tempted. I used to struggle with this as a high school student. With all the temptations that were facing me, I used to get so upset and think I was disappointing God because of the temptations that were coming my way.

Temptation is not a sin. If temptation were a sin, Jesus would be a sinner, but we know that's not the case. Temptation is not a sin. Giving in to the temptation is a sin, and this is why we are told to fight.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, when speaking on temptation, said this: "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." That's the difference.

Temptation is an enticement, an allurement away from God, and it always comes from Satan. He is called the tempter. He always has been, and his modus operandi has not changed since the Garden of Eden.

We're going to go to Genesis chapter 3 here in just a minute, so you can begin finding Genesis 3. Keep your hand there in Matthew 4 because we're going to look at both as a case study.

But let me just say this before we move on. This just needs to be said. Put an asterisk by it if you're taking notes. Mark the timing of this temptation. Jesus enters into the wilderness, led by the Spirit, right after He's been baptized. You remember what happens at His baptism. The Spirit of God descends like a dove, and He hears a voice from heaven from His Father:

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

— Matthew 3:17

Sometimes we think we are most prone to temptation when we're weak, struggling, depressed, or despondent. But Jesus' temptation came at a high mark in His life.

Our head needs to be on a swivel at all times because the enemy is looking for any moment to pounce. He's that roaring lion looking for someone to devour. It might be a downtime. It might be an uptime.

Look at David's life. He fell into his sin with Bathsheba after he had won a war. He's resting in the luxuries of the kingdom and of his throne, and he's looking around. Look at what's going on. He's at a high moment, and that's when Satan comes after him.

All of this is to say we've got to be ready at any minute because Satan wants to lead us away from the Lord. He'll do it in the high times, right after the high times. He'll do it in the low times. He'll do it any chance he gets.

So we can't let our guard down. Again, this is a fight.

The Origin of Temptation

We've seen the definition of temptation. Now let's look at the origin of temptation, or we can say the originator of temptation. If you're taking notes, here's the answer: It's Satan. It happens in Genesis chapter 3.

Now, I don't know if I need to say this or not. I wrote this down in my notes, so I'm just going to say it. We do know that the devil is a real being, right? He's not a figment of our imagination. He's not some character made up in an old wives' tale. He's not this comic character in red tights that we see around Halloween. This is not who the enemy is. He is a real being. He's insidious and strategic, and he's someone we do not need to take lightly.

If you've never read the book *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, it's a great book. It's entertaining and would be a great summer read. Go get C.S. Lewis's book *The Screwtape Letters*.

It's a fictional account of a senior demon named Screwtape, Uncle Screwtape, and he's writing to his nephew by the name of Wormwood. What a great name. Wormwood's just getting going. He's in Demonship 101, and he's writing to his older Uncle Screwtape about strategies for getting people to fall to temptation.

He asks Screwtape, "Should I make myself known? Would that be what I need to do? Stop being invisible and allow him to see me? Would that bring him down?"

He writes Uncle Screwtape asking that question. Listen to how Screwtape answers:

"The fact that devils are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that - it is an old textbook method of confusing them - he therefore cannot believe in you."

That's one of Satan's best moves, convincing us that he's not real. He's just a character with a pitchfork and red tights. He doesn't want us believing that he's a real being, that he's a real threat, and that he plays for keeps. If he can convince us of this, he's already won a significant battle before temptation even begins.

Here's the deal, though. Throughout the pages of Scripture, from Genesis 3 to the closing pages of Revelation, when he's done away with forever, we see that Satan is a real being.

Listen to what Jesus says about him in John chapter 8:

He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

— John 8:44

We're going to see in a moment that one of the tools of temptation is lying. He's the father of lies.

John 10:10 says:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

— John 10:10

I take that as literal. I really believe that the enemy is out to steal from us - to steal our joy and steal our peace. He is out to destroy and to kill us. I take that as literal. He wants to get us addicted to anything it takes. He wants to rob us of anything. He wants our lives. This is what Satan does. This is what he's after.

The primary way that he steals, kills, and destroys - his foot in the door - is temptation.

