

**“Winning the War Within;  
We Value Personal Integrity”**  
1/31/99

Thank you so much, Larry Ford. Larry, if I am not mistaken, we met in the aisle of the First Baptist Church of Merritt Island after a service one Sunday. I don't think you sang in that service, I think you were just, did you sing in that service? I couldn't remember for sure if you sang or not. Sorry about that! What I remember is that you told me about a chorus on a Steve Green album, on the cross. Do you remember what that chorus was? It was, I am crucified with Christ. Then there was a chorus. There was another one you told me about. I am sorry I don't remember right this minute but I tell you that God used that. I tell you, I have used that song. I have gone blank as well. I was just listening to you sing and I couldn't bring up the words to that song in the process. Embrace the Cross- that's it! Thank you. That was going to bother me the whole time I was preaching this morning. Have you all ever done that? Someone is singing and you are thinking about another song but you can't bring the words up because you are so caught up in the tune of the one you are listening to? But I tell you, Embrace the Cross has been a marvelous piece and I have put that in my car so many times on the way to church on Sundays. I let that be as though it was the theme song of my heart for that day, that I would Embrace the Cross of Christ and be faithful to it. I said all of that to say, Larry, thank you for coming and singing and being with us today. You have blessed us and we were grateful to have you here.

I am so glad to see each and every one of you here this morning and for us to have this privilege of taking yet another step in the study of the Book of James. You might want to be turning there in James, Chapter 1.

As you are going in that direction I need to just pause this morning and share with you that I want to make a confession at the opening of this service today. You know, in some church traditions confessions are done in nice little private booths in privacy. In our tradition you do it openly. So, I am going to need to just make this a public confession this morning. I was tempted this week and I failed.

I went to King's Market one afternoon on the way home from the church. I needed to pick up a few things to help with the dinner meal that Connie was preparing. When I pulled into the parking lot and went in and got in the front door I was immediately slowed in my pace because there were just a tremendous number of people standing at the bakery counter. I couldn't even get past the bakery counter to go on and get the things I needed because all of these people were there. What was happening was that they were taking fresh Danish and donuts and putting them up on the counter for sampling purposes. I am telling you there were just people everywhere.

My first thought was I wish these people would just get out of the way. You would think if they wanted to buy groceries, they would just come buy groceries. This is not a restaurant, we are not here to eat, get out of my way. That is what I thought. I went over to the produce section. I looked at lettuce and tomatoes and I got all of this good healthy

produce. But there was a problem. I had not had one thing to eat all day that day. When I finished picking up my produce I turned and looked and there was no one between that counter and me. Somehow that crowd, I guess they all arrived at the same time and were there and then moved on. Suddenly nobody was standing there and you know what I did? Suddenly the Pharisee, who had already pronounced judgement on all of the people who were in the line decided it was his turn to go and sample the morsels that were there. I went and took a half of Danish and just stuffed it in my mouth. As I was licking the final morsels of that Danish off my tongue and as I was walking through the store I thought, now why did I do that? To be honest with you I had had a busy day. But I had been trying to count my calories and, therefore, part of my purpose in not eating was trying not to eat as much. As those final bites of that sweet, delicious Danish were going down I was thinking, it seemed as though I had won the battle and then I lost the whole war right there in King's Market that afternoon. You know, really and truly, the loss was not nearly so much a calorie loss, though it was a calorie issue, I probably could have eaten something earlier in the day that would have had fewer calories than what I put away in that piece of Danish and piece of donut that I ate.

I told you this was a confession didn't I. I don't know if they offered you to take two or not. I didn't even stop to think about that. But, anyway, when I walked away, ultimately, I realized that it wasn't nearly so much a calorie issue as it was an integrity issue. I mean integrity by the fact that there had been a commitment in my life to reduce calories to increase my health and to reduce my weight. When I violated that it was not just that I took in more calories in a moment than I should have, the issue was that I violated something that I was trying to uphold as a standard on the inside. What happened was I was tempted and I failed.

