

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

February 11, 2024, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Matthew 6:13; I Corinthians 10:12-13; I Peter 5:8

Introduction:

Some years ago Zack and I went fishing up on Silver Lake with Lamar Vander Griend. We had a great time and caught a bunch of fish. Most of you know Lamar has a well-deserved reputation as a great fisherman. In the fish world he is a master tempter. He doesn't just throw a hook out in the water and wait to see what happens. He has spent years learning which lures are the best for tempting which fish.

This petition in the Lord's Prayer is a sober reminder from Jesus we live in a world that is like a big pond and there are millions of lures hanging in the water all around us and there is a master tempter who has mastered the art of lures, knowing just which ones will be most effective against each one of us.

This present life is a spiritual minefield with dangers all around us. Do you believe that? Do you think about life that way? Are you aware every step we take at home, at school, at work, in the world is a step into the presence of temptation? There is no moment in your life that is not a moment for temptation, an opportunity for sin, for unbelief, lack of faith or disobedience, lack of love.

We are in the midst of a spiritual battle with spiritual forces arrayed against us, real enemies who hate us and these enemies are led by a very great leader, Satan.

Jesus is teaching us that amid such a battle with such a great foe we dare not to trust ourselves or go into battle alone and ill-equipped. We must begin each day with this daily prayer, "Father, have mercy on us, keep us safe in the midst of all unseen dangers, deceptions and temptations."

Scripture admonishes us in the strongest words:

I Corinthians 10:12 *Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

The strongest man in the Bible fell into temptation, more than once.

The greatest king in the Bible, a man after God's own heart, fell into temptation more than once.

The wisest man in the Bible fell into temptation more than once.

The man closest to Jesus fell into temptation more than once.

Do you think you are stronger or wiser than them, do you think you don't need to pray for this every day?

“Father, lead us not into temptation.”

We are confronted immediately in this petition with a nagging question. Is Jesus implying God leads us into temptation? The answer is a clear no and yes.

If you know your Bible at all you have read somewhere God does not tempt us.

James 1:13 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.

So what is up with Jesus teaching us to pray to our Father in Heaven and asking Him to “Lead us not into temptation”?

What about Jesus after His baptism?

The first recorded event in the life of Christ after His baptism is His temptation by Satan. We are told at the beginning of all three accounts recorded in the gospels that:

Matthew 4:1 Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Tempting and Testing.

We need to start by clarifying there are different kinds of temptings in Scripture. The Greek word translated here as temptation is also translated in James and Peter as trials or testings. There are temptings that are testings and there are temptings that are enticements into sin.

God is the author of testing, Satan is the agent of temptation (Hank Hanegraaff, *The Prayer of Jesus*, p. 79). Satan tried to tempt Jesus, but God used that to test and prove Jesus could not sin and that He was the second Adam who passed the test.

I Peter 1:6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials [peirasmois; Matt 6:13], **7** so that the tested [dokimion] genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

God does give us trials and tests, and they can be occasions for temptation. Pray for His protection and that we will see the way of escape.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

We are praying and asking God to be with us and keep us through temptation. Hold me back from stepping inside the temptation.

Our faith will undergo times of testing and trying, it will be put under the microscope and sometimes under the hammer.

There are weaknesses and flaws hidden in our hearts that if not exposed and brought out into the light of God's truth, will take root and destroy us.

Taking and passing tests can be a positive, encouraging practice, it helps us see our progress. God gives us tests to show us what is in us, to expose what still needs to be learned or corrected, and to show us how far we have come and how far we have to go.

If temptation means testing through trials, and if testings and trials are not only inevitable but necessary, then why pray and ask God not to lead us into them?

J.I. Packer suggests three reasons (*Praying the Lord's Prayer*, p. 86-87).

First, we pray because the enemy is strong. Whenever God tests us for our good, Satan is right there trying to exploit the opportunity and cause us to fail. Adam was tested and Satan showed up to tempt. Jesus was tested and Satan showed up to tempt.

I Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Satan is far more subtle and sly, luring us to boast or gossip or lust or covet. Why is greed and sex used to sell stuff? Because they are Satan's best and most effective lures.

In the midst of every temptation to sin Satan is there whispering, "Go ahead, no one will know. You know you really want to, and you will give in eventually any way. Besides, it won't hurt anyone. Just think how good it will make you feel. How about just this once, then you don't have to again if you don't want."

He is relentless, persistent, crafty, starting with something small, seemingly innocent and then gradually builds on his success and until he wears us down.

Never underestimate the enemy. We pray because the enemy is so strong.

Second, we pray because tests are hard. Sometimes we shrink back in fear. Some tests are so hard we flunk.

Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Father, if it’s possible let this cup pass from me.” Facing the hardest test of His life, Jesus prayed. So must we pray, “Lord, protect us in severe and hard testing, especially where our faith might not survive.”

