

I don't know if you guys remember picking out a college, but I would just get tons of mail and all these brochures from all these different schools. What happens is photographers have this great talent of taking a picture at just the right angle. I've seen brochures for beaches and things like that, and you look and the beach looks so beautiful, and the palm trees are there, and the cabanas are out there, and the water is so clear. It looks so beautiful, and it's great, and you get there, and what the picture didn't show was the big, giant factory just down the road blowing the big, black smoke, and the place is smelling all to pieces. They don't show you that in the picture. They crop out that part. They don't want you to see that.

I remember when I was picking out a college. I went to PC. All the brochures from PC looked great. The campus just looked so beautiful. What they didn't tell me was that there was a huge cow pasture right across the street, and when the wind got going, it felt like the cows were actually in class with you. It was awful! They don't show you that in the picture. They crop out that part. They don't want you to see that part. That's exactly how it is with temptation.

We are every day bombarded with all these different choices and things that we see coming along the path, and sometimes we choose the choice that looks really good, but the picture of that has been cropped out. We don't see the whole thing. We don't see the consequences. We don't see that. We crop pictures in our own life to make it seem a lot better than they are. We do it all the time. We tell ourselves this. We say it made me feel better. Ever done that? Ah, I know it was wrong, but it made me feel better. Yeah, it made you feel better for about five seconds, and then you went back to feeling just how you were. We do it all the time.

How about this one? They owed me anyway. I know, see, the company, I've been working overtime, and they owed me anyway so, yeah, I took the coffee maker home, but it's not that big a deal. They owed me anyway. I've been working overtime. Do we ever say that? What about this one? It brought us closer together. You know, we were in love, and it brought us closer together. Okay, well, how are you doing now? We broke up. Hmm, that's interesting. Great job of cropping by the enemy. Hey, it was just a one-night stand! I heard that one all the time in college. I met him at a party. We had a thing. It was just a one-night stand. Well, the thing about one-night stands is the human mind has this way of remembering things, and what we find is that 20 years later, you're just bumping along in life, and all of a sudden, there is that moment. There is that face. There is that night. One-night stands have a way of not really being one-night stands after all. They pop back up. No one knows about it but me. That makes it okay. As long as no one knows about it, that's fine. It doesn't make it any better. What we need to realize is these choices we make that we think are affecting only us or that no one else knows about, what happens is it's like a poison that runs through your whole body, and these choices we make in isolation, what we don't realize is they leach out and their little tentacles expand, and in the end, it affects everything that we do.

What we need to do today is to see the whole picture. We don't want to see the little cropped-out versions of the picture that shows all the beautiful pools and all the beautiful people and all the things going on. We want to see the whole picture. That's what we want to do this morning.

We're going to look at Genesis 3 so if you have your Bible, I would encourage you to look because that's where we're going to be kind of spending our time there this morning. We're going to look at three points. We're going to look at the two lies of the enemy and the truth of God. The enemy has two lies for us, and we're going to look at the truth of God. To understand the first lie, we have to understand that we live in a spiritual battle. We have a spiritual enemy who is out to destroy our lives. We talk all the time about how God has a plan for us, and God wants what's best. That's true, but the other side of that is that we have a spiritual enemy, and the enemy has an agenda as well, and that is to keep us out of God's best. God has a plan, and it's the best plan you could have. We have a spiritual enemy whose plan is to keep us out of that, to rob us of the good that God has planned for us. We're constantly being bombarded every day with temptations, and I think a lot of us would admit that sometimes we fall. It works!

Satan is our enemy, and he's very deceptive, and he gives us choices that seem really good, but in reality, they're not, and they're very destructive. He's been doing this ever since the beginning. Look back in Genesis 2. We all know what happened in Genesis. God creates the Heaven and the Earth, and they're good. Verse 25, Genesis 2, Adam and Eve are then created, it says, the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Now, this is before any of the bad stuff happens. This was back when they were first created. They were naked, and they felt no shame. That's just a beautiful picture. You've got Adam and Eve, and they're naked. You know, they don't have to worry about what they're going to wear. They don't have to pick out their outfit for the next day. No going to Wal-Mart, and oh, those are nice jeans. Well, why don't you get those shoes? None of that. It was totally, they were naked, and they were unashamed. The very next verse, now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. Enter the serpent, and he's going to bring some trouble with him.