What I have just described to you plays out in your life every day and every week as well. Because there is a battle, there is a war that we are all engaged in and it is called the war within. It is the battle between doing what we know we should do that is right and wrong, and that which we oftentimes feel like doing. That battle is not always the same. For many of you you could have walked right through King's Market that day and you would never have been tempted because your temptation is not necessarily a dietary one. Temptations come in all shapes and sizes and colors, in all times, in moments, and seasons of life. There is never a time in life when you do not have to come face to face with the reality of wrongful desire and a right standard.

Because I believe the issue of integrity is such an important one and because I know that vulnerability is such a real issue in our lives, this morning I want us to take time to examine what James had to say in James, Chapter 1 about our own vulnerability to temptation, about the value of integrity and the importance of having a standard of integrity in each of our lives. Let us read together beginning in James, Chapter 1, and verse 13. Let no one say when he is tempted. Let me just go no further than that.

The word when means it is going to happen. It is a common experience. Each and every one of us will face it. It is not an if, maybe, or might, it is a when, and it is a reality. But when it happens in your life, James says let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted

by God. God cannot be tempted by evil. Nor does he, himself, tempt anyone. But each one, that is an individual reference. Each and every one of us, individually, is tempted, not in the same way, not in the same time. But each and every one of us is tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. It comes down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. For, of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James is very familiar with the subject of temptation. In a very simple but very straightforward fashion he describes for us how temptation comes and what temptation does in our lives. In this process it is as though he begs some questions. Because he is giving us some insights, he is giving some answers; there are some questions that are just natural to ask and to use as tools to help us understand this portion of scripture. Obviously, the opening question is the one that relates to verse 13, no one can say when he is tempted, and I am tempted by God. Literally, the question that James is begging, the question that James is answering is this, where does temptation come from? In this battle that is so common to every one of us where is it that we begin with this problem called temptation? James is very quick to say, let me just make it very clear, let me just state it and put it out there – temptation does not come from God.

One of the oldest tricks in the book has been for man to blame God for his problems. In fact, all you have to do is to go back to the Book of Genesis, go back to the Garden of Eden, find in Genesis Chapter 3 that moment when Adam had partaken of the forbidden fruit with Eve, his wife, when both of them had sinned, when both of them were naked, when both of them had hidden themselves and God came looking for them. Do you remember God asked some questions about what Adam had done. Do you remember what Adam said? He said, Lord, the woman. That was a great answer wasn't it? Not my fault, God, it is hers. But that is not really what he said. He said, Lord, the woman whom you gave me, she caused me to sin. He immediately began to blame God. He immediately began to say, God, it is your problem not my problem. But I want you to know that James comes back again here and asserts and clearly puts in front of us this reality that whenever we are tempted there is not a one of us who can say, God has tempted me because God is not the source of temptation. God will never solicit us to do evil. God is pure. God is righteous. God is holy, even as we have sung just in these last few moments. When we understand who God is we understand that there is never a time when we can look upward and say, God, you are the one that caused this.

James goes on to say in the 14<sup>th</sup> verse that each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. He says, let me just tell you, there is something else you need to know about temptation and that is that temptation isn't just outward. I don't mean there may not be some alluring things, some attractive things, on the outside but it are really not those outward things. He says, the problem is not upward or outward it is an inward problem. Because you see what you see outwardly only stimulates that which is going on inwardly.

Now I was in a market where Danish was being served. The problem was not that the Danish was there the problem was there is a desire in here that likes Danish. Had I been in a bait shop and worms had been sitting out on the counter, I wouldn't have had any interest at all because I don't have an internal desire for worms. But I want you to know all I had to do was look beyond the bakery over to the fish cabinet and I could tell a whole bunch of fish had fallen for some kind of bait. Okay? That was real evident. Because, you see, fish are attracted to one thing, we are attracted to something else. I may not be attracted to what you are attracted to, you may not be attracted to what I am, but the problem is it is not what is in the world outside, it is what is wrong inside of us. The problem is that the Bible says that every one of us is tempted because there is something wrong, something skewed, something in error inside of us that causes us to want to compromise the standard of God and the sufficiency of God in our lives.

