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Scripture: Teach Us to Pray- Lead Us Not into Temptation but Deliver us from Evil

Can I ask you a question? What do you think of when I say the word, temptation? Temptation. For many of us, it conjures up the idea of something negative. For me, most of the time I think of food because there is nothing that can tempt me more than food. Especially all things, chocolate.

Christmas was a difficult time for me. We seemed to have so much chocolate laying around the house and my brain was telling me, *No! No more chocolate, Paul* but my taste buds were saying, *eat the chocolate, Paul. It is so good.* It was like the proverbial angel on one shoulder and devil on the other. *Eat the chocolate. Don't eat the chocolate.* It was a very difficult quandary because of course, too much chocolate is not good for me, so the temptation is negative, right?

Perhaps for you there are other things that spring to your mind when you think of temptation. Things that can trap you like money or material possessions, like shoes. I am told some people can't walk by a shoe store without getting the same feeling I have for chocolate. *Buy them, don't buy them*, it is hard. Or maybe it is alcohol, or drugs or sex. What tempts you?

Can I ask you another question? Is temptation always negative? It seems to stir up this visceral negative feeling in us, but is it always bad to be tempted? Just think about that for a moment. If you have been with us for the past few weeks you know that we are in the midst of a message series on the Lord's Prayer.

Let me remind you of the context of Jesus' teaching this prayer to his disciples. Early on in his ministry on earth, Jesus has gathered his followers together

on the side of a mountain and he uses the opportunity to do some pretty intentional teaching about the Kingdom he came to proclaim, the Kingdom of God. We have commonly referred to this teaching found in the gospel of Matthew Chapters 5-7 as the "Sermon on the Mount".

Much of Jesus' teaching was countercultural to anything the people had heard before. *Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek.* Jesus teaches about a new way to understand the law and how to handle anger and love your enemy. He calls them to give to the needy and then he turns his attention to prayer. Right in the middle of this radical teaching, he tells them about a new way to pray. It is like he is saying to them, *do you want to know what our father in heaven likes to hear. Do you want to know how to take the pressure off when you pray?*

Matthew 6: 9-13

"This, then, is how you should pray:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

*¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

*¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

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

Our Father, the opening draws us into praying in community with others to God who is close at hand, like a father. The first three petitions are about God; *hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done*, Your, your, your and then the attention focuses to us, us, us.

*Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts.
Lead us not into temptation.*

Last week, we focused on *Give us today our daily bread*. We are going to skip by *Forgive us our debts* not because it isn't important. It is very important but just the way the calendar works, time doesn't allow it. We will preach it in the days ahead so we will let you know when that is coming.

Today, we come to **Matthew 6:13**, *Lead us not into temptation* and then the phrase that follows, *but deliver us from the evil one.* You can't truly understand what the first part of this petition means without looking at the second part. Let me explain.

Do you remember how I asked you what comes to your mind when you think of the word, temptation? For most of us, it was probably negative. An action that causes us to do something that violates a moral code or is unhealthy for our lives. For those who were gathered around Jesus on this day when he taught them to pray like this; *And lead us not into temptation*, They would have heard the word, *peirasmos*. The word that we know as temptation, translated in the Greek, the language is the New Testament is *peirasmos*.

Now my intent in sharing this is not to wow you with my knowledge of another language, I have enough trouble with English. But here is the interesting part. The word *peirasmos* that the followers of Jesus heard in this petition actually has two meanings.

It means temptation, but it also means test. Temptation and test and those can be two separate things. A test is something meant to prove a person's reliability or integrity and as a result, refine or enhance their character. In the bible, when God tested someone, it was to grow their faith. When he tested Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22, it was to grow his faith.

Whereas a temptation, is meant to lure a person to do something that they maybe don't want to do. Something that will bring about negative results.

So, *peirasmos* can either be a test to prove or improve a person's character and grow their faith or

a temptation, enticing a person to do what they may not want to do, maybe sin.