Let's kind of walk through this passage and see the enemy's plan. The first thing the enemy does is to get in and he challenges the very heart of God. If you look at, we see in the passage that God gave Adam and Eve one rule, right? You can have any of these trees in the whole garden. You can have that one, that one, whichever tree you want. Just don't have that tree over there. The serpent comes in and says did God really say don't eat from that tree? Did He really say that? He works his way in and gets Eve thinking well, maybe that is a good tree. See what the enemy wants to do is he wants to challenge the heart of God and make us think, man, maybe God's holding out on us. Maybe there's something really good over there. It looks really good. Maybe it is good. I know it's off limits, but maybe He's holding out on me. What the enemy wants us to believe is that God – I think often we think of God is like a mean parent who's like the cookie jar is over there, and we don't, you can't have the cookies. They're really good,

but you can't have them. What we need to realize is that is exactly what the enemy does. He tricks us. He opens us up to the lie. The second thing we need to see is that the enemy always hides his temptations and deception. He's clever. It says it right here. He was craftier than any of the animals. So what that means is that Satan is not going to come up to you and say, hey, why don't you cheat on that test and that will pretty much kick you out of school and will ruin your life. He's not going to do that. He's clever. He's going to hide his choices of sin and deception.

It's kind of like this. I saw a pastor in Atlanta do this one time. It's kind of like if I have this fishhook right here. It's actually for catfish and any fish you bring up. Do I have any volunteers? Can I stick this in anyone? Choir? Y'all are closest. No. Okay. Generally, if you're fishing, if you throw this in the water, you're really not going to have too much luck. I mean, no fish is going to come along and say, hey, there's a hook. Let me go bite that maybe I'll ream my insides out! It's not your best approach. If you're a good fisherman, you know that you need one of these. Right? Look at it. It's yellow and white, and it's got a red head on the top and an eye, and it's got a little frilly hula skirt type deal going on. It's got a little spinny thing, and it's all shiny, and you throw that in the water, and the fish are like, what's that? They see it, and they're distracted. They look at the shiny thing and the hula skirt, and what they don't notice is that. See that? Same deal. Uh, Jack, that's really not a temptation for me. That's really not a big deal. What about the white one? See it's got a blue head, and it's got two little spinny things. This one's like leaf-shaped and this one's more globular-shaped. How about this one? Nah, Jack, it's cool. I'm doing okay. That's not really a big deal for me. What about the red one?

Did you know that in college that professors will give you a test, and it's a take home test, and they say you take it home, but I don't want you to cheat. You can't talk to your friends about it. I don't want you to look at your notes. You're on the honor system. Take it home. Do it yourself. Bring it back here to me the next day. Professors actually do that in college. No, that's not really a temptation for me, Jack. That's okay.

What about the frog? It's got his little legs, and they bob up and down. You know, fish eat the frogs. We like frogs, but look at that; it's got a hook. Do you know that in college you can pretty much stay out as late as you want, and there's really no, you're not accountable to anyone? You can stay out all night and do whatever, and really no one will ever find out. Got the hook!

What about the little Mr. helicoptery type lure with the hook and the yellow legs on it? Maybe fish eat that. I was dumb enough to buy it so I guess someone. No, Jack, I'm doing okay right now. That's not really a big deal. We've got the mouse. Look at this mouse! I don't know if fish eat mice. I really don't know. You know, crawl through on the water and then, I don't know. Look at that! Two hooks! That will ruin your day real quick.

In college, believe it or not, they'll actually deliver the alcohol right to your room. People will show right up. You just tell them what kind you want. It doesn't matter if you're 16, 20, whatever. They'll pull right up, back the truck up. They'll bring it out. Nah, that's not really a big temptation for me, Jack. It's you know. What about this one? It's part plastic, part flippy-tail guy. It shakes.

What I'm trying to tell is that Satan has a very large tackle box, and he'll throw everything he's got at you. If you're a good fisherman then you know that if you throw this out there, and no one's biting on it, you don't continue to fish with this all day. I mean you're not going to get anywhere. What you do is you go out and get one of this, and if that doesn't work, use Mr. helicopter. He's going to throw everything he's got at us. He's got an incredible plan, and what we need to realize is that is coming. He knows us. He knows our weaknesses. He knows what's going to influence us. He's very patient. He'll wait. If you don't feel temptation today, he'll get you tomorrow. If not tomorrow, ten years from now. He's patient. He's got a timetable that's very long. He knows our tendencies, and he's going to keep coming at you until he finds the right recipe for you and for me. So we have to admit that. We live in a spiritual battle. That's the kind of things that we're coming up on.

Another thing we need to know is that Satan uses others to influence our decisions. I think that's what's getting a lot of us today. What we've found out is that we're not going to fall to temptation by ourselves. Satan knows that some people are just too strong, and they'll resist. He knows that if he gets a few more people around you, you'll make that choice. You see this one coming? Nope, not going to it. Unh, unh, there's the little yellow thing, but look, there's the hook right there! Not going to get that one. Nope, Satan. There it is right there. See? I'm not going to bite that. Send two more people in the equation that are going after it, and all of a sudden, uh, maybe I will. We do it. He uses other people to influence our decisions. He's crafty. He's got a plan. He's got a plan for our lives.

