

Enrolling in the School of Prayer: Class 5

Praying Not To Fall Into Temptation

2020-11-01 Sermon

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[Samuel read slides 1-10]

[slide 11, blank] Temptation is something all of us face. But why does it happen? And why, when tempted, do we sometimes give in and violate our own values?

Why do we give in to what we know is going to be destructive? Why do we engage in actions we know we'll be ashamed of?

Well, according to the Bible, at least part of the answer lies in the fact that we have an enemy.

Paul the apostle writes in Eph. 6, "We are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood,

but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world... against spiritual forces of evil" which are led by the Evil One, Satan.

The fundamental identity of the Evil One is as tempter and his fundamental weapon is temptation.

We see this from the very beginning, in the book of beginnings, Genesis, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God.

And so Jesus teaches us to pray to our Abba Father, in the 2nd clause of this petition in Mt. 6.13, [slide 12] to "deliver us from the Evil One" for temptation is what the Evil One does.

And in the 1st clause, Jesus teaches us to pray, "lead us not into temptation."

It's worth noting that in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, this 1st clause can also be translated as,

'do not let us fall prey to' or 'yield to' or 'give in to, the time of trial or temptation.'

In making this petition, then, we are asking our Abba Father that we will not fall prey to, yield to, or give in to, the trial's or temptations we face from the evil one, Satan,

but that we will be delivered out of or saved from them.

[slide 13] This petition, like all the other petitions, is firmly grounded in the life and work of Jesus himself.

Jesus faced temptation head on throughout his public life and was victorious over it –

from his temptations in the wilderness right after his baptism,

to the Garden of Gethsemane where he was tempted to not drink the cup of suffering and death held out to him,

to the hill, called Golgotha, where the forces of evil surrounded him, that he might defeat them and set the world free from sin,

to his bodily resurrection showing the power of God and his kingdom over the power of the evil one.

We can, therefore, pray this part of the prayer with confidence because, as Heb. 4.18 says,

"...we do not have a high priest [Jesus] 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."

"Because he himself... was tempted," Heb. 2.18, "he is able to help those who are being tempted."

So what might it mean for us to pray this petition Jesus taught us in Mt. 6.13, in light of how Jesus faced temptation and was victorious over it?

To answer that question, I'd like for us to look at 1 Cor. 10. This is one of the classic passages on temptation in the Bible.

This passage will shed more light on what "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One" means for us today.

Specifically, it will show us how not to fall prey to, or yield to, or give in to, the testing or temptations we face from Satan, the Evil One,

so that we might be delivered out of or saved from them.

We pick it up at v.6 where Paul writes, "Now these things occurred [he's referring to the temptations the Israelites faced in their wilderness wanderings]

as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in [pagan] revelry."

⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - and in one day 23,000 of them died.

⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did - and were killed by snakes.

¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

[Paul is referring here to we who are now living in the overlap of the ages – between this present age and the age to come]

¹² So, if you think you are standing firm [in your faith], be careful that you don't fall!

[slide 14] Now read aloud with me our key verse, v.13, which is on the screen:

¹³ “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to us all.

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 endure it.”

There are **three observations we can make about temptation** from this verse which will show us how not to fall prey to, yield to, or give in to,

the testing or temptations we face from Satan, the evil one, and so be delivered out of or saved from them.

What then, is the 1st observation we can make about temptation? [slide 15]

1. EXPECT temptation.

Paul the apostle writes in v.13: “No temptation has overtaken [or seized] you except what is common to us all.”

We can expect temptation. Temptation is common to all of us. You will be tempted, so don't be surprised, don't be caught off guard, when you are tempted.

To pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” does not mean, “deliver us from the experience of temptation,”

because there is no person on the face of this earth who does not experience temptation.

Even Jesus was tempted by the Evil One, so don't act surprised when you are tempted. It's part of life.

A celebrated experiment in psychology, started a few decades ago by Walter Mischel, illustrates this fact that temptation is common for all of us. [slide 16, run video].

[after video bring out bag of marshmallows].

My question to you this morning is, “What’s your marshmallow, your temptation?”

Maybe it’s food. Maybe it’s the 4 letter word S-A-L-E. Maybe it’s the joy of passing judgment on other marshmallow eaters.

