

March 26, 2023

Do Not Lead Me Into Temptation

Matthew 6:13

Jesus teaches us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation (or testing) but deliver us from evil."* The Greek word can be translated temptation, testing, or trial. There is a slightly different shade of meaning, when we consider each of those nuances

Paul writes, *"I don't understand myself at all. I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my conscience proves that I know the difference between right and wrong. But I can't help myself. It's the sin inside me that makes me do these rotten things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. Oh, what a miserable person I am. Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?"* (Romans 7:15-24)

If you've never felt like that or never been tempted, faced trials, or testings, you can tune out. But if you have been tempted or tested, or think you might possibly be tempted or tested in the future, or you know anyone who has been tempted, this might be relevant.

Jesus understands our temptations, testings, and trials.

- *"Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing/temptation/trials, he is able to help us when we are being tested/tempted."* (Hebrews 2:18)
- *"This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings/temptations/trials we do, yet he did not sin."* (Hebrews 4:15)

A Case Study in Temptation – David (2 Samuel 11-12)

In David's case, the test or temptation was a *"woman of unusual beauty taking a bath."* But let's consider temptation more generically.

a. Different things tempt people. For some people, like David, sexuality is where they are easily tempted. For other people, we may be more tempted by money. Or TV. Or social media. Or food. Or lottery tickets. Or alcohol. Or working too many hours. Or working too few hours. Or shopping. We all have our weaknesses. It's good if we know what they are.

b. If possible, don't put yourself in a situation where you will be tempted. That warm spring day, David ought to have been away from Jerusalem with his army (2 Samuel 11:1). He ought never have seen Bathsheba at all. We may need to be careful what we do and where we go. If too much TV/videos is your problem, don't flip through the channels/YouTube just to see what's on. Don't window shop at the mall. Or on Amazon. If we're wise, we can avoid temptation all together.

Other times, unintentionally, we see Bathsheba in the tub. We happen to be in Park Place Mall during the sidewalk sale. We pass by Laura Secord when they're putting out ½ price chocolate. It happens. Note: David may not have been able to avoid the first look, but he certainly could have avoided the second. He definitely could have NOT done what he does. We can choose to walk past the temptation. Or we can choose to stop. and look, and do.

c. Be careful what you think. Thinking is good – very good – when we do so creatively and constructively. But thinking can be bad – very bad – when we imagine, "*What if ...*" or "*What harm could possibly come of ...*" or "*I could justify it this way ...*" When our thinking leads us to imagine things and rationalize temptations we know are wrong, we're in trouble. If you find yourself thinking inappropriate things, pray. Force yourself to think of something else. Jesus astutely comments, "*Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew 5:28). His point is the first step toward sin is to imagine. Temptation and sin begin in our hearts and minds long before they move our feet or hands ...

d. Be careful what you do. Thinking about temptation can lead to acting on temptation. David finds out who the lady is. Maybe that's OK. But it isn't enough. He thinks more. He does more: he sends for her. That isn't enough. He thinks more. He does more. He takes advantage of her. He's now in a royal pickle and he knows it. He thinks more. He does more. He has her husband killed.

Our issues may not be as big as David's. But we may step over the line and do something we know is wrong. We buy the first drink. We choose to watch that video. We buy the 85" TV we can't afford. It is never enough. We go further. And further. We're in a royal pickle and we know it. We have to figure out how to get out of it. We make our lives even more complicated. We try to cover our tracks, and it all becomes very messy very quickly.

David's sin is not anyone else's fault. Bathsheba didn't seduce him. He can't blame his friends or his parents. He chose to act. These days, we have just as much (or more) opportunity to do wrong as David. But no one forces us to act. Being surrounded by lots of temptation doesn't give us any more excuse than it did David. At the end of the day, neither the Devil nor anyone else makes us "do it" – we make that choice (don't give the Devil more credit than he deserves).

