



November 20, 2016
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Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Lead Us, Deliver Us

A few weeks ago, I had to go to the Department of Licensing. For reasons too complicated to explain, I went to the Port Orchard branch, one I'd never visited. I walked in and was greeted by a guy seated behind a table. "Can I see your I.D., please?" he said. (ID? To get into the Department of Licensing? Well, OK.) So, I pulled out my driver's license and showed it to him. He looked at it, jotted something down in a book and gave it back to me. "Thank you. Please, go on in." I was pretty puzzled by it all but made my way into the room. But I literally stopped in the doorway, looked around, and thought to myself, "This is the most psychedelic Department of Licensing I've ever seen!" The walls were covered with bright flowers and sunrays. And then I looked at the shelves behind the counter and thought, "What's with all those glass jars?"

Suddenly it struck me: "I am standing in a marijuana shop!" Turns out, the DOL was the next door down! I couldn't get out of there fast enough! Today, we turn to the final petition in the Lord's Prayer: Lead us not into temptation...but deliver us from evil!

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, how do we end it? For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Powerful ending, right? Only problem is, Jesus didn't teach these words. This line was added later by some scribe who couldn't stand to let the prayer end so abruptly. But our best manuscript evidence suggests that, in fact, the ending was that abrupt: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Bam! Kind of the feeling I had when I was teaching Rachel to drive and she came up to a stop sign. Abrupt. Sudden. Jerky. Not even an "Amen" at the end!

That word, "temptation," can also be translated "trials" or "testing." And the word "evil" can be translated, "the Evil One." So Jesus seems to be teaching us to pray this way: "Father, please don't allow us to slip into a trial that will cause us to sin. Instead, protect us! When the Evil One tries to destroy us, please save us! Save us from the Devil! Only you can do that!"—"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

It may seem an abrupt way to end the prayer, but doesn't it sum up the reason Jesus came to earth in the first place? Our greatest need, as human beings, is that God would save us from the destruction the Devil intends. As Paul wrote to young Timothy, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners!" In fact, it might be argued

that the rest of the gospel is a description of how God answers this last petition. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the way God answered—and still answers—the ultimate prayer of his people: “God, please lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the Evil One!”

But here’s something I find fascinating. Jesus didn’t practice what he preached! Do you remember the last thing that happens to Jesus before he begins his ministry? Temptation! Flip back to Matthew 4: 1: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Wait a second! Didn’t Jesus just teach us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one? And yet, two pages earlier, we read that God the Holy Spirit led Jesus into temptation? What gives?

I see the temptation of Jesus—and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus—as salvation parentheses on either side of his ministry. We know that Jesus conquers sin and death, ultimately, through his death on the cross and his resurrection. The Devil knows it too. That’s why way back here, before Jesus preaches his first sermon or performs his first miracle, the Devil tries to derail Jesus. But he fails! The Temptation of Jesus is a down payment on the resurrection; on Jesus’s victory over evil. When He teaches “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,” he does so as the Savior who was led into temptation, defeated the evil one, and makes it possible for us to do the same. So let’s listen to this remarkable story.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

If we want to be delivered from the Evil One, the Temptation of Jesus warns us of four ways in which the Devil tries to discourage and defeat us. If we want to live a victorious life in Jesus, we would do well to pay attention to these.

First, the Devil attacks our Identity. Do you notice the opening words in the first two temptations of Jesus? "If you are the Son of God..." Do you hear how he is trying to plant a seed of doubt in Jesus' heart? Doubt about his identity; about his relationship with God? If?! But how could there be any doubt? Do you remember what happened to Jesus just before his temptation? His baptism! And let me remind you of the very last verse in that story: "and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!" (Matthew 3:17) God has just declared for everyone to hear that Jesus is his beloved Son, and yet the Devil starts out his temptation by attacking Jesus' identity. "If you are the Son of God." If Satan could get Jesus to question his relationship with God before he even started his ministry, the game was over.

Do you ever find yourself wondering if God really loves you? If God has really saved you? If the things you say and sing and pray are really true? Are you really a son of God and daughter of God? Are you really a child of the king? Are his promises to save you and change you and take you to heaven really trustworthy? Whenever you find yourself thinking, "How could God love me? How could God save me? What hope could I possibly have?" If you hear those things being whispered, that is the devil! He's trying to cause you to question your identity as a child of God. Don't you believe it; the Devil is a liar!

Here's the second area of attack: Weakness. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. He was starving. He was tired. He was alone. And it was in that state that the Devil tempted Jesus to take matters into his own hands. He whispered this lie: "God's not going to come through for you. You are hungry. Perform a magic trick... like manna in the wilderness. Feed yourself because you can't count on God to meet your needs."

As you look back over your life, I'll bet you'll recall that some of your most spectacular failures came during a time of weakness. In Celebrate Recovery we are taught to be on guard when we are in one of four weakened states: Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. What does that spell? HALT! What do you do when you are being tempted in an area of weakness—when you are hungry or angry or lonely or tired? Halt! Stop! Turn around and go the other way. If you don't, you will say or do something you will regret, and the Devil will chalk up one more victory on his board. Every time we try to fill the empty, weak places in our life rather than trusting God to do so, we are being seduced by the enemy of our soul. Don't believe him! The Devil is a liar!