Maybe it’s pornography. Maybe it’s in a bottle or a needle. Maybe it’s gambling.

Or maybe it’s more insidious, more subtle. Maybe you’re tempted to give up your faith because of the harassment, discrimination, or ridicule you face for being a Jesus follower.

And so you stop meeting together with other believers and just drift along through life, like someone asleep on a boat,

only to wake up one day and find you have left your faith in Christ behind.

Whatever your marshmallow is, whatever the temptation is, its purpose is to draw you away from your Abba Father.

Temptation is never trivial. Temptation is about being drawn away from our Abba Father. That’s what’s at stake.

So be prepared. **Expect** temptation. You are not the exception to the rule. “No temptation has overtaken you [or seized you] except what is common to all of us.”

What then, is the 2nd observation we can make about temptation? [**slide 17**]

2. God SETS limits.

V.13b, “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” God sets limits.

Have you ever worked out with a physiotherapist?

You're doing some leg exercises after knee surgery and your therapist encourages you saying, "Give me two more. Come on! You've got two more in you."

In your mind you want to say a few choice words to him or her. But you do those extra reps because your therapist knows just how much you can bear.

God knows just how much temptation you can bear. He is omniscient, all-knowing, after all.

And he will not allow the Tempter, the Evil One, to go beyond that point. He will not. That is his promise.

And that is encouraging news to everybody in this room. God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

What then, is the 3rd observation we can make about temptation? [**slide 18**]

3. God will PROVIDE a way out.

v.13c: "But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out [an escape] so that you can endure it."

That's good news. God will provide a way out. But how? There are 3 ways out. [**slide 19**]

The 1st way out is to arrange your life around joy.

Neh. 8.10 is a very familiar yet very important statement in Scripture. "For the joy of the LORD is your strength."

After the Israelite exiles returned to Jerusalem in 445 B.C. to rebuild the walls of their city, and in celebration of the completion of that task,

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites said to the people, "This day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

[Sing, "The joy of the Lord is my strength."]

Experiencing this joy may be the single greatest weapon against temptation we have.

Conversely, joylessness is always a setup for falling prey to, for giving in to, temptation.

Author and teacher Dallas Willard puts it like this: "Joy is strength. Its absence creates weakness.

Failure to attain a deeply satisfying life always has the effect of making sinful actions seem good. Herein lies the strength of temptation.

Normally our success in overcoming temptation will be easier if we [have the joy of the Lord] in our lives." Those are wise words from Professor Willard.

To the extent that you have this joy in your life, temptation, which offers only the illusion of joy - never the real thing - is not going to be very tempting.

Since "the joy of the Lord is our strength" when it comes to temptation, the question you and I can ask ourselves is,

"What do I need to do to increase joy in my life? What activities or relationships will bring real joy into my life?"

Maybe it's being in nature. Maybe it's listening to music you love. Maybe it's spending time with certain friends.

Maybe it's involving yourself in physical challenges that you love doing.

Maybe you need to pray, "God, help me to be a joyful person. Help me to find those things that would fill me with your joy."

The point is, you are responsible to arrange your life around joy so that the joy of the Lord can be your strength. No one can do it for you.

If you don't arrange your life around joy, you're vulnerable. You're in a position to fall prey to temptation from the Evil One.

So that's one way out. Arrange your life around joy. For the joy of the LORD is your strength.

What then, is the 2nd way out? [slide 20]

The 2nd way out is to develop a relationship of accountability.

"Two people are better off than one," says the writer of Eccl. 4.9, "for they can help each other succeed."

If you think that you can handle temptation on your own, you're deceiving yourself. You're deceiving yourself because you've got an enemy who is stronger and smarter than you are.

I don't mean to trivialize temptation, but for the purpose of illustrating this point, was there ever a time in your life, ladies, when your big temptation in life involved shopping?

You told your husband, "This temptation has got to be dealt with. I just can't give into it anymore"- and you both agreed.

But the next week you come home with a new dress. Your husband says to you, "Deb, what's going on?"

I thought we agreed that the next time you were in a store and were tempted to buy a new dress, you were going to say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'"

"I did," I said. And he told me, 'It looks pretty good from back here too.'"

[That never actually happened, just so you know]. The point is, if you try to handle temptation on your own, you will fail.