How you interpret the word depends on the context. Similar to if I was to say to my wife, *could you please give me that pitcher/picture?* That may mean different things depending on what we are doing. If we are sitting around a dinner table, the pitcher is probably a container of some sort of drink on the table. If we were doing some interior decorating, it could mean, a picture to hang on a wall. Do you understand?

Similarly, how you interpret *peirasmos*, as a test or temptation in this petition of the Lord's Prayer, depends on the context. Let me give you a practical example. When my oldest son was 14 years old in grade nine, we had a curfew for him on Friday and Saturday nights of 11:00 pm. That is when he had to be in our home. Throughout the year, he proved himself to be trustworthy and responsible as he almost always was home by his curfew.

So, the next year, Carolyn and I anticipating that our son, now 15 and in grade 10 would ask for an extension of the curfew, we took the initiative. We sat him down and essentially told him, he had passed the test. He has proven himself faithful and trustworthy of the 11:00 pm curfew last year so we were moving it to 11:30 pm for the coming year. As his parents, by setting things such as curfews, they are tests. To build our child's obedience, trust and responsibility. To improve their character. These are not meant to be temptations.

In other words, I didn't set a curfew for my child just to tempt him to be late. I am actually cheerleading him to get home on time not standing at the door at 11:30 just to chastise him if he is five minutes late. Now he may have other things that are enticing him at night to break curfew but that's the part that builds his character. He needs to learn to bust through those and get himself in the house by 11:30 pm. Do you understand that?

See the overall goal in all of this is that one day my son would not need a curfew. That through this testing, he will have learned obedience and faithfulness and has the character to be able to function on his own without me having to continue to test him. That he is mature and responsible. I am

happy to report that he is now 25 and I think we made it.

Here is the struggle we have with this petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father, lead us not into temptation.* The bible tells us that God does not tempt.

James 1:13

And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.

So why does Jesus invite us to pray something that God does not do? Look at what it says in the verse just before James 1:13, at verse 12;

James 1:12-13

*God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.
13 And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.*

God does not tempt but he does test. The purpose of the testing is to lead us into a deeper faith. A full dependence on him. The evil one on the other hand, does not test but he does tempt, because his purpose is to cause us to fall away from our faith in God. Do you see the difference?

So with all of that preamble and Greek language lesson, we can conclude that this petition, *Lead us not into temptation* when rendered literally because we are speaking about something we want God to do in our lives, actually means, *Lead us not into testing.* The word temptation, *peirasmos*, in this context means testing. Jesus teaches his followers that when they pray, they are to petition God, *Our Father, lead us not into testing*

Now let me try and clarify that even more because it still can be confusing. *Lead us not into testing* means *Lord, lead us to such a deep faith in you that your testing will no longer be necessary or at least we will need fewer of your tests in our lives because we are wholeheartedly trusting and obeying you.*

My goal in setting tests like curfews for my son and all of my children for that matter was that they would learn and grow to be self-sufficient, mature adults with character and integrity so that they no longer needed my tests. The goal is to wean them off of my tests. Are you following?

Our Father, lead us not into testing but deliver us from the evil one. This word **but** is important word that ties this whole petition together, *but deliver us from the evil one.*

The only way for us to need less of the Lord's testing and have our faith strong and sure in him, is if he continues to cast the evil one out of our lives because Satan turns the tests into temptations. That is what can destroy faith. Let me just be clear though. Testing can be good. Testing is what grows our faith but we don't generally like to be tested do we?

I have never really liked tests. Tests in school, always made me a little anxious maybe it is because I wasn't particularly gifted, scholastically. Some of you may remember taking the standardized tests in school in grade 3, 6 or 9. In my other career as a teacher, I had to administer those tests to my students and I can tell you that they created a lot of stress for both them and for us, the teachers. Those of you in high school, you are in the midst of testing right now. It is exam season. A very important time for you.