The Tools of Temptation

Go to Genesis chapter 3. Here's what we're going to do. The Bible says in Ephesians 6 that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities of darkness. It tells us to take our stand against the enemy and the schemes of the devil. The word "scheme" there refers to a tactical approach.

Satan is not like God. He's not all-knowing, all right? Sometimes we see those cartoons, and there's an angel on one side and a demon on the other. They're like equals, just trying to talk to you. That's not the way this works, okay? Satan is a created being. He's on a leash. He doesn't know everything. He's not like God. God is all-knowing and all-powerful.

But here's what Satan does know: He watches film on our lives. He knows the choices that we make. He knows our weaknesses. He's seen us. He's observed us. He's smart. And so he knows what it can take to trip us up. There's a scheme there.

When we go to Genesis chapter 3, we're going to see that his schemes haven't changed since Genesis chapter 3. They're the same schemes he plays out against Jesus in Matthew chapter 4, and they're the same schemes he uses against us every single day.

If you're taking notes, the title of this section is "The Tools of Temptation," because this is what Satan uses to twist us up. It started in Genesis chapter 3.

By the way, I don't have time to go into this, but if you want a great study, read Romans chapter 5 this week, where Paul contrasts the first Adam, who was in the garden, a perfect environment, but still chose to sin against God and messed everything up, with Jesus, whom he calls the second Adam, who went into a wilderness, fought the devil, defeated the devil at the cross, and cleaned everything up.

It's the difference between the first Adam and the second Adam. It's why we worship the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, I don't have time to go into it, but read Romans chapter 5 and 1 Corinthians chapter 15. It mentions the second Adam and gives this contrast.

Let me give you four tools of temptation that Satan uses. He used them in Genesis chapter 3. We'll look at it in just a minute. He uses them in Matthew chapter 4. We'll look at that in just a minute. These are two case studies. Satan watches film on us, so let's watch some film on him this morning, all right?

Here's what he tries to do:

First, he creates doubt. That's what he does every single time.

Second, he perverts legitimate desires. God has wired us to desire certain things: relationship with Him, relationship with others, and community. He's given us all sorts of legitimate desires, and Satan wants to pervert those desires.

Third, he distorts truth. We've already seen that. He's the father of lies.

Ultimately, he deceives. He sets the hook, if you will.

Now let's look at Genesis 3, and we'll see this play out. These don't necessarily happen in a sequential order. They can happen in any way that he chooses to come against us.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

— Genesis 3:1

Do you see that? He's creating doubt. "Did God really say?"

Satan always puts a question mark where God puts a period.

Seniors who are graduating, this is very important. As you move on to school, this is one of Satan's greatest tools against you. He's going to want to put a question mark where God put a period. "You really believe what you grew up in? What you learned at camp and Vacation Bible School? What you learned in your church? You think that's really real?"

He just puts a question mark where God has put a period.

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."

— Genesis 3:2-4

Do you see that? It's a distortion of truth. It's a lie.

"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

— Genesis 3:5

He takes that legitimate desire for knowing God and being in a relationship with God, and he perverts it. He says, "No, no, no. You're going to be like God." He perverts that desire. It raises in her the thought, "Wow, be like God?"

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

— Genesis 3:6

That's where the hook is set. Satan deceives. He got them exactly where he wanted them.

Within these tools of temptation - creating doubt, distorting truth, perverting desires, and ultimately deceiving - there are three things that I would call pressure points. Again, they haven't changed from Genesis 3 to Matthew 4 to me and you today. This is where Satan tempts us. We're watching film on him today.

Number one, he targets our physical appetites. John would call this the lust of the flesh and the desire of the eyes. Notice how it says that Eve saw that the fruit was "a delight to the eyes." He held up that fruit. It's a delight to the eyes. So he tempts us in the area of physical appetites, the lust of the flesh.

Number two, he targets our personal ambitions. "This world is about you. It's about your needs being met and you getting yours. You, you, you, you, you are the center of the universe." He targets personal ambitions.

Number three, he targets our spiritual allegiances. Who are you going to listen to? Who are you going to bow down to?

Every temptation you face can be put into one of these three areas. You see it in Genesis 3. You see it in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4.

