



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Lead Us Not Into Temptation"

Lord, Teach Us How to Pray:

A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

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Several years ago, I remember sitting on the deck in the backyard of a friend's house one summer, when I heard this "zapping" sound and I wondered what it was. Every so often I'd hear a strange sound, a kind of electric "zap." Finally, I asked my host, "What's that sound?" He said, "Oh, it's the bugs hitting our new bug zapper." He went on to describe the gadget which attracts insects with its light, only to sizzle them when they get too close. All night long it went on – bug after bug. Hundreds of them. Zap! Zap! Zap!

You would think an approaching bug would notice the tray underneath the zapping light filled with hundreds of dead comrades and wonder, "Is this really such a good idea?" Still the bugs are drawn to the light. The temptation is too great to resist.

That experience got me to thinking about how much you and I are like those bugs. We're drawn to things that will lead to our destruction if we're not careful, but we can't seem to stay away. John Ortberg writes¹ that ever since Eve saw that the fruit in the Garden of Eden was pleasing to the eye and desirable for wisdom, Zap! Time and time again we see people who fall into temptations that devastate their lives, destroy their marriages, bankrupt their checking accounts, and ruin their souls. Why do we voluntarily give in to what we know is going to hurt us? Why do we come so close to the bug zappers of our lives?

The Bible tells us that you and I have an enemy who is stronger and smarter than we are, and Satan is described in Scripture as a roaring lion who is trying to devour us. He seeks to deceive and destroy, and temptation is one of his chief weapons. That's why Jesus taught His disciples to pray this petition in the Lord's Prayer, "*Lead us not into temptation*" (Mt. 6:13).

The passage we've read together this morning in 1 Corinthians 10:6-13 is a summary of the sins into which the people of Israel were tempted to fall during the time they wandered in the desert for 40 years after their deliverance from Egypt. Some of these sins were repeated over and over again, like idolatry, sexual immorality, testing God, and grumbling. After a giving a brief history of one of Israel's lowest points, the apostle Paul then gives his readers three truths to offer hope and encouragement whenever we face temptation like they did.

1. Temptation is a universal challenge. We all have to deal with it; none of us is exempt. This is not meant to discourage us. Just the opposite. It tells us we're not alone! Every follower of Jesus Christ will face temptation in their life, and no matter how spiritual you

are or how strong you may think you may be in the Lord it doesn't mean you will ever be above temptation. One of the surprising discoveries we learn from reading the gospels is that even Jesus Himself was tempted when He spent 40 days in the wilderness after His baptism (see Mt. 4). If Satan tried to tempt Christ Himself, you and I had better believe he will come after us as well. Our awareness of this fact and our readiness when temptation comes can help us whenever we have to face it.

2. God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can handle. There is no temptation you and I will ever face that is not first filtered through the loving eyes and the caring hands of our heavenly Father. God is faithful, and He will not allow the enemy to tempt us beyond our ability to resist. This truth is a cause for hope, because it assures us that with the help of God's Spirit you and I can deal with whatever comes our way. We are not helpless victims; God has given us everything we need to deal with our particular situations. But this truth is also sobering, because it also tells us we can never rationalize away our sin by saying, "The devil made me do it, or I just couldn't help myself, or I couldn't resist any more." God knows what we can handle, and He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to withstand with God's help.

3. God will provide a way of escape. Whenever temptation comes our way, we need to look around because there is always a way out. We may have to run, or we might have to fight, but with God there is always a way out. The word that is translated "a way out" in this passage is the Greek word *ekbasis*, and it means a way out like a mountain pass. It gives the imagery of an army surrounded by an attacking force, they think they're trapped, when all of a sudden they discover a way of escape. God is faithful to provide a way of escape for you and me whenever we face temptation, but the choice is up to us. We must decide which path we will take. God will not overrule our capacity to decide, and it's up to each one of us to lean upon His Holy Spirit and choose the way of Christ instead of giving into temptation.