Tests at the doctor's office usually involve being jabbed with a sharp object and having red liquid withdrawn from your arm, or sometimes the tests can be even worse. I am not a fan of those either. Some of you may be in professions that involve regular tests to maintain licenses and credentials. They can create some anxiety. All of us who drive on the roads legally, needed to pass a driver's test. I had four children go through this process and I can tell you during those times, things around our house were stressful. Last year, my mom turned 80. For the first time in over 60 years, she had to be tested to be on the roads. It was an anxious time for her.

Tests in and of themselves, may trigger some real emotion in us but I think we can agree that they are usually in place for really positive reasons.

Tests in school are meant to demonstrate to a student whether they are understanding the content that they need to learn. A good or even a bad mark on the test in school should be a barometer to help aid learning. A good mark means you have a good understanding of the content. A bad mark means you need some help.

Tests in the doctor's office reveal the state of our overall health. Results can give us more understanding of how to alter our lifestyle to make healthier choices or provide information for the doctor to treat an illness.

Tests in the workplace serve an important role as well. I have a friend who is a pilot with Air Canada. As an anxious flyer myself, it gives me some degree of comfort every time I step into an Air Canada plane, to know that their pilots have to maintain their proficiency by being tested regularly and working through scenarios on a flight simulator. As someone who drives a car on the road, I am glad there are standards to pass before you can share a lane with me. Although those standards seem to be slipping by the way I see some of you handle the winter driving!

Tests are not inherently bad things and as I alluded to earlier, the bible reveals many instances of God testing his people. Why? Well, it was because he was far more interested in their growth, obedience, faith and character development than he was in their momentary comfort or happiness.

*Exodus 16:4, the Lord said to Moses,
Look, I'm going to rain down food from
heaven for you. Each day the people can go
out and pick up as much food as they need
for that day. I will **test** them in this to see
whether or not they will follow my
instructions.*

*Deuteronomy 8:2
Remember how the LORD your God led you
through the wilderness for these forty years,
humbling you and **testing** you to prove your
character, and to find out whether or not
you would obey his commands.*

Two instances where the Lord tests his people to determine, what? Their obedience and character.

New Testament scholar, William Barclay says,

The word translated peirasmos is regularly used of the divine placing of humanity in situations which are tests, situations where there is the potential to fall but in which humanity is not meant to fall, a situation which may be to their ruin, but out of which humanity is meant to emerge spiritually strengthened and enriched”.

God tests, not tempts us, to strengthen and enrich our lives in Him. Have you ever been tested? Maybe you are in the midst of a test, right now. Is it a test of your faith and obedience to God? Or maybe a test of your character and integrity? Or is it a moral test? Are you being tested in your work place? Perhaps you are feeling pressure to do something that may lead to a promotion or a little more notoriety but it also comes at a cost. What you have to do may compromise your beliefs and who you are.

Maybe you are being tested in a relationship with someone you are dating. You feel things are advancing a little quickly physically and it is pushing up against that line of what is right and wrong.

Maybe you are being tested in your marriage. There is a bit of uncertainty and complacency setting in. There is someone at work that has caught your attention and even though you know it is wrong, you have begun to flirt a little bit.

Perhaps there is has been some testing of your integrity while on the internet or watching TV late at night. The programs that you are viewing or the web sites you are perusing are a little bit more risqué than usual.

Or maybe you are experiencing some testing in your relationship and commitment to Jesus. Your faith has been wavering a little recently and you aren't quite sure what it is you believe anymore.

If you have or are experiencing some testing, I want you to know something. Jesus, the one who taught us to pray, *Our Father, lead us not into testing,* knew what it was like to be tested.