In the engineering world there is a term called structural integrity. What is meant by that is that a building, like this building, has not only good materials and a proper design but that they are put together properly. You can have good materials and a good design but if those who put it together construct it in a wrong fashion then there is a structural problem with that building. Or, you can have a good design and good construction and bad materials. That can bring default as well. Or, you can have a design problem. But the Bible has already said there is not a design problem, God made us and God made us in a certain way. The problem is not with the designer nor is the problem with the materials, that is the world around us. The problem is in the construction on the inside of us and what James is telling us is that we have a problem with structural integrity and, therefore, we need to understand what is wrong inside of us. It is something that is wrong with all of us. It is what the Bible calls sin.

Sin is simply the standard of man instead of the standard of God. It is man's acceptance instead of God's acceptance. The Bible simply tells us in this portion of scripture that every one of us has an internal problem of structural integrity and that it is common for all of us and that every one of us struggle with points of weakness and frailty and the potential of collapse and failure.

Keep your hand here in the Book of James and turn back just a few pages to the Book of I Corinthians for just a moment if you will. I Corinthians, Chapter 10. I want you to see how Paul outlined complementing what James had to say. You know, sometimes people try to put James and Paul as though they were in conflict with each other because one talked about faith and the other talked about works. I don't think they are in conflict with one another because they are not standing face to face. I think they are complementing one another. They stood back to back, one defending the purity of faith and the other one defining what real faith looks like. So, really, these two men help to complement and to help us understand what life is and what following Christ is all about.

In I Corinthians, Chapter 10, verse 12 the Bible says, therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he do what? Fall. There is a problem with structural integrity. You may think you stand. You may think you are competent. You may think you are strong

but the Bible says, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall for there is no temptation that has overtaken you except such as is common to man. That is, we all have the same common problem of weakness, a propensity to sin, to fail, to collapse because every one of us has some internal problems.

Before I go further in discussing what the internal problems are let us talk about some things that are common to man. Let us talk about some of the things about the construction and the design and the makeup of how God has made us that we need to understand if we are going to be able to overcome the downward pull of temptation. The Bible tells us that God has made us with certain drives and with certain desires. Let us think about it for a moment.

There is a common drive, a common desire, that is being fulfilled in your life by being in this building this morning and that is simply your worship drive. You can study anthropology and in every culture of mankind while there may be great diversity in the discussion of who God is and what God is like, whether he is one or whether he is many. While you may have all of those arguments in human anthropology, what you will find is that archaeology has confirmed it and anthropology has demonstrated it, that in every civilization and in every culture there is among mankind a need and a desire to worship. It is not true of the animal kingdom. The animals look down for their fulfillment in existence in the things of this earth. But the Bible tells us, and even more, history and study tells us, that mankind has a need to look up and to look beyond the earth and say, why am I here and what was I created for. Man has a need to worship, to express his honor, to express his allegiance, to express his love for someone beyond himself. There is a worship drive that God has put in you. It can either be good or it can be bad but it is there.

There is another drive that is common to every one of us. It is not only our worship drive it is our significance drive. We all have a need for significance, to feel that our life is important, to feel that our life makes a contribution, to feel that we are here for a purpose. That is a normal God-driven drive. There is a desire for worship and significance.

There is a desire for affection. Did you know that God gave you your desire for affection, that it is natural for parents to hold and coddle their children? That it is natural and normal for husbands and wives to express affection? That there is a need when we around close friends to put our arms around them, to hold them, to draw them close? We all have a need for touch and for affection.

There is a need in every one of our lives for approval. We have a need to be approved. Obviously, that approval should begin in our homes, with our parents, with our families. Yet, so many times, this desire, this drive is skewed when approval is withheld or when someone is not able to feel affirmed in their life. Yet God has given us a need for approval.

We all have a desire and a drive for rest. Some of you are tempted to take advantage of that desire right this minute! I can see better than you think I can! The fact of the matter

is that God has given you a desire for rest, to take a nap, get a good night's sleep. In fact, the Bible says he gives his beloved sleep. There is a need; there is a drive, a desire for rest in all of our lives. That is a God-given desire. A God-given drive.

We have a drive for success. I simply use that word because it is a common word today, the word, success. Yet, however you want to describe it, there is a need for us to feel that our life is ever progressing and becoming stronger and better and more developed. There is a need for success, a need for progress in our lives.