Look at these pressure points. Let's go back to Matthew chapter 4. Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. He's hungry, and the tempter says:

If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

— Matthew 4:3

I don't care if you're on the Atkins diet or whatever you're doing. If you don't eat for 40 days and those stones look like bread, that's a temptation, right? I never understood those of you who give up bread, all right? That's between you and the Lord. But He calls it the substance of life. Eat your bread, all right?

Look at it. He says, "Command these stones to turn to bread. Use Your power, Jesus, to turn these stones to bread. You can do this. Your Father isn't providing for You. He's making You go hungry out here. You don't have to rely on God."

Again, this is a target toward physical appetite. "Feed Your flesh. You need it." In my mind's eye, I see Satan, after 40 days when Jesus is tired, kind of putting his arm around Jesus. "You can do this. You need this."

What does Jesus say in verse 4?

It is written,

"Man shall not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

— Matthew 4:4

Underline "It is written." We'll come back to it.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,"

and

*"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."*

— Matthew 4:5-6

This is Psalm 91. Essentially, what Satan is doing here is saying, "Jesus, don't go to the cross to be followed. Do something spectacular."

This is personal ambition right here. "Throw Yourself down. The Scripture says the angels will bear You up. You're not going to strike Your foot against a stone. They'll hold You up. Don't go to the cross. When You jump down and You're saved by angels, man, just think of all the people who will come to worship You and bow down to You."

What is Satan doing? He's deceiving. He's distorting the truth. He uses the Word of God to do it, but it's just a half-truth of the Word of God. And we know any half-truth is a lie.

Does Jesus fall for it? No. Look at what He says in verse 7:

Again it is written, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

— Matthew 4:8-9

We know Satan, from Ephesians chapter 2, is called "the prince of the power of the air." Jesus had a right to the kingdoms of this world. He left the confines of heaven and came to earth. Can you imagine that temptation? He sees the kingdoms, and this is targeting spiritual allegiance. "Just bow down, worship me, and they're Yours."

What a temptation that must have been - to have the kingdoms of the world without the suffering of enduring the wrath of God. And yet Jesus doesn't fall for it. He says:

Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

"You shall worship the Lord your God

and him only shall you serve."

— Matthew 4:10

This is the enemy's play. Anytime he tempts us, it always looks pretty, but there's always a hook.

I go to preteen camp every year. I encourage you, if you've got kids in those preteen years, get them to kids camp. I trusted Jesus at kids camp as an 11-year-old boy. Every year I go back. I'm at least preaching one or two nights at camp, just as a reminder of that time that Jesus saved me as a little boy.

When I talk to them about temptation, sometimes I'll bring a little lure like this. I had to get Pastor Stephen to give me one because I'm not a fisherman. He had plenty.

It looks so good, so flashy, so enticing. But I tell these preteen kids, and I tell you today, what do you have to do? You've got to look for the hook. Because I promise you, the hook is there. That's what temptation is.

Here's the thing about temptation: It doesn't even have to be flashy. All the enemy has to do is distract us a little bit.

I looked this up. Did you know that if pilots are one degree off in their coordinates, the results can be devastating? If they're traveling by air from San Francisco to Los Angeles and they're just one degree off, they'll be six miles off target by the time they're supposed to arrive. Just one degree.

If they're flying from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., and they're just one little degree off, they'll end up 43 miles away in Baltimore. Just one degree off.

See, this is what temptation does. Satan doesn't have to make a big flash. He does it sometimes. There's always a hook, but sometimes it's just a small distraction. We're supposed to be walking with Jesus, our eyes on Him, and it doesn't have to be much. It can just be one little sidestep here. Look at how the body's turned. I'm no longer walking this way. I'm walking this way.

This is the danger of temptation, and this is why Scripture says over and over and over again that we must fight.

How to Defeat Temptation

We've seen the definition of temptation, the origin of temptation, and the tools of temptation. Now let's look, as we close, at how to defeat temptation. This is where the rubber hits the road. What do we do in order to defeat temptation?

There are three gifts God has given us to help us say no to temptation.

The first gift He has given us is the Word of God. How many times did we see Jesus battling the enemy with each temptation? "It is written. It is written. It is written."

I don't know another way to engage the lies the enemy sends our way than by combating them with the truth of God's Word.

