Congratulations, You Have Won …

My inbox receives deceptive emails and text messages every day. The unsolicited contacts make all kinds of claims about something I won, a package waiting for me at the warehouse, a missed delivery of something I didn't order, or an expiring subscription that needs to be renewed. They use familiar companies in hopes that I think my subscription might be up for renewal. Occasionally, I receive bogus emails, pretending to be someone I trust, asking me to purchase a gift card because my friend is too busy. Some messages tell me I must verify information to unfreeze a bank account. They usually demand a quick response, so I don't have time to consider it. Some Facebook posts ask me to take a quiz about my choices of favorite songs, influential teachers, family information, etc. The data can be used later to establish a relationship, eventually leading to a request for money. These are scams, baiting me to do something unwise.

I suspect you receive these bogus emails, too. We are constantly tempted to click on links or provide personal information that can be used for fraudulent purposes. Evil people in the world are trying to victimize others for their own gain. Despite knowing this, we are tempted to rationalize that this time, it is different. We may think, "Today is my lucky day." Click on the wrong thing, and it is the opposite - an unlucky day.

Although electronic media is a relatively recent tool, Satan has been working to trick humanity since the Garden of Eden. Satan told half-truths designed to mislead Adam and Eve, and they fell for it. Adam and Eve also tried to convince themselves that it was OK so that they could have their will rather than God's will.

The bait is often something we want and sounds good. It is a tempting act of deception to get us to let down our guard. The Bible tells us, *"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1 Timothy 6:9)*

Most of us have heard the story about the Trojan Horse from Homer's Odessey. In the story, the Greeks were involved in a 10-year siege on the City of Troy without success. The Greeks built a huge wooden horse and pretended it was a gift to the city of Troy. They hid soldiers inside the wooden horse and supposedly sailed away with their army. Assuming the Trojan Horse was a gift, the people of Troy let down their guard and pulled the wooden horse inside the gates. The soldiers hidden inside opened the city gates and let in more Greek soldiers, who had returned under the cover of darkness. They destroyed the city of Troy. Today, a "Trojan Horse" is a metaphor for inviting a foe into an otherwise secure place. It is a trick that can cause great harm. It is no wonder we label malicious computer viruses Trojans. Trojans seek to destroy our computers or steal information if we click on a link or enter an infected website. Do you unwittingly invite evil into your lives?

Life in this world is a war zone. Satan tries to trick us with lies that appear to be true. We let down our guard because we want to do things that make us happy. Satan whispers excuses into our ears to convince us that something won't harm us, "everyone is doing it," or "no one will know." Giving in leads to trouble. The Bible says, *"but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15)*

So, how do we protect ourselves? Only trust reliable sources and follow their guidance. The Bible is a reliable source, but it is only helpful if we listen and do what it tells us. Be in God's Word – reading it and doing what it says. Don't be fooled by deceptive practices that seem to satisfy your desires. Take Jesus' advice: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:13).*