We all have a sex drive. It is a very beautiful and a very wonderful thing that God made and has given as a gift to a husband and to a wife. It is to be the bonding point of the marriage relationship. It is a beautiful thing that was created for enjoyment and was created for responsibility. It is a God-given thing.

We all have a drive and a desire for hunger. I talked about that a few minutes ago. Nothing wrong with having a hunger drive, with enjoying good food. After the first service - I love kids. A little boy in that service drew me a picture of Danish and drew one of those big circles with an X through it. You know, like no Danish for the Pastor. I love that! Isn't that awesome! Just a reminder not to let my hunger drive get out of control up there. That is exactly what I want to remind you, don't let your hunger drive get out of control. I know I am talking about food and this is a sensitive hour to be doing that but we have a hunger drive. We all have a need to eat and enjoy good food.

We all have a security drive, a need to be secure, to feel that life is protected and to have a sense of security about us.

We all have a relationship drive a drive to have friends and to be connected to other people, not to be isolated or to be alone. That is why a church can be such a positive connecting point for that drive and desire in our lives. You see, God has given us all these things and they are God-given materials, God-given design. It was all a part of the construction of what God put into us. But then came sin. Then came man trying to fulfill his own drives and his own desires in his way. Then came man giving himself not to the dominion of God but to the dominion of the ruler of this world, to Satan. In that process, in that surrender, not to God but to Satan, to the world, to the flesh, because of those things now temptation exists at the point of God-given drives but that temptation comes as a solicitation to do evil because that is what temptation is. It is a solicitation to do evil. But, more importantly, it is the solicitation or the enticement. Look at this definition, the enticement to fulfill a God-given drive in a God-forbidden way. That is what temptation is. It is when you are given an opportunity to allow the God-given drives on the inside to try to find fulfillment in a way that is irresponsible and is unrestrained and that is outside the standard of God for your life. So, you see, temptation comes from the inside. We do have drives and we do have desires. They were a part of God's plan. But the problem is is that we want to try to meet those without God. What Satan does so often is that he will set up the trap and bait us and entice us because he knows that we are weak. You see, he looks for our weaknesses.

You know, tonight two major football teams are going to collide down in Miami. In the process of preparation, hundreds of hours of study have gone into viewing the tapes of each of the other teams in play. The purpose of that process is so the coaches can understand how the other team does things. In particular, they want to know what the other team's strengths are and how they might be able to create a defense against the positive offensive move of the other team. But, even more importantly, they want to understand what are the team's weaknesses because if you can find the weakness you can press that point. That is exactly what the adversary does. He ever looks to find the point of weakness in that drive, that desire package in our life and to set us up at such a time that we will be vulnerable to temptation and to sin.

Where does temptation come from? It comes from the inside. There is something in us, a problem with structural integrity. Not with the way God made us but with the way that sin has warped us. We need to understand that we are drawn away as the scripture says here in James, Chapter I, and enticed by our desire, by our own lust.

That brings me to a second question that I believe we need to address this morning. That is this question. Is it a sin to be tempted? If this process begins with let no one say when he is tempted I am tempted by God because God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when he is... You know, it is talking about temptation and temptation being this prelude to enticement and to sin and to death. So, the question is, is temptation a sin? Let me give you a categorical answer. No! It is not a sin to be tempted. Someone has said, God has many sons only one of them has been sinless but none of them have been without temptation. Because even Jesus, our Lord and Savior, was tempted. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus was baptized, just like you saw this morning. Jesus was baptized; identifying himself with us, identifying himself as the Lamb of God whom came to die on the cross, to be buried, and to be risen again on the third day. Jesus was baptized. It was a heightened moment of spiritual victory in his life but immediately after baptism he went to the wilderness to be tempted. That is one of the amazing things of life.

Do you want to know one of the biggest times you are vulnerable to temptation? It is right after you walk out of a church service. Because you come to a service like this and just like a mosquito you stick your nozzle in and you start filling up and thinking, man I am full I am going to fly away. Boy, I tell you, just like that you get swatted. You need to understand that there is a vulnerability and that a part of the Christian life is certainly being challenged and stirred and encouraged spiritually but knowing that you are going to be tested and tried. Temptation is going to come. Jesus, our Lord and Savior was tempted.

