

Sermon for March 11, 2018 – Lent 4

Luke 11:4 (EHV)

Theme: Lead Us Not Into Temptation

- 1) Words we need to pray.
- 2) A prayer we need to believe.

*And lead us not into temptation*

Imagine being a soldier at war – tasked with the duty of crossing a dangerous minefield. Thankfully the leader of your squad not only has the “intel” needed to make it through the field alive, but has already crossed over the field himself.

As you get ready to enter the minefield, someone says to the leader: “Don’t get us killed.” This seemingly sassy statement actually expresses the fact that the entire squad is putting their lives into his hands, trusting him to get them through this minefield in one piece.

If you can picture this scenario, then you can begin to understand why Jesus encourages us to pray: “lead us not into temptation.” By praying this petition, we recognize the danger we are in, confess our helplessness without Christ, and reaffirm our trust in him to lead us safely through this life, home to himself in heaven. Let us consider these things, under the theme: **Lead Us Not Into Temptation:** 1) words we need to pray, and 2) a prayer we need to believe.

Part One: Lead us not into temptation . . . words we need to pray.

In order to comprehend the 6<sup>th</sup> petition of the Lord’s prayer correctly, we should first define the “temptation” we are asking God to help us avoid. We often use the word “temptation” to mean any and all enticement to sin. For example: we might say that whenever we see wet cement, we are tempted to touch it. In this example, temptation is merely the urge or impulse to do something we shouldn’t. Whenever we pray “lead us not into temptation” are we, therefore, asking the LORD to prevent us from seeing, hearing, or experiencing anything that might possibly awaken such urges in us?

That can’t be the case. Why not? Due to the fact that we live in a sin-cursed world, have an enemy like the devil who is constantly gunning for us, and have a corrupt, sinful nature that will continue to cling to us until the day we die.

No, the phrase “lead us not into temptation” means more than merely asking God to protect us from any outside object or experience that might awaken an impulse in us to do something wrong. We are asking God, rather, to keep us from sinning. Let me explain what I mean with the illustration of a mouse trap. As long as the mouse stays away from the trap, it can’t hurt him. It’s only when the mouse follows his desire and enters the trap that it becomes deadly. The same is true regarding temptation. Temptation that is ignored can’t harm us. But if sinful desire takes hold of our heart, then we have fallen *into temptation* – that is, into the trap ready to harm our soul,

as St. James writes: *each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire.*<sup>15</sup> *Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.*<sup>i</sup>

So you see, when we ask God to “lead us not into temptation” we are asking him to keep us from falling for Satan’s lies, the world’s deceptions, and our own sinful nature’s desire to pursue what is wrong instead of what is good.

“But,” someone might inquire, “why do we ask the Lord not to “lead” us into temptation instead of “don’t let us fall into sin”? Is it because the LORD sometimes leads people into sin? Absolutely not. While it is true that the LORD may “test” us for our good (just like the Navy might severely try its special operations soldiers in SEAL training for their good) the LORD never “tempts” people into sin. St. James writes: *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” because God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.*<sup>ii</sup> Therefore, when we pray “lead us not into temptation,” we are asking the LORD to do what he has also promised to do: be our guide who leads us on only good and righteous paths, and not into sin.

Now someone might say: “Isn’t it silly to ask God not to lead us into temptation when the Bible makes it clear that he would never do such a thing anyway?” It’s not any sillier than asking God’s name to be hallowed, his kingdom to come, or his will to be done. Every petition of the LORD’s prayer asks him to do things that he already does without our prayer. Why, then do we ask these things? More for our own sake, than for his. Asking for daily bread, for example, reminds us that all that we have comes from God. Asking the LORD to forgive our sins reminds us that even though we are sinful, the LORD is gracious and mercifully forgives us our sins. Praying “lead us not into temptation,” therefore, reminds us that we are surrounded by all sorts of deadly traps set by the devil, world and our own sinful nature. We are like soldiers caught in the middle of a mine field, unable to navigate our way through it. We need Jesus to lead us. And why Jesus? Because, during this life on this earth, he was *tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.*<sup>iii</sup> *Because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*<sup>iv</sup>

Yes, if we are to make it out of the minefield of our earthly lives in one piece, we definitely need Jesus, who not only forgives our sins, but knows how to avoid falling into the devil’s traps in the first place. This, then, is why it is important for us to pray: *lead us not into temptation.* It’s not only important to pray these words, but also to believe the very truth they convey.

