

Lead Us,



Today, we're digging into that portion of the Lord's Prayer that deals with

temptation. And I found this meme that almost perfectly sums up a lot of

our positions on the matter: "Lead us not into temptation...oh, who am I

kidding? Follow me, I know a shortcut." Temptation is everywhere. Things tempt us all

the time. And it's so pervasive in our culture that this meme probably rings truer than

most. At least for me it did. There are temptations we face. Some of those temptations

are to break the rules. Just polling us here: how fast do you drive on the Lucas Road?

And when the speed limit was raised on the interstate to 80, where do we set the cruise

control? I usually set it right at 82. There's no reason for this, really, but we're tempted

to just go that much faster. That's just how we are as human beings.

I've also heard a story about a group of pastors were on a spiritual retreat and started talking about the things that tempted them in life. One of the pastors said that he was tempted to plagiarize sermons from someone that he admired in ministry. Another pastor shared that he was tempted to gamble with his salary, he'd go to the casino and play the slots. Another pastor said that he was tempted by alcohol and realized long ago that if he had one drink, it'd lead to him having thirty drinks. The group then looked at a pastor who hadn't said much in the conversation and realized that he hadn't looked up from his phone the whole time they'd been talking. And the pastor finally realized that the group had stopped talking and was looking at him and said, "Oh, sorry. I just have to tell you that I am really tempted by gossip and have been live-tweeting this entire conversation."



We've been talking about the Lord's Prayer for the past few weeks and it's

because there is so much richness to this prayer that can often times go

unexplored and un-thought-about when we pray it week after week. Together, over the past few weeks, we've talked about what it means to hallow God's name and to form our hearts around God, God's will being done, and what bread exactly means. Then Jesus says, "Pray this way...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

And it sounds like such a counter-intuitive thing to say, "Lead us not into temptation." Why would we need to pray that God not lead us into temptation? Don't we want to avoid those things that tempt us most? The answer to that is yes. We want to avoid those things that tempt us most. But that's almost impossible, so we need God's help. Temptation is not something that God does. In his letter to the early church, James makes that clear as he writes, "No one who is tested should say, 'God is tempting me!' This is because God is not tempted by any form of evil, nor does he tempt anyone..



The problem is that we so often equate "temptation" with something bad.

Temptation, we seem to think, always means "to seek to seduce into evil."

But that's not actually how it functions in the testimony of scripture, and it's actually bigger than that first definition. Temptation means any testing situation, anything that is our humanity, our integrity, and our fidelity. When God gives the heart-wrenching command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, the scripture says that God tempted him, but what God really did was tested him. God tested Abraham's loyalty and obedience. When Jesus was led into the wilderness, he was tempted not by God or by the Holy Spirit (even if it was the Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness) but by the evil one. And he's tempted with sustenance during his fasting, and with God's protections that he already had anyway, and with an easier path to being the messiah. As we may know from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus withstands these temptations, is

ministered to by the angels, and then begins his public ministry. The temptations that we face aren't designed to make us fail; it's designed to make us better and stronger in the same way that Jesus was made better and stronger.

So, we're not praying to ask God not to do something God wasn't going to do in the first place. We're asking for relief from testing and temptation or at least that in the midst of our testing we would be found faithful, found as those who are being led by God and faithfully following.



We're asking God to lead us. "Lead us not into temptation." There's an

interpreter of scripture that points out that Greek doesn't use commas; any punctuation was added later. And this interpreter says, "We need to make sure that there's a comma in some there some place." What does it change if we pray, "Lead us (pause) not into temptation?" That's a big pause. It's us saying, "God, lead us not in the way that we would lead ourselves, which is in the way of temptation." We have the ability to lead ourselves into temptation. We know where all the shortcuts are. We have the ability to raise the speed even after we've set the cruise control. We have the ability to thinking about others however we want. We have the ability to do whatever we want without regard for the consequences for our actions.

But that's not what God wants our life to look like. We're praying for God to lead us. "Lead us, not into temptation," which always makes the think of Psalm 23, which shows us what it looks like to be led by God. The Psalmist points out that God's desire isn't to lead us to temptation. The Psalmist reveals the heart of God saying that God, "leads us in paths of righteousness for his name sake." This is how God leads us. God says, "I have a better way for you." And most likely it's away from the things that tempt

us: away from anger, injustice, hatred, and bitterness. Away from driving as fast as we want to or drinking as much as we want to or looking at all the things we think we need to see.

And that's a hard thing for us to pray honestly and earnestly. It's hard for us to actively give up control like that and be willing to be led. But that's what we're invited to do. More than that: **this is what we're saying we will do when we pray this prayer that Jesus gave us.** And even in the moments when we take control away



from God and go how we want to go, God is there for us even then. The prayer, at least in Matthew's Gospel ends: "deliver us from evil." God is the God of the second chance, and it's provided for us time and time and time again. The prayer, at least in Matthew's Gospel ends: "deliver us from evil."

The cold hard fact of our life is that we're going to be tempted. And when we resist it, we get stronger in our faith and our trust in God's work in our lives. But there's times when we will fall short, mess up, and go where we shouldn't go. But God is as near to us as our next breath; God will rush to us and pick us up. And God will dust us off. God comes to us and helps us put things back together again. This is what we're praying when we pray this line. Amen.