Now, how does temptation play out because there was something different about the result of temptation with Jesus and the result of temptation in my life and in your life? The Bible says each one is tempted, verse 14 of James I. Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed and then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. What is the process? How does temptation work?

1. It begins with an internal desire.
2. It moves to a point of deception. I need to realize that I am seeing something on the outside that is making me think that it is going to fulfill the desire, the craving, on the inside. I need to know when I am being deceived. I need to see it. I need to straighten out the thinking at that point in my life because, you see, we are drawn away, we are enticed. It is just like when that lure is in the water with that fish and that fisherman is just kind of baiting, he is just kind of saying, come on, come on. You see, there is an enticement. The deception is to assume that I can somehow take the bait without getting the hook. You see, that is really what happens. It is when we begin to deceive ourselves. We begin to tell ourselves in temptation that the desire is so strong and that the fulfillment will be so great, regardless of God's plan that we begin to give in. You see, there is a deception that takes place in our lives at that point. Then from that deception comes a decision, I am going to do it. That is what happens the moment that fish in the water says, go for it! It is beyond just awareness and attraction, it is the point where you make a decision to move forward. Are you aware when you are deceiving yourself?

It is kind of like one of those infomercials on TV. Have you ever fallen prey to an infomercial. I have. I own a George Foreman grill. I remember the day. It was a Saturday morning. I had had several cups of coffee, I was hungry, I was sitting in bed, and I was watching the infomercial. There was a desire, eat more food, eat fewer calories. It was that same hunger thing, you know. Then there was the deception. Somehow I began to look at that commercial, that infomercial, and assume that if I would eat the food I would look just like the people who were advertising it. I am not saying George deceived me, I am just saying I looked at what was there. I thought, I am going to be more like that. I am going to have more food and I am going to be skinnier for eating all of that food. Then came the decision to pick up the phone and punch in the number and give them my credit card and say, send me one of those George Foreman grills. I will never forget the look on Connie's face when I told her I had ordered one. You know what? It came and we used it but after desire, deception, and decision came death because George now sits under the counter totally unattended to on a regular basis. The interesting thing is I didn't get any skinnier I just tried more recipes. Yet, you see, something as silly as that is exactly what we fall prey to. You see, we fail to understand the process that leads us to destruction.

In her book entitled, "The Snare," Lois Mauday writes these words: "People don't lead moral lives one day and then have an affair or a moral collapse the next. It may appear that way but it is a process. The process is often overlooked because some stages are not as obvious to us, the viewer; thus they are difficult to detect. That is why it seems to happen overnight. Any of us could be in the process right now. Not one of us is immune. The earlier the danger signals can be detected and responded to the easier it will be to change direction. If you love potato chips and know that you can't stop eating them after you eat one until the bag is empty, then you are better off to never take the first bite. Some steps on the road to immorality are not wrong in and of themselves yet those

very steps may be the first potato chips that some people take.” You see, there is a process. While it is not a sin to be tempted what is wrong is when I fail to recognize the process, fail to intervene in that process, and fail to change the course quickly enough. Here is our thinking. Ooh, I have a desire, let me see how close I can get over here without falling off. Let me just see how close I can get and maybe I won’t fall. We just keep easing to the edge. But the reality is that if you do not deal with temptation decisively, then you will yield to temptation.

3. So that brings the third question that we need to ask and that is, What should I do when I am tempted? What should I do? Or, maybe to put it in the terms that we see so often today, WWJD, what would Jesus do? Well, you know it is great the Bible gives us a picture of that. The Bible gives us an illustration in the fourth chapter of Matthew when Jesus was tempted. The Bible tells us that when Satan came and tempted him it was after his baptism. He had been in the wilderness for forty days fasting. He literally had not had any food in forty days. Satan came along and said why don’t you turn the stones into bread. You could perform a miracle right here and you could have a hot loaf of bread. Jesus could even have butter if he wanted it. Do you know how good bread smells when it is being baked? I mean, hot, hot bread! I will be through in an hour so don’t worry about it! There is nothing like that and Satan said why don’t you do it? You know what Jesus said? He looked at him and said, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds of the mouth of God. Jesus, himself, did not rely on his own willpower. He immediately relied upon the power and the authority of the word of God. Because the secret to getting over temptation is not just fighting it at the level of your desire and your willpower, it is transferring the battle from the inside of you to the upside of who God is and what God is able to do.