The next area of temptation is exactly the opposite. After trying to bring Jesus down by attacking his weakness, now he tries to tempt him through Arrogance. He takes Jesus to the Holy City, sets him up on the pinnacle of the temple—the highest point on the wall of the holiest place in the holy city, 300 feet in the air—and he says, "Go ahead; throw yourself off! You are the Son of God, after all. God will have to save you! You are too important for him to let you fall!"

Notice how Satan uses elevation. He takes Jesus up, up, up—up from the depths of the wilderness, up to the holy city, up to the temple mount, up to the pinnacle of the temple. Satan wants to exalt Jesus, to lift him up and up and up so that he can bring him down, down, down. Arrogance!

Do you remember the myth of Icarus? His father, Daedalus, formed wings out of feathers and wax to allow Icarus to escape from his prison in Crete. He warned Icarus not to fly too close to the sun, but Icarus ignored him. In his arrogance, he flew up and up and up until the sun melted the wax and Icarus plummeted to his death.

Arrogance—pride—is such a dangerous thing and such an opening for the Devil! I have watched pastors of enormous talent who began to believe their own press releases and, in the end, came crashing to the ground because of their arrogance. Maybe your area of temptation is not weakness. Maybe it's strength! You are so clever, so gifted, so smart, so spiritual! You know the Bible, know theology, you've got it all figured out. In your strength and wisdom and giftedness, you are tempted to presume that you are the Lord of your own life; that God exists to bless and satisfy and protect you. Don't believe it. The Devil is a liar.

So the Devil attacks Jesus' Identity, he strikes at his Weakness, he invites him into Arrogance, and each time, he fails. Now comes one last temptation: Compromise. Satan takes Jesus even higher—up onto a great mountain—and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. And he says, "I will give these to you." Isn't this what Jesus wants? Hasn't he come to claim his creation? To redeem his people? But the way of salvation will be hard. It will mean rejection and betrayal and torture and death!

But what if he could bypass all that? The Devil offers a shortcut. "I will give you the whole world if you will just worship me." Here's what is fascinating about this: the verb for "worship" is a one-time event. It doesn't mean, "Worship me forever." It means, "If you will worship me just one time... just one!" Think of it. One little compromise and Jesus can get everything he wants—all without the cross.

How many of us have fallen because of one compromise? One little fudged number. One little white lie. One little hidden detail. Maybe even intended to accomplish some good things! Just make up an alibi for the boss, just doctor those returns a little bit, just one little compromise... who will know?

Well, you will know, and God will know... and you will always live in fear that others will find out. But there's something even worse: Compromise is infectious. Despite your promise to yourself, you never do it just once. Compromise breeds like rabbits and soon, your whole life is a minefield of compromise. And all the noble things you hoped to accomplish just by shaving the truth or cooking the books or stabbing that one colleague in the back—all of it collapses in a heap of failed dreams, broken relationships and ruined reputation. One little compromise? Don't believe it. The Devil is a liar!

The more I thought about it this week, the more I wondered if Jesus had his Temptation in mind when he taught the Lord's Prayer. Knowing the Devil would attack our identity, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our father..." Knowing the Devil would tempt us to think more highly of ourselves, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name!" Knowing the Devil would tempt us to meet our own needs, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." And knowing the Devil would tempt us to compromise so that we might gain the world, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

So Jesus taught us how to pray against temptation and against the Evil One. But he also taught us how to fight. Did you see how? Every time, he wielded the same weapon. What was it? The Word of God. What Paul called the Sword of the Spirit. Every time, when the Devil attacked, Jesus counter-attacked with the same words. What were they? It is written! It is written! It is written! And then he would quote a passage of scripture. Even in his weakened state, all Jesus had to do was tap into the reserves of God's Word that he had stored within his heart, and he had the weapon that would defeat the lies of the Devil.

It is good for us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," but it is also good if we have prepared ourselves for battle. I tell you, the single most powerful tool I have used to strengthen my prayer life in these last months has been scripture memory. Every morning as I walk 1.2 miles to and from our newspaper tube, I memorize God's Word, and this discipline has changed my life.

A few weeks ago, I was flying back from Spokane in one of those little cigar-tube-in-the-sky airplanes. After I was seated, a very large person approached me and said, "I'm next to you." She sat down and, even though she did all she could to stay on her side, it wasn't possible. I had to swing out into the aisle to make enough room for both of us. I know how I have reacted to this situation in the past. My internal dialogue would be disgusted and critical. Lots of secret eye rolls, but I had been memorizing Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." In that situation when I would have been tempted to be mean-spirited and self-centered or critical, those memorized words of Scripture-power came to mind, and something remarkable happened. I found empathy for my seat mate. I found myself caring for her and willing to rearrange myself so that she might feel less self-conscious or embarrassed.

That may seem like a silly little example, but I'm telling you, that was a transformational moment for me; one where I realized the true power of God's memorized word to do battle with the temptation of the Devil to think of my seat mate as anything less than a beloved child of God. When I have God's Word stored away in my heart, then whatever my condition—whether I am hungry or angry or

lonely or tired or depressed or anxious—whatever the state that makes me susceptible to the attacks of the Evil One...if I call up God's Word, if I recite this powerful promises I find myself strengthened.

In your bulletin you will find a book mark. I have placed on it some powerful scripture affirmations, including our benediction from Philippians 4. You can do this, and it will have the same impact on you that it did on me. So how many of you are willing to commit to memorizing at least one of these verses this week? Don't just let the Devil take swipes at you! Fight back!

Let's close by praying the Lord's Prayer one more time and ending it as Jesus did.