You need somebody you can go to and say, "I want you to know this is my marshmallow, my temptation,

and I want you to ask me how it's going with my marshmallow on a regular basis. I give you permission to do that."

It's important to develop an r'ship of accountability. That's another way out.

What then, is the 3rd way out? [slide 21]

3rd, immerse yourself in the Scriptures.

This is what Jesus did in Mt. 4 and Lk. 4, which we'll look at in a moment.

Immerse yourself in the scriptures, not so that you carry a bunch of Bible trivia around in your head, but so the way you think and feel is transformed.

You see, the best way not to eat a marshmallow is by trying really, really hard not to eat a marshmallow. Right? Wrong!

The best way not to eat a marshmallow is by making sure you're eating healthier food on a regular basis.

You're going to eat. But if you don't eat good food, you'll eat bad food.

Jesus models this for us in Mt. 4 and Lk. 4, which I referred to earlier.

Right after his baptism by John in the Jordan River, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the desolate Judean wilderness.

For 40 days and 40 nights he ate nothing and became very hungry.

Then, at his weakest, the Evil One comes with three different temptations.

1st, "Turn this stone into bread." You don't have to suffer hunger.

2nd, "Jump down from the top of the Temple." You'll be saved. God will take care of you.

3rd, “Bow down and worship me. I’ll give you all the kingdoms of the world.”

And on each occasion, Jesus responds to these temptations and to the Tempter with the words, “It is written...”

“It is written, people don’t live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” [Dt. 8.3].

“It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test” [Dt. 6.16].

“It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only” [Dt. 6.13].

Jesus’ mind was so immersed in the scriptures that he saw right through the temptations of the Evil One.

Know what your marshmallow is. Where are you most likely to be tempted and drawn away from your Abba Father?

Then immerse yourself in relevant Scriptures.

[slide 22, blank] If getting angry or holding grudges is a temptation for you, then read and memorize verses like Eph. 4.32:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

Say that verse over and over again, and start putting it into practice.

If fear is a temptation for you, read and memorize Joshua 1.9:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

And then everywhere you go, all day long, keep telling yourself, “The Lord my God will be with me wherever I go.”

If ingratitude or grumbling is your marshmallow, your temptation, read and memorize 1 Thess. 5.18:

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Every one of us wrestles with temptation. And temptation, at its core, seeks to draw us away from our Abba Father.

[slide 23] So when you find yourself being tempted, remember to arrange your life around joy, develop a r’ship of accountability, and immerse yourself in the scriptures.

For though temptation is common to all of us, our Abba Father will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. And he will provide a way out so that we can endure it.

Evil and the Evil One are real and powerful. But Jesus victory over evil and the Evil One is also real and powerful.

To pray as Jesus taught us, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” is, as Tom Wright puts it, “to inhale the victory of the cross.”

For as Paul the apostle writes in Col. 2.15, “God has disarmed the evil rulers and authorities by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.”

When we focus on Jesus, we are turning from the Strong Man, Satan, to the one who has defeated the Strong Man.

Parents used to teach children a prayer for protection when they slept. It’s a rather sobering prayer when you think about it.

“Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord, my soul to take.”

There’s another variation to this prayer, which is even more sobering.

“Our days begin with trouble here. Our life is but a span. And cruel death is always near, so frail a thing is man.”

Aren't those cheery words to say to your 6 year old as you tuck him in at night? “Cruel death is always near. Goodnight son. Sweet dreams!”

Why would people say that? Historically it was because people in past times understood what we tend to forget today -

that life really is a battle, that we really do have an enemy, and that we really are frail.

So, our one hope is to ask our Abba Father ‘My soul to keep’, because our life is at stake. And our life, your life, is precious to him.

It doesn't matter how hard the struggle is or how many times you've fallen prey to temptation before.

You can get back up by confessing your failings, receiving his forgiveness, and putting into practice the ways out he provides for us.

We have an enemy and he is strong indeed, but there is one who is stronger still.

Martin Luther said it well in the song we sang earlier:

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.

You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name
[Lord of the armies of heaven],
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

He has and he will.

Whatever your marshmallow, whatever your temptation, pray the prayer Jesus taught us:

“Abba Father... do not let us fall prey to, yield to, or give in to, the time of trial / to temptation, but deliver us, save us, from the evil one.”

Let's sing - God will make a way [492 / 639]