So what has to happen when we are tempted is that we quickly have to hit the fast forward button in our life to move beyond the desire to understanding the deception, the decision, and the death that will come. Instead we need to transfer out of that zone of temptation and we need to get focused on God and who he is. Look at what James says. Don’t be deceived my beloved brethren, verse 16, every good gift and perfect gift is from above which comes down from the father of lights. God wants to meet the need of your life. God wants to be the one who will fulfill the yearning and the hunger. God gave you desires. He didn’t give them to you so that they would burn inside of you. He gave them to you that he might meet those needs and desires and that he might be the sufficiency of your life.

So how should I respond to temptation? I very quickly need to get to what is commonly called today the end of the day. I need to get to the end of the day and see what it really looks like. Here is the picture. God is good. He is good. He is good and he wants to meet the need of my life.

In his commentary on the Book of Matthew, Matthew Henry writes something that I think is such a poignant reflection of what we need to understand about temptation. He says, the primary thing Satan aims at in tempting good people is to overthrow their relationship to God as a father and so cut them off from their dependence on him and

their communion with him. Outward afflictions, needs, and burdens are the great arguments that Satan uses to make people of God question their sonship as if afflictions and difficulties were not consistent with their father's love. The devil aims to shake our faith in the word of God and to bring us to question the truth of that. He implants within people hard thoughts of God as if he were unkind, or unfaithful, or had forsaken or forgotten those who ventured their all with him. You see, what happens is that Satan wants to deceive us to make us think that we have to satisfy ourselves because God is holding out on us. That is exactly what he did with Adam and Eve. He said, has God said that you are going to be like him in the day that you eat of the fruit so God is holding out on you. But I want you to hear me this morning. God is good. God can be trusted. When you are tempted the important thing is to immediately transfer yourself to the goodness of God and to the Word of God.

Secondly, recognize that God is generous. He doesn't just give us a little something. He gives us everything we need. I love what it says here in James, Chapter 1, and verse 5. It says, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally. Boy, that is a turn of events. God and liberal used in the same sentence. The Bible says that God is liberal? Not he is a liberal; he is liberal, generous, willing to give. We need to understand that we need to get to the end of the day and see that God gives because God is good and God gives because God is generous. He is the Father with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. There is not any place in your life where you will be tempted that God cannot be found sufficient to meet you at that place. When you get to the end of the day you see that God is gracious. God has a grace that is correspondent to the need of the temptation of your life and whether it is a lust of the flesh, such as sexual desire, or whether it is a lust of the flesh, such as hunger or whether it is a lust of the soul, such as approval or affection, in all of these things God is gracious. God is more than able to meet you at that very point of need in your life. Not just to bring gratification but to bring satisfaction to your life. That is what the Bible tells us about Jesus in the Book of Hebrews. I love this! It says, now that we know what we have, Jesus, this great high priest with ready access to God, let's not let it slip through our fingers. We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He has been through weakness and testing, experienced it all, all but the sin. So, let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give, take mercy, and accept the help. Jesus is willing to give you help, to deliver you from temptation, to give you victory over the war that would go on inside of you, to let you know what it is to be a disciple. In fact, discipleship is nothing more than this; it is the process of letting everything in my life come under the lordship of Christ. It is living every day with dependence upon him to fulfill my desire rather than me trying to meet my own needs.

