

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, August 7, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 6:13

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #25
THE LORD'S PRAYER: TEMPTATION

In his book, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, author Chuck Swindoll tells the story about a boy and his father.

"Son," ordered a father, "Don't swim in that canal."

"OK, Dad," he answered. But he came home carrying a wet bathing suit that evening.

"Where have you been?" demanded the father.

"Swimming in the canal," answered the boy. "Didn't I tell you not to swim there?" asked the father.

"Yes, Sir," answered the boy.

"Why did you?" he asked.

"Well, Dad," he explained, "I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn't resist the temptation."

"Why did you take your bathing suit with you?" he questioned.

"So I'd be prepared to swim, in case I was tempted," he replied.¹

Can you relate to the little boy? I know that I can. I wonder how many times that I have been seduced by temptation, wandering near its waters, hoping that I might have time to take a swim.

It's been said that temptation is an inevitable part of the human condition. There is not a Christian who has ever lived who has not battled temptation. The greatest saints; those heroes of the faith whom we all admire and wonder at how they arrived at their spiritual zenith, are folks who battled temptation on a daily basis. So, how are we to handle the temptation that comes our way?

¹ Chuck Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 85.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus addressed this universal condition that we find ourselves in. It was the final petition of the prayer, and it's found in Matthew 6:13.

Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, "13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Elmer Towns makes an interesting point. He writes, "The previous petition, 'Forgive us our debts,' focused on *past* sins, while this petition, 'Lead us not into temptation,' focuses on *future* sins. The previous petition focused on actual sins; this petition focuses on potential sins – those that might happen, but in fact might not occur at all if God answers this prayer."²

One of the first questions that arise when we read this verse is, "Is God the source of our temptation?" After all, if He was not, why would we have to pray that He wouldn't lead us into temptation?

James 1:13-15 gives us the answer to this question. The verses say:

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.

No, God doesn't tempt us. God is good. It would be against His nature, and absolutely impossible for God to tempt anyone.

Some have noticed the parallel between Jesus' petition here and Psalm 23. Listen to the first four verses from that famous Psalm.

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

² Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*, (Ventura: CA: Regal Books, 1997), p. 167.

I love the picture of Jesus as our shepherd, guiding us through the most difficult of experiences. We are all going to face excruciating trials and seemingly insurmountable temptation in our lives, but Christ is there to guide us through the difficulty. Psalm 23 gives us a good idea of what is meant when Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

Kent Hughes writes, “The key to what ‘Lead us not into temptation’ means is found in the fact that the word translated ‘temptation’ has two meanings. It can denote an enticement that has the goal of causing one to sin, or it can refer to a test or trial of the validity of one’s faith. The word occurs twenty-one times in the New Testament, and twenty of those appearances have the latter idea of testing or trial. Thus the meaning of ‘Lead us not into temptation’ is simply, ‘Do not allow us to come under the sway of temptation that will overpower us and cause us to sin.’ . . . The idea is: ‘Lord, preserve me from temptation that will bring me under its sway and will cause me to fall.’ We cannot help being exposed to temptation, and we are not to pray that we will be spared from being tempted at all. Rather, we are to pray that we will be spared those temptations from Satan that we cannot withstand.”³

1) Being Tempted Isn’t A Sin

Did you catch the difference that Hughes was trying to point out? Jesus wasn’t telling us to pray that God would lead us not into enticement that would cause us to sin, but that God would preserve us from temptation that would bring us under its sway and cause us to fall. Every Christian will face temptation. I’m glad that being tempted isn’t a sin. Because if it was, I’d sin far more than I already do! There are Christians I know who get so discouraged by being tempted, as if they have committed a terrible sin by temptation coming their way. Listen, everyone gets tempted. And if you are like most people you are tempted several times an hour. Sin comes into the picture when we act upon that temptation.