Scripture warns us that before the Messiah comes there will be a time of severe testing. We will only survive by prayer.

I am reminded of the prayer of Robertson McQuilken, the late, great president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary, “Lord, get me home before dark.”

*That I should stain your honor, shame your name, grieve your loving heart.
Few, they tell me, finish well ... Lord, let me get home before dark.*

As parents we tell our younger children, be home by dark. We don’t want them out after dark, we fear for their well-being, their safety so we say be home before dark.

That is every Christian’s heart-felt prayer and desire. Lord, bring me home before dark, before I stumble and fall into sin or temptation or faithlessness or doubt or despair.

There won’t just be a severe time of testing before the Messiah comes. There is testing everyday because there is an enemy of our souls. Testing is inevitable, there is no way around it.

We pray because the tests are hard and the temptations are strong.

Third, we pray because we are weak. We pray to acknowledge our own weaknesses and vulnerability. We pray because the enemy is strong ***and*** we pray because we are so weak.

Have you ever boasted you would not sin the way some people do, only later, maybe even years later, to find yourself failing in that very thing?

Indeed, pride goes before the fall. Never boast you will not fall, never even boast that someone’s particular temptation is not one you would fall for.

Jesus knows our infirmity, our own human fallenness and weakness. Our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak and in the face of the weakness of our flesh, we must turn to God for our help.

If you do not know you are weak and vulnerable, that you are constantly under Satan's attack and God's testing, then this prayer won't make much sense to you and you will not pray it with any good effect. You will not experience God's strength in your weaknesses.

He who seeks only God's provision in daily bread and not also His daily protection is a fool. He will soon eat the bread of affliction, misery and ruin.

Christian, be quick and bold to confess your weaknesses and your need of a Savior and a deliverer and a protector.

As we grow in maturity as Christians we become more and more aware of the deceptiveness of our own hearts and our inherent moral weaknesses; and the subtle and deceitful cunning of the devil. This petition is meant to lead us away from our foolish independence and cocky invincibility to acknowledge our creatureliness and our dependence on our creator.

I Corinthians 10:12 *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

We are waging an unending, life-long war with the world, our flesh and the devil. Our prayer is that we are not defeated or destroyed. We pray to ask God to show us the way out, the way to victory, the way to overcome, the way to resist the devil until he flees.

We pray because the enemy is strong, the tests are many and hard, and we are weak.

Application and Conclusion:

This is a call to "watch and pray." None of us will be spared. Everyone one of us has been, is being and will be tested and tempted. Be on guard, stay alert, put on your spiritual armor, most of all God's Word and prayer. Watch and pray.

Jesus again teaching the disciples

Luke 22:40 When he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Jesus warned Peter he would betray him three times. Then later in the Garden Jesus warned Peter again, "Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41). But he slept instead.

And a few hours later, after sharing this most intimate of feasts with his Lord, and after saying he would never betray Jesus, when temptation came in the form of a little girl's questions, Peter succumbed. You can eat the body of Christ and drink His blood today and fall into temptation tomorrow. For the sake of your soul, watch and pray. You can

deny all you want that you would never deny Jesus and it will still happen. Watch and pray.

Peter himself from such personal experience would be the one who later gives us those words of warning.

I Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your faith.

Pray for discernment to know what is right, to see the deception for what it is, to see the ambush, to see past Satan's lures.

Pray for strength to do what is right, especially in the face of our own inward reluctance, our own inward desires for the pleasures of sin, pray for strength to resist what looks good but leads to ruin.

Pray for courage to say no, to resist, to stand, to walk away, to run. Pray for direction to keep on the right path, on the path of righteousness.

Pray for each other, and pray for your leaders, your pastors and elders and deacons, everyone of us faces fierce temptations week in and week out. Prayer for one another.

Pray and take active steps to avoid and resist and flee from temptation. This is not just a passive prayer. Use practical means, cut off all avenues of temptation. Think about when and where you have the most difficulty and then make changes.

Don't keep your phone by your bed if that is a source of falling into temptation. Delete apps or websites that lead to lust, greed, envy, jealousy, anger, quarreling, frustration, anxiety, fear. What steals your joy, contentment, peace, hope?

Do you get impatient or angry, then do something tangible about it, don't just be sorry and move on. What are your besetting sins you return to so often? Take active steps to cut them off.

When we change, remove, cut out the things that lead us into temptation, those are the means God uses to answer our prayer. God will provide a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Look for it and take it.

God wants to protect us, so ask God to change your heart to want what he wants for you. Pray for the desire to be holy and to kill the sins of the flesh. We will never regret fleeing from evil and avoiding temptation and killing sin. Take active, real steps to love God and please God and find joy in our obedience. God is worth making sacrifices for.