Just a few days ago someone sent me a new devotional book on the Book of Matthew. I was reading a selection in there by Joseph Parker. I was unfamiliar with Parker's ministry and yet, apparently, he was a contemporary of Charles Spurgeon years ago. He was probably the second most known preacher of London in those days. But listen to what he says; never question the validity of your baptism into spiritual life because it is immediately followed by fierce temptation. Read the life of your Lord and find from that life that you are just as much a son of God when the dove descends from heaven as when

you are tormented and vexed by all the forces of hell in the wilderness. God is not variable. His elections are not so many opportunities of recalling decrees. We sometimes speak of temptation as if it were an accident of life. We forget the words that the spirit led Jesus to the wilderness. These words indicate that temptations are a part of God's plan, a step in a succession to a better life. Sometimes we delude ourselves with the foolish imagination that if we step very softly; we will somehow get past the serpent's nest without letting him hear us. Somehow we are going to safely allude the devil. Take no such view. Life itself is a temptation. To be is to be nearly lost. To be here at all is to be in the devil's domain. Understand that you have to be tempted. The wilderness is not a sphere lying thousands of miles away from your course. Your eye is fixed on heaven and right across from sea to sea lies the wilderness and you are not going to escape it. There is no way to sneak into heaven. I will be assailed, tried, vexed, thrown down, battered, and if I have not passed through these experiences of this whole kind, then the work of Christ has been lost on me because these are the kinds of experiences that were intended and that put him to the cross. If I could simply get by with escape then Jesus would not have needed to die but we needed a sacrifice; therefore count it no strange thing when temptations come. To be finite is to be tempted.

You are going to be tempted just as I am tempted. But there is one who has overcome temptation and there is one who wants to make you the first fruits as the Bible says here in James, of his creatures. To be a new creature not with structural integrity at fault but with strength of character and strength of life that demonstrates that God is able to meet all of our needs.

Would you bow your heads with me in prayer?

Father, I want to thank you this morning for the power of your word. Lord, for the fact that you speak to this issue of our lives. Lord, I know that I am not the only one who was tempted this week. I know there are people in this building who were tempted. Lord, some of them won. Some of them overcame. Some of them trusted you. I pray that this moment would just be a moment of praise and thanksgiving to you as they say thank you, Lord, for delivering me from evil this week. Thank you for delivering me from temptation.

Lord, we rejoice with those who have had victory in their life this week. But Father, I know there are others who have fallen this week. They have fallen in ways that they are so ashamed of. Lord, no one else in this building knows but they know they have fallen. Yet, Lord, I thank you that you tell us that there is grace and mercy for those who have fallen. I thank you, Lord, in your word that it says that if we confess our sins that you are faithful and just to forgive us from sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Lord, I just pray that right now there would be a moment of confession that where falling has taken place that we would be restored and mended in relationship with you.

God, don't let us just come and put on the face this morning and try to fake religion. Lord, let our hearts be made right to you. We open ourselves and we cry with the

psalmist, search us, O God, know our hearts, try us, and know our thoughts. If there is any wicked way in us, lead us in the way everlasting.

Father, we pray for others who are here today and who are simply on a search in their life. Maybe they have come to church hoping that they could get better and stronger but Lord, what we all have to do is to admit our weakness and our need. I pray that there would be those today who would admit weakness and need for Christ and that, Lord, right now in this moment there would be a time of decision and of commitment to Jesus Christ. That rather than being deceived to believe that somehow they could live a life that would be good enough for you that they would see clearly the need to trust Christ and to put trust in him right now.

We come as we are and present ourselves to you and trust you to work in this hour in our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to look right up here. We are going to close our service by extending an invitation to people who have come today. It is a public thing, just as baptism was a public thing but it is a way for someone who is here today who would say, I need to know Jesus Christ, I need to have some spiritual answers in my life, to come and have that need met in your life.

Maybe there are others of you who have trusted Christ but you have never, as these this morning, followed him in the waters of baptism and, frankly, you need to take a step of identification openly with Christ and you need to let that be known. We are not going to baptize you right this minute. But at the next time we will schedule and plan and we will let you take a step of obedience and faith to Christ. Oh what a temptation it is to say, I believed privately, that is enough. No, Jesus says, stand and confess me openly. Be baptized and express your faith in Christ. So I want to invite you, if you have that need in your life, to come and to speak with one of the pastors and helpers who will be here. Maybe you would like information about becoming a part of this church fellowship. We are going to have a dinner this Wednesday evening. Just come this morning and let us know you are interested. We will be glad to get that information to you.

We are not going to sing long but we are going to sing. We are going to invite. Not entice but invite that you might leave here today with confidence in Christ.

Would you stand to your feet. Could we sing together, Come Just as You Are.