

Matthew 6:13  
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Hampton Baptist  
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## Sermon Series on *The Lord's Prayer*

### "Tempting Our Weak Spots"

Temptation. It is a word that is tossed about flippantly. When a dieting choc-oholic, a person who is somewhat addicted to chocolate, is asked by a waiter if she would like a double chocolate brownie surprise for desert, the choc-oholic might respond, "It sure is tempting."

Temptation. Many college athletes receive lucrative offers for professional contracts and forsake one or more years of college eligibility for the big bucks. The temptation is just too great.

Haddon Robinson writes, "A young woman in a shopping mall sported a T-shirt that proclaimed, "Lead me not into temptation--I can find it myself." She wanted people to chuckle as she passed, but her one-liner raises a question. For what are we praying when we ask, "Lead us not into temptation?" We are praying, "Don't let evil ambush us. Help us to be ready for it." The implication is *not* that God takes us into snares and pitfalls, but instead, God has the power to lead us past all the lures to sin that threaten us.

"We are praying, "If the opportunity to sin presents itself, grant that I will not have the desire. But if the desire springs up within me, grant that I will not have the opportunity." Let's face it. We seldom want to be delivered from temptation. It promises too much fun. Someone has said, "Don't resist temptation. It may go away and not come back." Temptation stirs the blood and inflames the imagination. If we were revolted by it, then it would not be temptation at all. Occasionally we see where temptation will take us, and we may cry out for deliverance. Usually, though, temptation doesn't seem very bad, so we play with it, flirt with it, and invite it into our lives. When we pray about our sins, it's not the *temptation* that bothers us. It's the consequence of our disobedience that we want removed. In the context of this prayer, however, we are not merely asking God to keep us from being naughty boys and girls. The issue threatens more severe danger than that. We are surrounded by seductions to live life apart from God. In our ambitions and in our successes we are tempted to honor our own names, to build our own kingdoms, to take credit for baking our own bread, and to deny our needs for forgiving grace. Ultimately, the temptation is for us to cast ourselves away from God. Only God can make us see sin for what it is.

If temptation brought chains to bind us, we might resist it on our own. If temptation was ugly and horrifying, we would not be interested. Instead, it brings flowers and perfume and offers life and cheer. It bribes us with wealth and popularity and entices us with promises of prosperity and unbounded freedom. But only God can keep us from its charms." (Haddon Robinson, *Jesus' Blueprint for Prayer*, [http://www.mypetra.org/RBC/Jesus'20Blueprint%20for%20Prayer.htm](http://www.mypetra.org/RBC/Jesus%20Blueprint%20for%20Prayer.htm))

Yet God does not *automatically* remove us. God *allows* the temptation, and it is ultimately our decision to give in to the temptation or to resist it. Jesus was teaching the disciples *and* us to ask for God's help in overcoming the temptations that drive a wedge between us and God, a wedge created by any sin we commit. Every time we sin, we allow that action to become a barrier between us and God, prohibiting the free flow of relationship for which we were created.

Temptation in and of itself is not necessarily bad; what we *do* with the temptation is where the water meets the wheel. In the New Testament, the word actually means "trial" or "test," so the meaning is not so much to *seduce* a person into sin as it is to test his/her strength, loyalty, and ability for service. William Barclay writes, "Temptation is not designed to make us fall. Temptation is designed to make us stronger and better people. Temptation is not designed to make us sinners; it is designed to make us good. We may fail in the test, but we are not *meant* to fail. Instead we are meant to emerge stronger and finer." (William Barclay. Commentary on Matthew vol. 1. Philadelphia:

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Westminster Press, 1975, p. 225) So without temptations, we could not develop spiritual backbones and moral muscles. Yet every such trial or test involves the possibility that we may succumb to the downward pull of evil. Following temptation can certainly be dangerous.

Some years ago, a headline told of three hundred whales that suddenly died. The whales were pursuing sardines and found themselves marooned in a bay. Frederick Broan Harris commented, "The small fish lured the sea giants to their death. They came to their violent demise by chasing small ends, by prostituting vast powers for insignificant goals." (John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publ. 1993, p. 31.)

Many well-meaning Christians who are perceived as having whale-sized faith will succumb to temptations that are tragic. Chasing what an outsider would see as an insignificant sardine could result as an end to their life or their lifestyle. Every person has their sardines, their weaknesses. In every one of us, there is some weak spot and at that weak spot, temptation launches its attack. The point of vulnerability differs in all of us. What is a violent temptation for one person, leaves another person unmoved.

If there was nothing in us to which temptation could appeal, then it would be *helpless* to defeat us. When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," we are actually saying "Don't let me be captured by temptation's power; help me not to leave the Kingdom of God to enter the Kingdom of Evil." Yet the temptation hits us where we are weakest, not where our strength lies.

To prove this point, I would like for everyone to take their bulletin and a pen or pencil. On your bulletin, write the phrase *Lead us not into temptation*.

Now place the pen or pencil in the other hand, and write the same phrase, *Lead us not into temptation*. Most of us have a difficult time writing with our weaker hand. We are accustomed to writing with the hand of preference, but when asked to do it with the weaker hand, we failed. It felt differently, didn't it. Temptation works the same way. Most of us are not tempted to leave church today and commit cold-blooded murder. Most of us are not tempted to go to a 7-11 and demand that they give us all the money in the cash register. But, in the heat of an argument with a family member, we are tempted to say something we regret and often, we say hurtful words. When given the chance to do the right thing, many will not do so for fear of ridicule or rejection from their peers. These are our weaknesses. Everyone has a weak spot.

But there are two sections of the petition, "Lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The petition may be a poetic way of giving force to a positive statement; the phrase "deliver us from evil," could be setting the positive against the negative. A parallel would be: "Give us not darkness, but light."

How does God *deliver* us from evil? In essence, we are asking God to help us make good decisions; we are seeking God's assistance in being faithful servants in the Kingdom of God. We are telling God that we want to do the right thing, and frankly, when the temptation finds our weak spots, then we want God to be there. We are in control of our own actions, and as a result, we have to take responsibility for the wrong decisions we make.

These trials and tests can make us strong, yet often, we do fail. And we fail the most, when we are tempted at our weakest spot. Yet succumbing to temptation doesn't have to be the end of the story; instead it is an opportunity for redemption. Don't misunderstand me; I don't think that we should play with temptations and give in with the knowledge that our God will forgive us. I am saying that we should continue to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," and *mean* it. We

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should be aware that we have weak spots, just like every chain has weak links. At those points are where we are the most vulnerable.

At the onset of his ministry, Jesus withstood three strong temptations which would have thwarted the Kingdom of God movement. In I Corinthians 10:12-13, Paul wrote, "Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall. You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted. But God can be trusted not to let you be tempted too much, and God will show you how to escape from your temptations. God can provide a way out of the temptation."

Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that we could have an abundant life. Leaning on God instead of succumbing to temptation will certainly make us stronger, but we have to be willing to depend on God.

So, what is your weak spot? Have you given in too many times, because it is so easy just to ask for forgiveness? How do you handle temptation?

Today, in our time of communion, let's be thankful that we have been provided a way out of temptation. Let's be grateful that God will forgive us when we succumb to temptation. And finally, let's remember that Jesus loved us enough to die for us, knowing that we would sin.

What a great love Christ has for us!