Matthew 4:1

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be **tempted** there by the devil.*

The word tempted here is the same as the Lord's Prayer, *peirasmos*. It means tested. For forty days, Jesus encountered the most intense testing. What the devil meant for temptation, for Jesus to fall under the pressure and turn away from his heavenly father, didn't happen. The Holy Spirit provided and Jesus withstood everything the devil threw his way and then went on to begin his public ministry. Jesus knew what it was like to be tested. He knows what we may be encountering even today and the bible gives us hope in the midst of our testing.

Now I am almost hesitant to use this next verse only because I think we have misused it, but it does speak a fundamental truth from God to us. Notice there are three variations of the word temptation in this one verse and each one is the Greek word, *peirasmos*, and in the context is translated, testing. Let me read it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

The temptations (peirasmos-testing) in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation (testing) to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted (tested), he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

The Apostle Paul wrote this truth to his friends at the church in Corinth. He wanted them to know that even in their times of testing, God will make them stronger. He will give them more faith, more trust and more obedience, if they turn in to him during the testing and not away.

You know I get people that quote 1 Corinthians 10:13 to me on occasion, often times out of context and they will be exasperated. *God promised me he wouldn't give me more than I can handle. Well I am sinking and he is nowhere to be found.*

This is what I think when I hear that. First of all, I think the person has underestimated what they can handle and it sounds like they are the ones who have turned their backs on God, not the other way around.

Let me explain it this way. I have shared with you in the past that believe it or not, I used to run. The emphasis on "used" to. It started when I was teaching school. During our lunch breaks I began to jog around the neighbourhood with another guy on staff. We started with a particular route but soon found ourselves covering the distance in less time. We were getting into better shape so, we began to make the route longer. With each week, we found that we were running further in less time until finally we both decided that maybe we wanted to test ourselves and take the running outside of the lunch hour and begin to do some 10 kilometre runs. Oh, there were some aches and pains along the way, but we broke through the quitting points. I never imaged myself running a 10 KM race when I started but I had developed in my running to a point that I could challenge myself to do more and go further, I was in better shape.

I completed my first 10 KM race. The key word is completed. That was my goal. I did it. But, I also had a semi respectable time, so now I was hooked to try and beat my time and my next race, I ran even faster and before you know it, I was regularly running with a group of guys on Saturday mornings covering distances of up to 20KM.

I would have never thought that I was capable of that when I started. As I stretched myself and tested my limits, breaking through the quitting points with others by my side encouraging me, I had gotten myself into the best physical condition of my life. I could handle much more than I ever imagined. I think sometimes we underestimate what we are able to handle; physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. What we are able to achieve or overcome in our lives because we give into the testing, those obstacles in our lives. We quit too soon and often, it is because we tried to carry it ourselves.

Instead, this passage, 1 Corinthians 10:13 implores us to turn to God when those times of testing happen and trust that he will give us what we need to get through them, bust through the quitting points and we come out the other side with our character strengthened and our faith enhanced, able to handle much more than we ever imagined because we didn't carry it alone.

See, a plea to God to give us a trouble free life is a call to make us complacent. Make us weak and fragile. To pray to God to strengthen us through the inevitable tests and trials that life will throw our way is to ask God to deepen our trust, grow our faith and build our character. Did you notice once again, the use of the plural pronoun in this petition?

Our Father...Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

When Jesus taught us to pray this prayer, it was a call into community. It was not just a horizontal prayer but one that comes with a lateral glance. To pray for and invite others around us into each of these petitions of this wonderful prayer.

If you are experiencing some major tests and temptations in your life right now, let me ask you something, *are you holding it yourself? Are you hiding?* That is what we tend to do because there may be a little guilt or shame attached to it. In the prayer, Jesus says to turn to God and then invite people into your experience to help you as you journey this path. That takes some humility though doesn't it? Instead of hiding it, it means bringing your situation to light by sharing with others. That is not always easy but it is what this prayer encourages us to do.

If you are sitting here and experiencing a difficult time in your life, do you know that we have a prayer sheet at North Park that you can access online to invite people to pray for you during this time?

