

TEACH US TO PRAY THROUGH SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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Matthew 6:13

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INTRO.

-- It could be a neighbor or someone at work or a schoolmate. It could take the form of a lottery ticket or a powder or a pill. You could find it in a sports bar or on the internet or even at church.

It is temptation, and it affects us all.

-- The final petition in the Lord's Prayer deals with this universal enemy. It is also the most perplexing part of the prayer that we have been studying since the beginning of the year. Does the petition "lead us not into temptation" suggest that God just might be the one who would lead us into temptation?

-- This morning we're going to take a close look at this request and discover the crucial insights that it holds for us concerning this difficult issue that all of us struggle with - temptation. In fact, there are four insights into temptation - insights that enable us to better understand temptation and, more importantly, to gain victory over it.

I. The First Insight: God Does Not Tempt Us, but He Does Allow Us to Be Tempted.

A. The Clear Assertion in James 1:13

-- The Bible makes a clear and unmistakable assertion in James 1:13 that God does not tempt anyone to sin.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

B. The Greek Word

-- The Greek word for temptation that is used both in the Lord's Prayer and in James is an interesting word. The basic meaning of the word is to put to a test, and there are two possible results of being tested: you can pass or you can fail. God at times may test you to reveal or to refine your character, but God will never test you intending for you to fail and fall into sin. That's what temptation is - a test that is used to draw you into sin.

So the same word can be used to mean a test that strengthens us or to mean a test that causes us to fall into sin. In fact, James uses the word both ways in the first chapter of his letter. Look at the verse immediately before verse 13.

James 1:2, 12, 13 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet **trials** of various kinds **trial**, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. **13** Let no one say when he is **tempted**, "I am being **tempted** by God," for God cannot be **tempted** with evil, and he himself **tempts** no one.

-- The same word that is used for "trial" in verses 2 and 12 is used for "tempt" in verse 13.

God tests us but never tempts us. Whenever God gives us a test His desire is for us to pass it, for the test to refine and strengthen our character. Satan, however, will take that test and turn it into a temptation to entice us to sin.

C. The Examples

1. Adam

-- Adam in the Garden of Eden is an example of how the same test can be used in two different ways. The forbidden tree is a test. God intended for the tree to be a way for Adam to show loving obedience, but Satan used the tree to entice Adam to sin, to rebel against God and to disobey God's command.

2. Job

-- Or think about Job. God intended for Job's suffering to be a way to reveal Job's godly character and to refine and strengthen it even more. But Satan wanted to use the same suffering to tempt Job to turn away from God.

3. David

-- And then there's King David. The story of David and Bathsheba is an example that temptation itself is not sin. It's no sin to be tempted; even Jesus was tempted. How we respond when we're tempted determines whether it is a test that strengthens us or it is a doorway to sin. When David went for that walk on his rooftop and saw Bathsheba bathing, he in that moment of temptation had a choice: to turn away (physically, mentally, and spiritually) or to continue to pursue the temptation (thinking about it and then acting on it). Had David turned away the incident would have been a test and no sin would have happened.

D. The Idea in the Petition

-- So let's get back to the Lord's Prayer. When Jesus tells us to pray "lead us not into temptation," the idea is this: Don't let abandon us in times of testing and temptation; don't let us be trapped by temptation and fall into its deadly grasp. It's a prayer for God to protect and preserve us.

II. The Second Insight: Temptation Assaults Us from Two Directions.

-- The second insight about temptation that we gain from this petition is not stated directly but is definitely implied, and it is that temptation assaults us both internally and externally, from inside and outside.

A. Internal

-- Temptation is internal; it's inside us, part of our nature. It's like a girl I saw in the mall wearing a T-shirt that said, "Lead me not into temptation - I can find it myself."

After saying that God doesn't tempt us, James tells us in the next verse where temptation does come from.

James 1:14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

B. External

-- Temptation is internal - it comes from within us. But it is also external - it attacks us from the outside. Jesus recognizes that when He says, "deliver us from evil," or, more literally, "from the evil one," which, of course, refers to Satan, a name that means "adversary."

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

-- The devil is a scheming, clever adversary. He studies us and knows our strengths and weaknesses. He attacks us with temptation exactly when and where we are most vulnerable.

III. The Third Insight: Temptation Has Enormous Power over Us.

A. Even When We Try to Resist

-- Even when we try to resist temptation, we often fail. We're like Paul in Romans chapter seven.

Romans 7:18-19 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

-- Most of us are like Oscar Wilde who said, "I can resist anything except temptation."

B. Often We Don't Try to Resist.

-- Of course, the truth is that often we don't even try to resist. There are times when we don't want to be delivered from temptation - it's too appealing and offers too much excitement. Like another T-shirt slogan that I once saw: "Don't resist temptation. It might go away and not come back."

-- Temptation enchants and excites us. Temptation gives us an adrenaline rush. It makes our hearts pound and our blood race. It stirs our imaginations and inflames our passions. Temptation is a clever marketer that knows how to package its merchandise. When Satan wants to make an alcoholic out of us, he doesn't start by showing us a skid-row derelict. He starts by showing us images of athletic, attractive young people partying on the beach.

-- One of the stories in Greek mythology was about the sirens, sea creatures that lived along the coast of the Mediterranean. As ships passed by these sirens would sing such enchanting songs that the sailors would become transfixed and would be drawn hypnotically by the music. Some sailors would jump overboard and drown; others would sail towards the singing and run their ships into the rocky shores and perish. Temptation is like the sirens; temptation is enchanting and alluring, but what it leads us to is death

IV. The Fourth Insight: Victory over Temptation Is Possible.

-- There are two vital implications about victory over temptation in the second part of the petition: "Deliver us from evil."

A. Our Weakness.

-- Praying "deliver us from evil" is an implied confession of our weakness.

B. God's Strength

-- And the petition for deliverance is also an implied declaration of God's strength, that He is the one who is able to deliver us from the roaring lion who seeks to devour us.

1. James tells us how God accomplishes this victory.

James 4: 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

-- For God to deliver us from evil and from the evil one, we must first "submit" to God. In other words, we have to do what is in the first part of the Lord's Prayer.

Cf., vv. 9-19

-- When we submit to God, we can resist the devil, and God's promise to us is the devil will flee from us.

-- But we must first submit ourselves to God. Submitting to God means that we hallow His name, that we exalt Him, that He is our highest treasure and greatest desire. Submitting to God means that we gladly declare His lordship over us and that we seek to do His will, to live according to His Word in all things.

Living according to God's Word means fighting spiritual warfare according to God's directions.

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **¹¹**Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **¹²**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **¹³**Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

CONCLUSION

We need to prevent temptation as much as possible - to stay away from the places, circumstances, and people that cause us to be tempted. But we can't avoid temptation entirely, which means that we must also prepare for it. We prepare for it by keeping our lives centered on Christ, by living a life directed by God's Word and depending on Him in prayer. And we can be assured that when temptation comes, God will not abandon us but will give us a way to escape.