Psalm 119, verse 11, says:

*I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

— Psalm 119:11

I really don't know what else to say. If we're going to have victory in a consistent way over temptation, we've got to start engaging with this Word in a way that plants it in our hearts. This means Scripture memory. This means listening to God's Word and putting it in places where you see it. It's got to capture your mind.

I remember being a freshman in college. I'm in Bible school, and my professor comes in. It's a bunch of ministry majors. We're 18 years old, and we want to charge hell with a water pistol. We are passionate, man. Let's go.

He says, "Gentlemen" - and I couldn't tell you a quote from another class in the four years that I was there, but this one I remember - "the battlefield for your soul starts in your mind. If Satan can win the war in your mind, he's got you beat."

Do a word study about your mind engaging with the Word of God. In Ephesians chapter 6, part of the armor of God is the helmet of salvation. Put on the helmet of salvation.

First Peter 1 says:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

— 1 Peter 1:13

Romans 12 says:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

— Romans 12:2

Romans chapter 8 says:

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

— Romans 8:6

Which one do you want?

You've got to engage in the Word of God in a way that gets it into your heart. College students, as you're going away, and high school seniors, as you're graduating, you've got to get into a good church. You've got to get community around you. You've got to get the truth in your mind over and over and over again.

This is the power source. When we read the Bible, it reads us.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

— Hebrews 4:12

I cannot tell you enough that if you want to defeat sin and temptation, you've got to get into the Word of God and let the Word of God get into you. There are no shortcuts. You've got to get into God's Word.

Secondly, He's given you the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is what He's given us to fight: the Spirit of God.

When you receive the Lord Jesus into your life, aren't you grateful that God doesn't send us into the wilderness by ourselves? He puts His Holy Spirit in us.

Now, we sang it earlier. It's a truth from Scripture. Paul said:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

— Romans 8:11

My New Testament reading right now is 1 John:

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

— 1 John 4:4

Now, listen. Don't tell me that there's an addiction you can't kick or a habit that you can't get over if you are a son or daughter of God. God's Spirit lives in you. You can say no to that temptation as you submit your life to the Spirit of God and walk in step with the Spirit.

The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another, according to Galatians chapter 5. It's like two Rottweilers, and the one that you feed is the one that's going to win.

You will either feed the Spirit, and it will grow strong, or you will feed the flesh. You feed the Spirit by giving your mind to His words, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and doing what the Holy Spirit says. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Otherwise, you will give your mind and your life to the flesh. Whichever one you feed is the one that's going to get stronger.

You have the Spirit of God in you.

Listen, it's getting to be hurricane season here in Houston, all right? We're all ready, June to November. You know what happens when these hurricanes come through. If you don't have a generator, you're in trouble if the power goes out. You have no chance against a hurricane and the Houston heat if you don't have a power source there that's working.

The same goes for the Christian. You have no shot at saying no to temptation and living victoriously if you're not plugged into the power source of the Holy Spirit.

How does this happen? It's John chapter 15: abiding in the Word.

God has given you the Word of God to defeat temptation. He's given you the Spirit of God to defeat temptation. Third and finally, He's given you the armor of God.

Ephesians chapter 6 - read it in your own time. God has given you spiritual armor to wear every single day:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

— Ephesians 6:11

Put on the whole armor of God, not some of the armor, all of the armor. That tense of "put on" is this idea that you put it on and you keep it on. You can never afford to take it off. Again, the enemy plays for keeps. He's insidious. He's patient. And so we've got to put on the armor of God.

Interestingly, if you read about the armor of God - the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, feet fitted in readiness to share the gospel, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God - Jesus encapsulates all of them. Jesus is truth. He is righteousness.

Really, what Paul is saying is, if you want to put on the armor of God, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Didn't Paul say that in Romans 13:14?

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

— Romans 13:14

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ like you put on clothes this morning.

If you want to defeat temptation, this is the way to do it. Wake up every single day, giving your mind to God, surrendering to the Spirit of God, and putting on the armor of God.

