

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION:" PRAYING FOR GOD'S PROTECTION
LUKE 11:4

Some 2500 years ago, perhaps as early as 700 BC, in order to protect themselves, the feudal states of China began to build protective walls to guard against invaders. When the 1500-year-project was completed, those walls were joined to form the massive **Great Wall** around China. The wall eventually measured over 13,000 miles long and on average was over 25 feet tall (some sections as tall as 39 feet) and 13-16 feet wide.



The wall seemed to be an impenetrable defense: it was too high to climb, too thick to knock down, and too long to go around. And for many centuries, and during many dynasties, the wall served the people of China well. But it did not protect perfectly, as one historian noted:

But the Great Wall was **not always effective**. Genghis Khan and his armies had no trouble invading Chinese territory, for example, nor did various other tribes from the north. In some cases, the invaders may have simply gone *around* sections of the wall; in others, they found more ingenious methods. The Tanguts, in 1002, were able to cross the wall easily by filling in trenches along its length when they noticed the guards of the Song dynasty weren't paying attention.

That incident points to a key weakness in the Great Wall: Defensive fortifications are only as good as the people manning them. This would prove true on more than one occasion during the Great Wall's history. For example, in 1644, the Ming dynasty was betrayed to invading Manchu forces by a turncoat general who simply let the enemy army in through a gate.

The wall was only as good as the people manning them. There is a spiritual analogy there. God has provided for His followers everything they need for life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:3). But those provisions are only as effective as the people are faithful and obedient to implement what God has provided.

As Jesus concludes His teaching on **how to pray** in Luke 11, He instructs the Twelve (and us) about the importance of praying about temptation. He does not say to pray that there won't be temptation (He makes no promise of removing temptation). Martin Luther also reminded us of the reality of temptation when he said, "There are three things [that] make a Christian: prayer, meditation, and temptation." Temptation will not be removed from us, but, Jesus teaches, there is protection in the temptation...

YOU WILL BE TEMPTED BY SIN. ASK GOD TO PROTECT YOU FROM FAILURE.

As we consider this petition remember **three essential realities about sin and temptation...**

- 1. Our Relationship to Temptation**
- 2. God's Relationship to Temptation**
- 3. God's Provision for Temptation**

1. Our Relationship to Temptation

• Temptation defined

- ✓ Temptation is *not* sin (Jesus was tempted, but without sin; 4:1-14).
- ✓ “A temptation, then, in general is anything that, for any reason, exerts a force or influence to seduce and draw the mind and heart of man from the obedience which God requires of him to any kind of sin.” [John Owen]
- ✓ It might be an enticement to not do something we are commanded to do, or it might be an appeal to do something defiantly against God’s revealed will.
- ✓ The temptation itself is not sin (though after a long battle with it we may feel like it is sin). However, even a movement in the heart to indulge the temptation turns it into sin (Js. 1:14-15).
- ✓ So that is temptation — any enticement or pressure that compels us not to follow Christ.

• Temptation is internal — from our own desires

- ✓ John Owen wrote, “Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before.” If that sounds biblical, it’s because that’s what Jesus said (Lk. 6:43-45; Mk. 7:20-23).
- ✓ *Internal desires are sinful*; coveting is sinful — and that includes any kind of coveting (Ex. 20:17).
- ✓ When our desires do not honor the Lord, they are sinful. When we desire something the Lord has forbidden, it is sinful. The lustful inclinations and desires are sin. The problem is inside me.
- ✓ We tend to cultivate those desires persistently. And we *do* cultivate them.
 - People will say, “I hate...[drunkenness, porn, my anger, conflict,...].” Yet when they are engaging in those sins they are saying something different.
 - In the moment when the temptation is offered, they are attracted to it and love it.
 - The preacher Haddon Robinson wrote, “Temptation stirs the blood and influences the imagination. If we were revolted by it, it would be no temptation at all. Usually, though, temptation doesn’t seem very bad, so we play with it, flirt with it, and invite it into our lives.”
- ✓ Oswald Chambers illustrated the danger of these internal desires when he said, “Temptation yielded to is lust deified.” When we give into internal longings for sin, we are exalting our desires over God’s commands; we are deifying sinful lust. The temptation comes from within.