SONG: CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

The consequences of David's actions have an impact on more people than he imagined. Uriah is dead. Bathsheba loses her husband and her first child (11:26, 12:19). David's colleagues are accessories to murder (11:14-17). After the incident, sexual sin and violence became endemic in David's family – a role model has been established (2 Samuel 13) that taints generation after generation.

David's sin has consequences for himself, too. Taking the step across the line desensitized him to his own sin. He rationalizes it. He justifies it. It doesn't bother him at all. Had it

been anyone else, it would have been inexcusable. But in his own twisted thinking, it was OK for him. In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan tells a parable about a wealthy man with many sheep who took a poor man's only lamb to feed a guest. David is outraged. Then Nathan points at David and says, "*You are that man.*" Finally, David sees his sin.

Giving in to temptation has a way of desensitizing us. When we're first tempted, it seems unthinkable to actually cross the line from thought to action. Then we play with it in our minds. We talk ourselves into it. We cross the line. Once we have done it once, it is easier to do the second time. Even easier the third. For a dieter, the first cheat is the hardest. For the abstaining alcoholic, the first drink is the hardest. But once you've crossed the line, it gets easier and easier. We can rationalize our actions in all sorts of ways. If it was someone else, we'd never accept their arguments. But in our case, God is making an exception ...

David's in trouble. His guilt is overwhelming. Like Paul he can only say, "*Oh, what a miserable person I am. Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?*"

There is an answer to that question. "*Thank God.*" exclaims Paul. "*The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death ... God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.*" (Romans 7:25-8:3) God's forgiveness is without condition, without reservation, and without cost. With God's Holy Spirit living in us, we can overcome temptation. God gives us to resist temptation, to endure the testing, and to carry on.

Look at what happens. **First, David owns up to his sin.** "*David confessed his sin to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord'*" (2 Samuel 12:13). Psalm 51 is David's confession to God of his sin. God challenges us to recognize and acknowledge our sin. Through our God-given conscience, through prayer, through other people, or through Scripture, God can bring our sins to our attention. And when we are aware of it, we have to confess it.

Second, God responds with complete and absolute forgiveness. "*Nathan replied, 'The Lord has forgiven you.'*" (14).

Third, God restores David. God doesn't give up on David. God will still work in him and through him. God loves David – and each of us - unconditionally. But, having walked down that journey of temptation and sin once, David will struggle to keep on the straight and narrow, for the rest of his life. We have to walk carefully, too. God restores us – He can give us strength to resist temptation – but we need His help.

Fourth, David lives with the consequences. There are real consequences to David's sin. Yes, God forgave David. But God didn't rescue him from the tangled mess he got himself into. There may be consequences when we give into temptation, too. We may have to rebuild relationships. We may have to pay off the credit cards. We still have to burn off all the calories. We may need some counselling. We may bear the scars of our sins – health-wise, financially, relationally – for a long time. But God's forgiveness is complete.

SONG: WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE IN ME

Jesus encourages us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation (or testing) but deliver us from evil." He is encouraging us to be wise, to be smart, and to ask for God's help.

"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience," Paul writes. "God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he'll show you a way out so that you can endure" (1 Corinthians 10:13). What's the way out?

1. **Know your enemy and know what tempts you.** What is your weakness?
2. **Be careful what you see and hear. Don't put yourself in a tempting situation.** "When you are being tempted, don't say, 'God is tempting me.' God never tempts anyone. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away." (James 1:13-15)
3. **Be careful what you think.** Pray about it. Ask for God's help to resist. "Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Matthew 26:41)
4. **Be careful what you say and do.** Only say GOOD things. Keep yourself busy in HEALTHY ways. Do some physical exercise. Read a challenging book. Watch a (healthy) engrossing movie. Physically remove the temptation (shut down the computer?). Get together with other people. Being alone with your thoughts may not be good for you. If you have a trusted friend, confide in them and get them to hold you accountable to NOT act. Create checks and balances.

PRAYER

SONG: THE RIVER

BENEDICTION: Let's celebrate good news: "The Lord is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love ... He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who turn to him." (Psalm 103:8-14)

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