In 1992, *Discipleship Journal* conducted a survey with hundreds of *Discipleship Journal* readers. One of the questions posed to the survey participants was, “What are your areas of greatest spiritual challenge?” Here is how the readers ranked their areas of greatest temptation.

1. Materialism.
2. Pride.
3. Self-centeredness.
4. Laziness.
5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness.
5. (Tie) Sexual lust.
7. Envy.
8. Gluttony.

³ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 195.

9. Lying.

There isn't one sin in that list of nine that some in this room don't struggle with. When pressed about the temptation, survey respondents noted temptations were more potent when they had neglected their time with God (81 percent) and when they were physically tired (57 percent). Resisting temptation was accomplished by prayer (84 percent), avoiding compromising situations (76 percent), Bible study (66 percent), and being accountable to someone (52 percent).⁴

Be encouraged, that being tempted isn't a sin. There is a second truth about temptation that I want you to see this morning.

2) God Allows Christians to Be Tempted

You might think that sounds like it goes against the character of God. Why would a loving God allow us to struggle with so many things in this life? But, when you think about it, Jesus himself was familiar with temptation. Hughes writes, "The abiding reality is that temptation is good for us. Temptation molded the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. His ministry began with his epic temptations in the wilderness. Satan came at him with the most elaborate and insidious psycho-spiritual attacks ever made. Jesus withstood it all and with the temptation conquered went on to live his peerless life. Some there and a half years later in Gethsemane he triumphed again over temptation as he conquered the impulse to flee from the cross. The writer of Hebrews bears testimony to the molding effect of those and other sufferings in the earthly life of our Lord:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (2:10)

If temptations helped shape the life and ministry of the perfect Christ, much more so do they do so for us! Temptation is necessary for the development of our moral character. 'Temptation is not so much the penalty of manhood as it is the glory of manhood. It is that by which a man is made an athlete of God.'⁵

Think about your own life for a moment. Are there some temptations that became besetting sins before you were a follower of Jesus Christ? Maybe when you first became a believer these sins were embarrassing scars in your life. It may be that these sins were the first hypocrisies in your young Christian life. As you followed Christ, and as you trusted Him, He gave you victory over certain sins. Not that you have arrived. Not that you couldn't easily fall back into those sins. But, there are things that used to tempt you, and hold such power in your life, whose influence has waned as you have fought the battle against temptation. God allows Christians to be tempted, because sin is a very real part of our world, and Satan is very much at work. As long as Satan and his demons are at work,

⁴ Discipleship Journal, November / December, 1992.

⁵ Hughes, p. 195.

then temptation will be a part of the life of the believer. Jesus didn't make a mistake when He ended Matthew 6:9 with the words, "deliver us from the evil one." To deny the evil one's existence, which is popular to do today, is to deny Christ's very words. His life is a testament to the fact that Satan is alive and well, but his days are numbered! God allows Christians to be tempted, in part to show that He is more powerful than Satan. How tragic that we don't take Him up on the power that He offers to help us walk through our temptations.

Truth number three is that, Christians can fall to temptation.

3) Christians can fall to temptation.

I don't need to tell you that, do I? But, it's important to verbalize it. We pray for Christ to "lead us not into temptation," because we know all too well the reality that Christians can and do fall to temptation, on an almost daily basis.

Towns writes, "Every child is born both beauty and the beast. As beauty, the child has great desires to know and honor God in his or her life. Children are also a beast with a destructive nature that will destroy themselves, and everything they touch, or anything that touches them . . . two forces dwell within every child, called a good nature and an evil nature (see Ephesians 4:22-24). The child can give control to either nature, and that choice of natures will determine the destiny of the child. There is in each of us a Dr. Jekyll, which has an internal attraction to destruction; and a Mr. Hyde, which has an external attraction to do God's will.

Satan will set a trap for every believer, a specific temptation to trip up a person. That trap will be aimed at the weakness of the person. When you pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' you are asking God not to lead you into that trap.