• Temptation is external — from the world system and its ruler, Satan

- ✓ Temptations come from the world system (1 Jn. 2:15-17). That system is ideological (2 Cor. 10:5).
- ✓ And the world system is ruled by the great Tempter (Lk. 4:13). He delights in evil and lives to entice both unbelievers and believers with sin (2 Cor. 4:2, 4; 1 Pt. 5:8). He is always prowling and always seeking and always enticing. Seeing others fall into sin is his perverse delight. He is diligent to tempt. “This lion is ever hunting after his prey.” [Watson]

He does not confine himself to one sort of temptation; he has more plots than one. If he finds one temptation does not prevail, he will utilise another. If he cannot tempt to lust, he will tempt to pride. If temptation to covetousness does not prevail, he will tempt to extravagance. If he cannot frighten men to despair, he will see if he cannot draw them to presumption. If he cannot make them profane, he will see if he cannot make them formalists. If he cannot make them wicked, he will tempt them to be erroneous. He will tempt them to leave off ordinances; he will pretend revelations....Thus Satan's diligence in tempting is great—he will turn every stone; he has several tools to work with; if one temptation will not do he will make use of another. [Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 260 (Kindle version).]

- ✓ We live in a broken and fallen world where Satan is constantly working against us. But are we also aware that the world system in which we live is not just broken, but rebellious against God? The problem is not so much with the “stuff” in this world — the problem is the way it teaches us to think and the philosophies about what is right and true and what is the answer to life.
 - The world system embraces humanism instead of theocentric worship;
 - It embraces political process instead of Christ's rule;
 - It embraces relativism instead of eternal truth;
 - It embraces eclectic soul care instead of biblical direction and instruction;
 - It embraces entertainment and ease instead of sacrifice and service;
 - It embraces self-actualization (expressive individualism) instead of the gospel of Christ on the cross.
 - The world is after our minds (hearts), to move us away from Christ; Christ is given to us to free us from sin and to transform us into His identity (and the way *He* thinks and desires).

- **Temptation is inevitable — even for the believer**

- ✓ Temptation surrounds us externally — Satan and the world system are an assembly line of temptations. And our flesh is also inclined to manufacture idols that turn into temptations.
- ✓ That is the teaching of Rom. 7 and Gal. 5:1, 13, 16 — they reveal the reality of fleshly temptation.
- ✓ David Powlison rightly observed, “In sum, we are tempted and led astray by the plausible images and voices that surround, by our own desires, and by the Tempter.” [*Making All Things New*, 34.]
- ✓ This prayer request, among other realities, is designed to make us aware of the onslaught of temptation. Do you live with the awareness that Satan and the world are seeking to destroy you?
- ✓ We employ many kinds of protections against dangers: insurance of many kinds, home security systems, expiration dates on food, seat belts, eye and ear protection when working with loud machines, sun screen, and dozens more. What protections are we using to protect our souls?
- ✓ We are weak, and temptations are real and persistent. So what do we do?

2. God's Relationship to Temptation

- Let's answer the obvious question first — does this request mean that temptation to sin comes from God and we are asking Him not to do that to us (“don't entice us to sin”)? No. James 1:13 is clear.