We have prayer cards in the pocket of the seats in front of you that you can fill out and put in the offering boxes at the back. Our staff see those and we pray.

We have people standing up here at the end of each service who are available to pray for you, are you taking a step in faith to come and pray?

Many of you are in small groups, is that a safe place for you to share and invite people to walk with you during your tests and struggles?

Our world teaches us to value privacy and individualism, Jesus turned that around, to value community and openness with one another but how

are we with that? Can we handle each other's tests and temptations?

People say to me on occasion, *Paul, I am praying for you.* I just want you to know, that I don't take that lightly and I hope you don't either. I am counting on the fact that you are praying for me and I am praying for you. Do you think I face testing and temptation in my life? You better believe it. I encounter the same world as you do. I need Jesus every day to help me to withstand the testing and to cast the evil one aside. I need you and we need each other. Is this a church that stands with each other in the good times and the more difficult?

We also have to think about this in terms of the broader church community as well. The Lord's Prayer is a corporate prayer that has implications for us, as a church. So what testing do we, as a church, encounter?

Is it in areas such as Pride in our accomplishments and not giving the glory to God? Boastfulness about our size and the number of services we have. Temptations to people please or to water down the message of the gospel. Maybe times when we exert our own will instead of God's. Are there times we can give in to the consumer mindset of our world and become more about entertaining people than disciplining them? Are we being tested in our unity by letting bickering or gossip seep in?

How are we standing together with one another in this faith community to overcome testing and temptation? Maybe that is something you want to talk over coffee later or in your small group this week.

With this I will close.

The Greek word, *peirasmos*, which meant both temptation and testing in Jesus' day, was also the word that was used to describe the process of refining gold during the time of Jesus. A goldsmith would take a piece of ore from the ground both to reveal it and to refine it. To reveal that it really is gold and to refine it into pure gold, by burning the impurities away.

That is what God does with us. God puts us to the test to reveal and refine. To reveal whether we are

trusting him or then refine our obedience and faith in Him. Just about every experience and event that we encounter in our lives serves as a test to reveal and refine us but remember, what God intends for good, the evil one can quickly turn to bad when we let him get a foothold in our lives.

Herein lies the power and the necessity of this petition, Our Father, *Lead us not into temptation (testing) but deliver us from the evil one.*

As we utter this plea, we are not asking God for a trouble free life, instead we are declaring to the Father the yearning of our hearts, *deepen our faith Lord. May it be possible Lord, that one day our faith and trust in you is so tangible, so authentic, so unhindered that you will no longer need to test us.* Lead us not into testing, is to dream of the day where we are so close and connected to our heavenly Father that we no longer need his tests.

It is a prayer that gives hope for a better future for us and our world, do you understand that?

We are going to transition into our time of communion but as we do that, will you stand with me as we together as a church community pray the Lord's Prayer as we have done each week of this series.

Let's pray

The Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.***

***Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.***

***And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.***

***For yours is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory, forever, Amen***

*A translation based on Matthew 6:9-13
and the original Greek text.*

Points to Ponder

Teach Us to Pray

Lead Us Not into Temptation but Deliver us from Evil

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. What do you think of when you hear the word, temptation? What is it that tempts you? Is temptation always negative?
2. What does it mean to be tested? Can you think of a time in your life when you were tested? How did you stand up to the testing? How is testing different from tempting?
3. Read the passage in Exodus 16:1-4. What was the purpose of God testing the Israelite people with food from heaven?
4. If you feel comfortable, share an example of a way you feel you are being tested at this time. Where are you seeing God's provision in that testing? How is the testing affecting your faith?
5. Have you ever encountered a testing that you felt was too much for you to handle? Describe how you felt your capacity grew, as you turned to God to help you through the situation.
6. Have you experienced the power of community during a time of testing? Have you intentionally invited someone into your life during a difficult time to help you shoulder the burden? What impact did that have on you and your faith?