John calls that trap 'the world':

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."⁶ (1 John 2:15-16)

It's easy to give into our cravings. But we don't have to, for our fourth truth is that God expects His children to overcome temptation.

4) God Expects His Children to Overcome Temptation.

He really does! God has given us the power to overcome the temptation that we face in our lives.

⁶ Towns, pp. 170-171.

It's written all over Scripture.

Let me share just two passages.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read, "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."

In the powerful doxology that ends his one chapter book, Jude says, "24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

God can keep you from falling!

Charles Spurgeon has been called the one of the most powerful preachers of all time. When preaching on temptation, Spurgeon said, "What settings are you in when you fall? Avoid them. What props do you have that support your sin? Eliminate them. What people are you usually with? Avoid them. There are two equally damning lies Satan wants us to believe: 1) Just once won't hurt. 2) Now that you have ruined your life, you are beyond God's use, and might as well enjoy sinning. Learn to say no. It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin."⁷

That's great advice. I wonder how many times that we have collectively said, "Just once won't hurt!" I wonder how many regrets are in this room. I wonder how many of us wish we had a time machine and could go back in time to the first time that we fell to a particular temptation. I love Spurgeon's second point thought. It is a lie of Satan that our lives are ruined beyond compare. God loves to take ruined lives and make them whole again. God expects His children to overcome temptation, but He is also there to help repair the damage when we succumb to temptation.

Benjamin Franklin said, "It is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it."⁸

How true it is!

John Piper says that sin (lust for example) "gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier."⁹

God has given us the power to overcome that kind of stinking thinking. We need to grasp onto His hands.

⁷ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/temptation.htm>

⁸ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/temptation.htm>

⁹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/temptation.htm>

5) Praying the Lord's Prayer Can Help You Overcome Temptation

Elmer Towns makes an interesting point in his book, *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*. He writes, "When you pray, 'lead us not into temptation,' you are asking for deliverance from both a crisis and a process. In referring to temptation, Jesus used the word *peirasmōs*, which implies that temptation is a process. This means, 'Don't put me into a place of seduction where I wrestle with temptation every day.' . . . Life itself is a process. When we gain victory over one sin, another temptation always seems to be waiting to trip us up. Therefore, praying, 'Lead me not into temptation,' is an appeal for God to enable us to go 'from victory to victory.' We are praying, 'Lord, give me a victory today'; and tomorrow you will pray again, 'Lord, give me a victory today.'"¹⁰

If we are going to beat temptation, then we need to be people who are praying this prayer on a daily basis. Praying the Lord's Prayer can help you overcome temptation.

6) You Can Have Victory Over Temptation

The final truth today is that you can have victory over temptation.

I read this week that God is a bit like a teacher. A first grade teacher isn't going to give his class of first graders a college level term paper to complete. He's going to teach the class how to print, and how to read. In the same way, God isn't going to allow you to face any temptation that you are not ready to face, with His help. The good news is, if you are struggling with temptation, God has given you the power, through His Holy Spirit to gain victory of the temptation.

Remember, different people learn how to handle temptation in different ways. Over the years, the church of Jesus Christ has gained a reputation for abusing those who have found themselves caught up in a pattern of sin.

In a *Christianity Today* article dated April 15, 1993, Stephen Brown wrote the following, "It was F.B. Meyer, I believe, who once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances."¹¹

God has offered victory over temptation, but all fall from time to time. If you are in the grips of a besetting sin today, I want you to be honest with God. Pour out your heart to Him. Daily ask Him to lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from the evil one. When tempted, pray the Lord's Prayer. There is power in prayer, and God has given you the tools you need to overcome any temptation that comes your way. How cool that He has offered to be our guide through life's most difficult terrain! So, the next time you feel like taking a dip in the pool of temptation, run to Jesus! He'll carry you through!

¹⁰ Towns, pp. 173-174.

¹¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/temptation.htm>