Another thing we learn is that when we give into the temptation, not saying we have to, but I think my life and your life bears out that we will occasionally give into temptations. Satan vanishes and leaves us broken and alone. Well, that's nice of him, isn't it? That's just great! He leads us in, come on, come on, this will be great, come on, come on, come on, come on, and we've got the hook in our mouths, and when he's caught us, he's gone! Look back in the passage. You see, right after Adam and Eve fell into temptation, Satan was out of there. It's not like he came around, and said well, sorry Adam and Eve. I really thought that would work out for you. I'm sorry a lot of bad stuff has happened since you were tempted and fell into that. I'm sorry. Really, I don't know what happened. None of that. He's out of there. He's gone. He leaves us broken and alone to wallow in what we've done and the shame that goes along with that.

See, Satan shows us this little cropped photo of how great it is. It's going to be fun. It's going to be great. He can't back up that claim. When we get to this photo, we're going to see the whole picture eventually. I hope you see the whole picture that it really was

destructive. It really wasn't the best thing for us. He can't back up his claims. Yes, this will make you happy. This will satisfy you. This will meet your needs. Nothing he says that to will do that. He's sly. He's crafty. He throws those things at us. What's even worse is he's just getting started. His second lie is once we fall into that temptation, he comes back. He does come back. Did you know the word, I'll have to learn Greek and Hebrew in seminary, but I do know that the word Satan means accuser. That's his job. He accuses. When we fall into temptation, Satan comes back around. Eventually, after we feel horrible about it, he comes back around, does a 180, and he does something like this. I cannot believe you did that. You just fell for that temptation. Unbelievable! I cannot believe you just did that thing, that night, and I was there. I saw you! I cannot believe you did that! You call yourself a Christian! God doesn't want anything to do with you. After what you did you just might as well never come back to church and just forget the whole thing! After what you did, God would never accept you! I guess you're right. I've done some horrible things. I guess you're right. He wouldn't. Those are the kind of lies, that's his second lie. He comes back. He comes back to bring condemnation on us. He comes back to accuse us. That's his second lie. He gets us to thinking that God will never accept us so we start not wanting to come to church. We don't want to come to Sunday school. We don't want to see church members. We feel so bad about what we've done.

This church has 1,000 members in it, and I think we have around one-third of that most Sundays. I'm trying to figure that out. It's taken me three years, and I don't have it yet. One of the things I think that keeps us from coming to church is we feel so bad about things that we've done. We just don't want to be in God's presence. We don't, and so we stay home from church. We don't want to be in small groups. We don't want to get involved. We run because we feel so horrible about ourselves because Satan has come in and told us that we're worthless. Nothing you ever do will be good enough. You're just a dirty sinner. Those are the kind of lies that Satan gives us. We need to know that. We need to be ready for that.

What happens, I'm embarrassed to say it out loud, but we get at this point in our lives where we're so susceptible to a thought like this. You're feeling pretty bad, aren't you? Well, I got a good idea on how you can feel better. We fall into the exact same temptation that we just fell into. That's a drag. What happens is we fall into that same temptation again, Satan vanishes, comes back to accuse us, tells us how horrible we are, and we just keep spiraling down and down. It's compounding interest. The more you do it, the more he's going to accuse, the worse we feel about ourselves until finally we just feel like we should give up and forget the whole thing.

What we want to know today is how we get free from this spiral. How do we get free from temptation? That's where we're going to see the truth of God. The truth of God, to really understand it, we need to know that sin is real and it's a big deal to God. God cannot just turn His back on a temptation when we fall into it. He can't just say, well, that's fine, and pat you on the back, and send you on your way. God is hurt deeply when we sin. Have we ever had someone in our lives that's very close to us hurt us before? I

think we've all been in that situation. A close family member, something they said or the action they did, and it just hurt you so deeply. The more you love them, the more it hurts. I think is a little taste of how it is when we sin and how God feels. It hurts Him deeply. He loves us so much and wants the best for us, but when we sin, it stings right at His heart. It's serious. We see that in the Scripture. When Adam and Eve sinned, they took off. They hid. They didn't want to face God. They saw God walking in the garden. They took off. They hid. The relationship was severed. They did not want to be in God's presence. They knew that there was some tension there. God had made a rule. They had broken it. The relationship between God and Adam and Eve was severed, and it hurts God, and it hurts Adam and Eve, and it hurts us as well.