- ✓ God is absolutely, completely, perfectly, and infinitely holy.
 - ✓ He is good and does not sin (Ps. 119:68). There is nothing within Him that is personally attracted to sin. He has never been inclined to any sin. He never will be inclined to sin. He cannot be inclined to sin. He is not perverse, deceitful, or sarcastic. He does not ever entice anyone to sin.
 - ✓ (Though it is also clear that He uses sin to accomplish His divine purposes; Mt. 1:1-18; Acts 2:23ff.)
 - ✓ Since God doesn't entice us to sin, what does this request, **Lead us not...** mean?
- Some have said that since the word **temptation** can also refer to tests or trials and not just enticements to sin, that Jesus is teaching us to ask, "don't make the tests of life too hard for us" (1 Cor. 10:31).
 - ✓ That's possible. But Jesus is teaching us to pray about temptations immediately after teaching us to pray for forgiveness — which relates to sin and not trials and difficulty.
 - ✓ It seems much more likely that the sequence of requests is something like: provide us with the food and covering we need to survive each day, pardon us from the sins that have broken our fellowship with you, and protect us from even being enticed by and falling into sin.
 - So how should we understand the request, **lead us not...**?
 - ✓ It is noted that the verb has a nuance of permissiveness — "do not permit me to fall into the hands of temptation that leads to sin, iniquity, or anything shameful." [Jeremias, *paraphrase*]
 - ✓ Jesus is not saying that the Father leads us into sin unless we ask Him not to lead us to sin.
 - ✓ Jesus *is* saying that we have access to ask God to strengthen us so that we are not overwhelmed by temptation so that we give into those enticements.
 - ✓ Also, the primary request is "lead us" — and then that is negated, so we might give the sense: "Lead us — *not* into temptation, but away from it, into righteousness, into situations where, far from being tempted, we will be protected and therefore kept righteous." [Carson]
 - ✓ So the request really is an expression of dislike and hatred of temptation and sin, and a request for help from God to sustain us against temptations.
 - Do we hate temptation? Do we hate sin? Are we paying attention to the loves of our hearts?

"No matter what temptations we face or what familiar sins we still battle, we cannot overcome them if we neglect the affections of our heart. Godliness requires more than strong feelings; it demands our strongest feelings, namely, our love. It brings us back again to what Christ called the 'treasure' of the heart. What is it that a person loves the most? It's sitting right there, right next to his or her heart." [Troxel, *With All Your Heart*, 102.]

- Do we recognize our weakness and need for help? Are we overestimating our strength to resist sin on our own — and are we actively asking God for help with the temptations we face?
- Do we love Christ more than sin and its enticements? Are we asking God for help?
- ✓ We also should remember that not only does God not entice us to sin, but He understands our weakness and our inclination to sin (our dustiness, Ps. 103:13-14) and Christ, having endured

temptations in ways we cannot comprehend, is sympathetic to us (Heb. 4:15). He knows infinitely better than us the power of temptation and the provision of God for temptation.

- Remember, God doesn't lead us into temptation to sin; He protects us from sin and evil — "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation..." (2 Pt. 2:9).
 - ✓ It is a Father's responsibility to protect the family; an earthly father will sacrifice his life to protect his wife and children from evil.
 - ✓ We pray for help to the heavenly Father who is able and desires to keep us from sin.
 - ✓ He sent His Son to liberate us from the power of temptation and sin (Rom. 6:14, 22).
 - ✓ So what is His provision for us in temptation?

3. God's Provision for Temptation

- There is one stated provision from God for temptation and at least one more implied provision.
- The first provision for temptation is prayer.
 - ✓ This prayer is a reminder that we have a **Father** who delights to provide for His children (11-13).
 - ✓ And what we need is not just provision, but protection. And if we ask, He will protect.
 - ✓ We cannot (genuinely) pray and contemplate temptation at the same time:
 - We can't pray with gratitude for food and either starve ourselves or be gluttonous.
 - We can't pray for the salvation of someone and lust for them at the same time.
 - We can't pray for God's blessing and provision for someone and be angry at the same time.
 - We can't (genuinely) ask God for help with any sin and indulge in that sin at the same time.
 - We will either pray for God's help or we will indulge in the sin; we can't do both.
 - ✓ George Whitfield rightly said, "It is so dangerous to engage to subtle and powerful an enemy as Satan is, that we shall be overcome as often as we engage, unless the Lord be on our side. My brothers, if you were left to yourselves, you would be overcome by every temptation with which you were beset." When anticipating temptation, let us pray.
 - ✓ And as you pray, remember what prayer is — it is fellowship with and enjoyment of your Father. So every temptation is an opportunity to defeat the devil; *and* even more, it is an opportunity to delight in fellowship with the Father who will protect you in the temptation.
- The first implied provision is watchfulness — attentiveness and alertness.
 - ✓ Watchfulness is implied by the fact that we are asking for help prior to the temptation of sin. Repentance and confession is what we do after we give into temptation and sin (v. 4a). Watchfulness (praying ahead of time) is what we do to prepare for the battle with temptation.
 - ✓ This is the very thing Jesus compelled the disciples to do when they faced their greatest temptation (while they were in the Garden with Him, 22:40, 46).