### Part Two: Lead us not into temptation . . . a prayer we need to believe.

Remember how, at the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned the guy who told his squad leader, “Don’t get us killed?” In a certain way, this is what we are asking the LORD to do, when we pray “lead us not into temptation” – only much more respectfully.

And Jesus promises to do exactly what we pray. He sees all the world’s enticing traps and knows all of the devil’s deceptions. He is the perfect one to lead us – always through, but never *into*, temptation.

“But,” someone might say, “how come I feel so hopelessly caught in temptation. I have these strong desires to sin and there’s nothing I can do about them. I pray this petition with all my heart, but still feel the attacks and fall. Why won’t it stop?”

Since we are at war with the devil, he will use everything in his power to attack us – especially when we are weak! Jesus never promised us a temptation-free life on this earth. Remember what he actually said: “*In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.*”<sup>v</sup>

And where do we find our courage and direction in the midst of temptation - when our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak? We find our strength in Jesus. He will always lead us through, and never into, temptation. Focus on him, following in his footsteps; stay with him at all times - doing what he tells you to do – and he will bring you safely through.

You see, the problem is not the fact that we face temptation, but our failure to listen to Jesus who leads us through it. This is why we fall. This is why we sin. All too often we rely on our own strength, believing that there is a quicker, more direct path out of the minefield of temptation than the one on which our LORD is leading us. And that is exactly when we fall!

But, no matter how scary and intense Satan’s bombardments are all around us, if we stick close to Jesus, following his every lead, they can not touch us.

This, then, is the other major reason we pray “*lead us not into temptation*”: to reaffirm our faith in the LORD’s promise to safely guide us through every spiritual danger, so that we can confess with St. Paul: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*<sup>vi</sup>

Ok, now that we know the importance of both praying and trusting in the LORD for guidance, the question arises: how, exactly, do we follow the LORD? Where do we find him so that he can guide us safely through this life?

We find Jesus in His Word. Through the Bible he speaks to us: warning us of all the pitfalls the devil’s allies, the unbelieving world and our own sinful nature, put in our ways - telling us how to recognize them. More than this, he gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us in Scripture to see how graciously he saves us.

But what if we, in a moment of weakness, take our eyes off Jesus and succumb to temptation? I don’t know about you, but I must sadly confess that this happens all too often with me. The apostle Paul confessed the very same thing, when he wrote: *I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing. . .*<sup>24</sup> *What a miserable wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*<sup>25</sup> *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*<sup>vii</sup>

And why do we thank him? Because he forgives and helps us, even when we fall into temptation, as the apostle John explains: *My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*<sup>2</sup> *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.*<sup>viii</sup>

Because of this we can confess with St. Paul: *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*<sup>38</sup> *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces,*<sup>39</sup> *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*<sup>ix</sup>

So we see, brothers and sisters in Christ, the petition “lead us not into temptation” is not only a petition we need to pray, it is a petition we need to believe. Without our LORD’s guidance, we would never make it through the minefield of temptation that marks our existence on this earth. This is why we ask the LORD to lead us – confident of his mercy to do what we ask. And if we, as we are often prone to do in our weakness, take our eyes off of Jesus and fall into sin? Let us then, trusting in his grace, confess our sins to him – confident that he will forgive us for his mercy’s sake. May this, in turn, encourage us to continue to pray and believe the words of the sixth petition: Lead us not into temptation. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> James 1:14-15 (EHV)

<sup>ii</sup> James 1:13 (EHV)

<sup>iii</sup> Hebrew 4:15 (EHV)

<sup>iv</sup> Hebrews 2:18 (EHV)

<sup>v</sup> John 16:33 (EHV)

<sup>vi</sup> 2 Timothy 4:18 (EHV)

<sup>vii</sup> Romans 7:19, 24-25 (EHV)

<sup>viii</sup> 1 John 2:1-2 (EHV)

<sup>ix</sup> Romans 8:37-39 (EHV)