We also need to know that there are consequences. Every time we sin there is a consequence. Romans 6:23 is a verse that hopefully most of us know, but it says, “The wages of sin is death.” What that means is every time we sin, sin is not a natural thing, God did not create the world as a sinful world. He created it. It was perfect. That's the natural state it was in. Adam and Eve came along, and we messed it up. When we sin, a little bit of death comes into our lives. Death of career. Bad choices could be death of a relationship. Death of your goals. Death of virginity. Death of marriage. Death of self-esteem. With these choices we make, a little bit of death comes into our lives. It gets worse and worse.

What we need to hold onto this morning is that God loves us and wants His best for us. We see in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve have basically turned their backs on God. Does anyone wonder why there is a Genesis 4? God could have just done the end of the story right there. Okay. Adam and Eve, you're doing your own thing. Have fun. There is a Genesis 4. We see that God pursues us even when we disobey. Look in Genesis 3:21, the Lord made garments as skin for Adam and Eve, and clothed them. They were naked. God came. God pursued them. God found them, and He made clothes for Adam and Eve, and protected them with clothing. That's the kind of God we worship. That's the kind of God that we're here in honor of.

What we know, and what Adam and Eve didn't necessarily know is that there is a better covering that is available for us, much better than skins, and it's the covering of grace. We may be thinking in life that we've just done so many bad things that we will never be accepted by God. Our mountain of sin is Mount Everestly huge. What God wants us to know is that there is a Mount Everest-size grace mountain that will cover all that sin and will forgive us. Romans 5, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. God sent Jesus on this earth to live and walk the earth and face every temptation we face today. You think you've faced a temptation that Jesus hasn't faced? You're wrong. He's faced it all. He was tempted in the desert, in the wilderness with Satan standing right there. It's like Satan, and Jesus was tempted right there, but He didn't fall. He stayed the course. He had His eyes on His father. He was perfect and died on the cross. He died a sinner's death on the cross, and took the punishment that we deserve for our sins with Him. Not only that, He took the guilt, the shame, and the condemnation that we feel all the time when we sin. He took all those three things with Him, too.

We just need to realize that forgiveness is open for anyone. Me, you, it doesn't matter, whoever comes to the feet of Jesus and gives him his life or her life will be forgiven and free from the power of temptation.

I want to close with this. As young people, myself included, we think time is on our side. Yeah, I fall into temptation sometimes, and I don't do the right thing, but I'm young. I've got plenty of time to turn my life around. I've got plenty of time to go back to God. That is what the enemy wants us to think, that we've got tons of time.

Carrie and I saw Spiderman 3 a couple of weeks ago, last weekend actually. We don't recommend the movie. It was all right, but not great. It was long. There is a great scene in the movie. We know Spiderman has got the red suit and the blue thingy whatever. He's got the red suit, but in this movie, he has like the black suit, and when he puts on the black suit, his powers are like enhanced. The black suit is like really fun. When he puts on the black suit, he is more carefree, and he's, you know, on top of the world, and it seems like it's better than the red suit. So he gets the black suit analyzed by the scientist, and the scientist says yeah, the black suit's got some pretty impressive properties to it. It does some pretty neat things, but what you need to know is that the more you wear it, the more it's going to get into you, and it's going to end up destroying your life. He says, okay. Also, the longer you wear it, the harder it's going to be to take it off. We see that in the movie. When he first puts it on, he goes around town for a minute, takes it off, and puts it in the closet, no problem. Towards the end of the movie – I ruined the movie in the first service, I'll go ahead and ruin it now – but he takes off the black suit, and it's this big struggle. It won't come off. He's tugging and pulling. He's tearing it off. Eventually, he gets it off, but it stays on. It wants to stay with him.

That's what we need to realize about temptation. We could have all the time in the world. I'll fight temptation then. I'll come back to God, you know, next year, tomorrow, whatever it is. We need to realize that the longer we put it off, the longer we think that we have time to repent, time to come back to Jesus, the harder it's going to be. The more those patterns are set and entrenched in our lives, the harder it's going to be to give those up and to come back to God. That's my prayer for us this morning that we would make that decision today. Not tomorrow. Not after graduation. Not on our deathbeds. Come back to God tonight. That's what He's asking of you. That's what He's asking of me. Let us pray.

We just thank you for this day. We thank you for this chance for us to gather together. God, I pray that as we face temptations in our daily lives that we would realize that we're not seeing the whole picture, God, and the whole picture is that temptation is real and that it is harmful and that sometimes even when we do fall into it, we just feel terrible about ourselves. God, we know that grace is offered. Forgiveness is offered. Lord, I pray that we would take advantage of that. Accept Christ for our hearts and our lives now. Accept that forgiveness and live free from the power of temptation. We ask all these things in your name. Amen.