- ✓ Do we recognize the things that entice us and pray for help and wisdom prior to the attack? It's the kind of planning football coaches do before the weekend, and Generals before a battle. And we are in the greatest conflict of all — it demands watchfulness and preparedness.
- ✓ Watson — “Do we keep our spiritual watch? Do we set spies in every place, watching our thoughts, our eyes, our tongues? When we have prayed against sin, do we watch against temptation?”
- ✓ As another British writer (Tolkien) observed centuries later: “It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.” (*The Hobbit*)
- ✓ We not only live near a dragon; we live in his lair (the world). Are we being watchful?
- ✓ The best time to deal with temptation is before it arrives — and we prepare best in prayer.
- ✓ It has been observed that “watching and praying seem like a pathetic counterattack [against temptation]. But that is because we underestimate the spiritual armor God gives His sons and daughters.” [Butterfield]
- This petition is similar to the request of David: “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice deeds of wickedness With men who do iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies.” (Ps. 141:4)
 - ✓ Temptation was first observed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3) and it has been a constant companion of mankind ever since Adam ate the forbidden fruit.
 - ✓ Temptation is internal to us in our desires. And it is all around us in the world system.
 - ✓ And God will never entice us to sin. Even more, He has given us the resources we need to combat that temptation and not succumb to sin — prayer and watchfulness.

CONCLUSION: Prayer (quoted and modified from a prayer in *A Way to Pray*) —

Our great Father (and we so delight to come to You as our loving, eternal, infinite, and glorious Father). We treasure our access to You and thank You for the invitation to come to You in prayer. This morning as we pray we ask for strength to fight the ongoing battle of sin.

We hate temptation and we hate its consequences when we give into temptation. We especially hate that when we follow the temptations it leads to sin that impairs and disrupts our fellowship with You. We long for the day when we will always be in fellowship with You and neither temptation nor sin will impede our communion with You. Until that day, would You keep us attentive to temptation?

Would you help us to identify sinful inclinations and desires that we are cultivating in our hearts? Would You help us to see the slightest movements towards perversity; might unrighteousness in our souls abhor us. Give us attention to what we do and where we go. But make us even more attentive to what we think and what are the meditations that excite us and consume us — and might those meditations be pleasing to You.

Further, would you make us attentive to the attacks of the Evil One that come against us through the ideologies of the world system. Help us to see when we are believing untruths about You (philosophies that are raised up that deny Your goodness and Your righteousness). Help us to see when we are believing untruths about the world (supposing that temporary pleasures in the world are more important than avoiding suffering because we love Christ). Help us to see compromise in our hearts, and when the slow slide to ungodliness begins.

Make us strong in the Lord, since our struggle is not simply against flesh and blood. Reinforce us with Your powerful might, since our warfare is against principalities, powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world.... Lord, keep us from walking right into temptation's way. Knowing our ever-present danger, keep us watchful, ever on the lookout for the subtleties of sin and Satan. And keep us praying — dependent on You.

As we come now to this table where we remember Christ, would You examine our hearts?

- If we are not believers in Christ, would You accept our humble repentance? We hate our sin and we hate being in bondage to it. Would You remove the sin from us and change us so we can live for You? We believe that Jesus is the only way for us to be forgiven. We are asking You to forgive us because we believe that Jesus died for our sins, paying the penalty of our sins.
- And if we are believers in Christ, as we did last week, we now pause and ask if there be any sin that is a barrier to our fellowship with You. Is there something which we have not confessed previously? We know confess it and ask You to forgive it. [Pause] Thank You for the blood of Christ that frees us from sin and its power.

And now we end our prayer where the message just ended. With David we say, “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice deeds of wickedness With men who do iniquity; And do not let me eat of their delicacies.” We know the power of temptation, keep us from sin that comes from temptation and make us to delight in You more than the temptation. And now help us to remember the goodness and greatness of our Savior Jesus as we come to the table of remembrance. In His name we pray, Amen.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25