Sometimes we sinful human beings are just like the wolf of the Arctic regions that the local peoples
used to catch without having to hunt them down. They simply put some fresh meat on a sharp blade
and let the wolf do the rest of the work. The wolf with its insatiable appetite not only would eat the
meat off that blade but in the process would lick the blade clean, slicing its tongue in the process. Then
the wolf would become an easy target to kill or it would die by bleeding to death. In it's desire for food
it did not realize what it was doing to itself. It ends up consuming itself to feed it’s hunger.

Temptation is the world’s oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. We all have areas
of weakness. For some it is their temper. For others it might be over-eating, pornography, or drinking.
We all have areas in our lives where we fight for control. The good news is that God wants to help us
get control of our life. He wants to help us overcome temptation.

1 Cor 10:13  No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he
will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide
a way out so that you can stand up under it.

A man was late for an appointment to a downtown office building and ended up parking in a No Parking Zone. He wrote a note to "bribe" the cop and he put it under his windshield wiper. "I've
circled this block ten times and I have to make this appointment or my boss will be upset with me.
`Forgive us our trespasses'"  When he got back he found a ticket on his car and the officer had written
a note, "I've circled this block for ten years and if I don't give you a ticket, my boss will be upset with
me.  `Lead us not into temptation'"

Jesus taught us to pray saying “Lead us not into temptation.” He was saying by this that we all need
God’s help in overcoming temptation in our lives. So how do you overcome temptation? There are 3
things we need to remember:

1. REQUEST HELP FROM GOD

The boy was standing near an open box of cookies at a grocery store. The grocer approached the boy
and said “Now then, young man, what are you up to?” “Nothing,” replied the boy: “Nothing.” “Well it
looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie.” “You’re wrong, mister, I’m trying not to!” That is
temptation. It is trying to not do something you know is wrong.

Sin gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be happier if I follow it. The power of all
temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier. -- John Piper

To overcome temptation we need to deal with it in the correct way when it appears. We need to see
temptation from God’s perspective. One of the wrong ways that people handle temptation is that they
allow it to lead to condemnation. Have you ever been praying and all of a sudden the weirdest idea
from left field comes into your mind? You think you are not even a Christian to have such thoughts.
Where did you get an idea like that? The devil uses temptation to bring condemnation into our lives.

Temptation leads to 3 common reactions. The first is ALARM - how could I think such a thing? I
must be a terrible disgusting person. The second is FRUSTRATION – why do I keep falling in the
same area. The third is DISCOURAGEMENT – I am never going to be able to change.
This passage from 1 Corinthians tells us a lot about temptation. The first thing I want to point out is that it says that temptation is COMMON. Temptation is normal. It happens to everybody. We're all in the same boat. Anyone who says they are never tempted is a liar.

It is not a sin to be tempted. It becomes sin when we give in to temptation. The Bible says even Jesus was tempted. The Bible says He was tempted in all areas we are yet He did not sin. Someone once said "You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." You can't keep all the thoughts the devil wants to put in your mind out of your mind but you can reject them when they come.

A lot of people live under unnecessary condemnation, particularly Christians. They say, "How could I think such a thing? I thought I was beyond that!" No, you'll never outgrow temptation. The closer you get to the Lord, the more the devil is going to work on you. You don't have to feel guilty about temptation. It's not what you think but what you do with it that makes a difference.

A man at a fishing dock asked an old fisherman "If I were to fall into this water, would I drown?" It was his way of asking how deep the water was. The fisherman had a good answer. "No," he said. "Falling into the water doesn't drown anybody. It's staying under it that does."

The wrong way to face temptation is by allowing it to lead to condemnation. The right approach is to call out to God for help. The second piece of good news in this passage is that it says that no one ever HAS to fall into sin. There is always a way out of temptation.

Psalm 50:15 call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me

This is what I call a microwave prayer. It's not a long conversation with God. It's simply crying out HELP when you're being tempted. You don't have a long prayer, just HELP! Why does God want us to ask for help? Because he understands what we are going through.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus went through the same temptations we do. Did Jesus ever struggle with honesty? Yes. Anger? Self pity? Sexuality? Yes. He had a free will but He never sinned. Even better, He overcame it. He can help us. So He says, come boldly, with no hesitation. Don't be intimidated. Raise your voice to God and cry, "Help me!"

2. REFOCUS YOUR ATTENTION

The way you think determines the way you feel, the way you feel determines the way you act. Temptation always begins with a thought. The battle always begins in your mind. Whatever gets your attention gets you. The key to overcoming temptation is to refocus your attention. Don't try to resist the thought – simply refocus your mind. Whatever gets your attention gets you. It's a psychological law. You move toward whatever you focus on.

Have you ever gone up to a cliff and looked over and had this feeling that said, "Jump!" That isn't your suicidal tendencies coming out; it is just that you are following the focus of your attention.
When you are golfing or playing baseball the number one rule is that you always keep your eye on the ball. When you are learning to drive you are told to always watch in the direction you are going. Looking to either side will naturally pull the car to that direction. If you're on a diet and start telling yourself to avoid food then you will be drawn to the focus of your attention – FOOD. Your actions come from your attention. The more you think about something, the stronger it has a hold on you.