I close with this story. I read it a few years ago. It was about a scientist named Temple Grandin. Temple Grandin was doing research on how to gently kill cows because science was proving, and I didn't know this, that cows experienced high stress levels when they were under duress. As a result, they would release hormones that would lower the meat quality. Grandin was researching ways to lower the cows' stress before their lives were taken.

Listen to what the researcher said about her work:

"What they learned was that workers shouldn't yell at the cows, and they should never, ever use cattle prods because they're counterproductive and unneeded. If you just keep the cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they're led. Don't surprise them, don't unnerve them, and above all, don't hurt them. Well, at least until you slit their throats at the end.

"Along the way, this scientist devised new technology that has revolutionized the ways of the big slaughter operation. In this system, the cows aren't prodded off the truck, but they're led in silence onto a ramp. They go through a squeeze chute, a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother's nuzzling touch. The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the same kind of way they've traveled so many times before.

"As they mosey along the path, they don't even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument delivers a surgical strike right between their eyes. It's their transition from livestock to meat, and they're never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it.

"The pioneer of this technology commends it to the slaughterhouses and affectionately gives it a nickname. She calls it 'the stairway to heaven.'"

I read that story, and I think that's exactly what Satan does with us as it relates to temptation. He lulls us to sleep and makes us comfortable, and we don't even realize that the temptation we're up against is going to be the very thing that takes our lives.

Christians, we've got to fight. Fight.

Get into the Word of God. Memorize it, and use the sword of the Spirit as a weapon to combat the enemy's lies. Surrender and submit your life to the Spirit of God so that you're empowered and infused with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Say no to temptation. See it before it even captures your attention.

Put on the full armor of God so that you can do war against the enemy in a way that honors Christ. Let's fight for the glory of Christ's name. Amen?

Let's pray together.

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. I want to encourage you today, if you're here and you've never received Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, today is the day of salvation.

Listen, you're here. I don't know what brought you here. It could be that you're new to the area and you're just checking out a church. It could be that you went through a valley, you're in a dark night of the soul, and you just needed something that was bigger than you. I have no idea why you're here. Maybe you were invited by a friend.

But if you're here this morning and you know your sins have never been forgiven, and you've never trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, I want to give you an opportunity today to receive Christ.

All you have to do is turn from your sin. The Bible calls this repentance. And you place your faith and trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, believing that He shed His blood for you personally.

Listen, the greatest temptation you're going to have today, if you're here and you're not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you've never submitted your life to Him, is to listen to the lie of the enemy that says, "Hey, there's always tomorrow. You don't have to do that today. You're worked up in the moment. Get on out of here. Get some fresh air, then make your decision."

I'm just telling you, that's a lie from the enemy.

"I've got to have everything together before I come to Jesus. I've got to know all the right answers to all of my questions before I come to know Jesus." That is a lie straight from the pit of hell.

The Bible says:

*Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.*

— Hebrews 3:15

The Bible says:

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

— 2 Corinthians 6:2

So if you're here and you've never received Christ, we're going to stand in just a moment and we're going to sing, and I'm going to invite you to come. If you came with someone, they'll come with you.

You say, "What happens if I come down?"

We're going to have a word of prayer with you. We're going to encourage you, and we're going to give you some resources to help you begin your walk with Christ. That's all there is to it. We want to celebrate the decision that God's making in your life.

Others of you, maybe you're on your own, in the sense that there's no church home. Everybody ought to have a heavenly home. You ought to have a personal home, and you ought to have a church home.

Maybe you're here and you need to join our faith family. You've been sitting on the sidelines. You've been coming and taking in, taking in, and God's leading you here. Don't listen to the enemy. Don't listen to the lies that you don't need a church home. Are you kidding me? We all need accountability. We're in this together.

Maybe you just need prayer. You're facing a certain temptation. It would be our privilege to pray for you. I have no idea what decision God's laying on your heart. Maybe it's to be baptized, like we talked about earlier.

But here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pray. We're going to stand. We're going to sing. As soon as we begin singing, if God's spoken to your heart, I want you to come forward. We'll have our pastors and volunteers here to receive you. You do what the Spirit of God is telling you to do.

Lord Jesus, this is Your time of invitation, and where You've spoken to hearts, let us respond in a way that glorifies You. In Jesus' name, amen.