A great example of this is Joseph in the OT. You'll remember he was one of the 12 sons of Jacob who was sold into slavery by his brothers because of their jealousy. When he ended up in Egypt, he landed in service of a man named Potiphar. Potiphar's wife was attracted to Joseph, and on several occasions she tried to seduce him. Once when they were alone in the house, she grabbed his robe and tried to persuade him to sleep with her. He didn't even wait around to have a conversation, and he ran out of the house with her still holding his robe in her hand. He took the way of escape, even though it cost him a great deal later on.

A couple of weeks ago during the time for young disciples at the 9:30 service, Mark Charbonneau of our church staff showed a video of his dog Marcus who battled temptation. It involved a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It is one of the best studies I've ever seen on how we creatures battle temptation, and it's just too funny not to share with the whole church. Take a look. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViprtUHmJh0>

In Matthew 18 Jesus advised His disciples on how to deal with temptation. He said, *“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell”* (Mt. 18:8,9).

Jesus was not teaching self-mutilation in this passage. If He were, all the disciples would have walked around blind and crippled! The point Jesus is making is that we should deal with sin as drastically as is necessary to resist temptation. His advice is very practical. In other words, He was saying if the things you look at lead you to sin, pretend as though you are blind. Don't look at them! If the things you touch lead you to sin, pretend as though you have no hands. Don't touch them! And if the places you go lead you to sin, pretend as though you are cripple and have no feet. Do go there! Radical obedience to Christ is necessary if we are ever going to overcome temptation in our lives. You can't flirt with it; you can't turn it over in your mind and think about it. You must be decisive and direct. Deal with the temptation now!

When our Lord was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He responded to each of the three temptations He faced by quoting a passage of Scripture. His knowledge of the Word of God was His main weapon to resist temptation in the time of trial, and you and I would do well if we learned more Scripture to help us resist our own temptations. Study Matthew 4 this week, and see what you can learn from Jesus' experience.

How do you deal with temptation, and what are the things that lure to do the wrong thing and wander away from God? Is your temptation lust? I'm told that one out of every four hits on the internet today is a pornographic website. Men, how are you dealing with temptation in your life? Be decisive and root it out. But remember, ladies, lust isn't just about sex. We can also lust after other things like clothes, homes, a job, children, or our quality of life? Where are you tempted to lust today?

Or is your temptation power? Money? Status? Getting even with someone? Having people think well of you? Taking what isn't yours? Telling a lie in order to get ahead? You think to yourself, “No one will know? What's the harm?” Our character in Christ is either built up or destroyed by all the little decisions we make every single day of our lives. And we are either making progress or losing ground in our growth in grace with every decision we make.

A temptation is as much an opportunity to rise as it is an opportunity to fall. A test is as much an opportunity to make an A as it is an F. When temptation comes, it can be our finest hour. It all depends on if we're prepared and ready.

I close with this. Rosalie Elliot was an 11-year-old from South Carolina who was a contestant in a national spelling contest in Washington, D.C. In the fourth round of the contest she drew the word "avowel," and in her soft Southern accent she spelled it. But the question was, did she use an "a" or an "e" as the next to last letter? The judges couldn't decide, and for several minutes they listened to tape recording playbacks of what she said, but the critical letter was accent-blurred.

Finally, Chief Judge John Lloyd put the question to the only person in the room who knew the answer. He asked Rosalie, "Was the letter you said an 'a', or was it an 'e'?" Rosalie was surrounded by young spellers who were whispering to each other, and by this time she knew the correct spelling of the word. Without hesitating, she replied she had misspelled it. And as she walked from the stage, the entire audience stood and applauded, including fifty newspaper reporters, one of whom was heard to say that Judge Lloyd had put quite a burden on an 11-year-old, but she rose to the occasion. She resisted the temptation to lie in order to win the contest, and instead she told the truth. Rosalie, your character just took a huge step forward in becoming the kind of person God is so very proud of.

Martin Luther once said, "Temptation is like the birds. You can't keep them from flying around your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair!" May we heed the warning Paul gives us from the history of Israel and the advice the Lord offers in the gospel of Matthew, and may we be faithful to the call of God to flee temptation whenever it comes our way. Amen.

ⁱJohn Ortberg in *Praying with Power*, p. 52. The opening illustration and some of the points of this sermon are adapted from his chapter "Deliver Us From the Evil One."