I talk to people all the time that say things like, "I'm depressed!" I ask them, "Do you want to be?" They say no. "Then why do you keep telling yourself that you are?" – you are what you focus on.

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James says evil thoughts lead to evil actions. It is like having a child, at first the baby is just a single cell but then it quickly grows until it is born and grows to adulthood. The key to overcoming temptation is to catch it early. Don't wait until it is full grown – deal with it when it is still small and weak. Don't fight it – simply refocus your attention on something else. Shift your thoughts. The more you fight a feeling, the more it controls you. If you ignore it, you weaken it.

But doesn't the Bible say to resist temptation? No, it does not. It says resist the TEMPTER. There is a big difference. When Jesus was out in the desert and the devil came to tempt him to use his miraculous power for selfish reasons and said, "Why don't you turn these stones to bread?" Jesus does not resist the temptation. He does not try to deceive himself into saying, "No thanks I'm not that hungry..." He was hungry! Instead he refocuses on God's Word and resists the tempter. The more you fight something the more you focus on it and that's what you're moving toward.

Someone once said, "I wouldn't be tempted if temptation wasn’t so tempting." Don't try to argue with the devil. He is much better at it than you are. He's had thousands of years practice. When temptation calls you on the phone, just drop the receiver and walk away.

When Martin Luther was asked how he overcame the devil, he replied, “Well, when he comes knocking at the door of my heart, and asks ‘Who lives here?’ the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, ‘Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here.’” When Christ fills our lives Satan has no entrance.

Sometimes refocusing a temptation means that you have physically get away from the situation. Get up and turn the TV off. Walk away from the group that's telling the dirty jokes. Leave the party. If you don't want to get stung, run away from the bees. If you don't want to be scratched then stay away from the cat. You need to just get up and move physically, out of the situation.

Remember that old Hee Haw skit? The man goes to the doctor and says “Doctor, I’ve broke my arm in two places. What should I do?” The doctor replies “Stay away from those places!”

The Gorgons were three sisters in mythology. They were hideously ugly, with glaring eyes and serpents entwined in their hair. If anyone looked them directly in the eye, that person was turned to stone. Temptation is not ugly like the Gorgons, but we need to turn away from it and not even look at it, lest our hearts be turned to stone.
3. REVEAL YOUR STRUGGLE TO A FRIEND

Revealing your struggles to a friend does NOT mean you should reveal your deepest struggles to everybody you meet. You don't broadcast it. But have at least one person you can share your heart with and share your struggles with.

Ecc 4:9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

You need other Christians and other Christians need you. You need to have at least one person in your life that you can be absolutely gut level honest with and reveal your struggle to. Often as Christians we walk around wearing masks and pretending everything is OK when it's not. Your personal life is falling apart, your family is under stress, your job is a mess, you're being tempted right and left by the same temptations everybody else is but nobody wants to admit it.

Hiding a hurt only intensifies it and makes it worse. When the hurt is revealed the pressure and stress are significantly reduced in our lives – we are just made that way.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Confess your faults then they don't have as much power over you any more. Why? When you begin to talk about a problem you begin to gain control over it.

Maybe you are having problems in your marriage. Problems with your kids. Maybe your thought life is in the gutter and you feel that no one understands. The moment you start revealing your feeling to somebody else you begin to gain control of it. It is so liberating when you're able to be honest and transparent because you start finding other people with the same issues. You realize that others have the same challenges that you do.

With this many people here this morning, you name me any problem that you could think of and there are other people right here that have gone through the exact same thing. Nothing shocks me anymore. Temptation is common to man. Don't feel condemned by it. Cry out to God for help. Refocus your attention. Find a friend that you can talk with who is going to accept you unconditionally. Get in a small group.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

To resist temptation you need to do two things: Give in to God and then resist the devil. There's a positive action and there's a negative action. Give in to God means you admit you can't handle this on your own. Your struggling with it and keep falling and you know it. God is not surprised or shocked. God does not condemn you - He knows your struggle.

Then resist the devil. Salvation is the first step in this. That means to invite Christ into your life. In talking about the Spiritual Armor Paul says that salvation is going to be your helmet. It protects your head. The battle against temptation is fought in your mind. The helmet of salvation protects your mind. If you've never opened your life to Christ you have absolutely no resistance to any thought the devil wants to put in your mind.
Men who trap animals in Africa for zoos in America say that one of the hardest animals to catch is the ring-tailed monkey. For the Zulus of that continent, however, it’s simple. They’ve been catching this agile little animal with ease for years. The method the Zulus use is based on knowledge of the animal. Their trap is nothing more than a melon growing on a vine. The seeds of this melon are a favorite of the monkey. Knowing this, the Zulus simply cut a hole in the melon, just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand to reach the seeds inside. The monkey will stick his hand in, grab as many seeds as he can, then start to withdraw it. This he cannot do. His fist is now larger than the hole. The monkey will pull and tug, screech and fight the melon for hours. But he can’t get free of the trap unless he gives up the seeds, which he refuses to do. Meanwhile, the Zulus sneak up and nab him.

Don’t be a monkey. Get your hand out of the melon. The first step is to receive Jesus today as your savior.