

February 9, 2020

The Lord's Prayer
Lead Us
Matthew 6:5-13

Opening words: The Lord's Prayer has been called "The Greatest Prayer" and the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It has been recited by billions of believers through the ages and is cherished by everyone, regardless of theology or tradition. We recite the words regularly at Western Reserve. It is safe to say we recite the Lord's Prayer about 200 times a year, including Sunday morning worship services, Lenten vesper services, Holy Week services, as well as weddings and funerals. We know the words, but do we understand the meaning behind those words? In this sermon series, *The Lord's Prayer*, your understanding is my goal.

This is the fifth, and final, sermon in the series. To this point, we have learned the Lord's Prayer is a model pray. That means the elements that are found in the Lord's Prayer must be found in all prayers. In the first four weeks we have looked at praise, obedience, physical needs and spiritual needs. Today, we look at protection from sin. People have been sinning a long-time.

In the second and third chapters of Genesis we learn how sin was created. Sin can be traced back to Adam and Eve. God created Adam out of the dirt. Adam means earth or dirt. It was from his rib, God created Eve, so Adam would not be alone. God placed Adam and Eve in a garden where they lacked for nothing. It was paradise with only one rule, do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. At first, Adam and Eve obeyed the rule and their relationship with God was unimpeded. It's too sad the story doesn't end there. In the third chapter, a new creature is introduced into the story, the serpent. However, it is not just any serpent. It is the Dark One, Satan, himself, disguised as a serpent. Eve is his first victim. He introduced doubt into her life. In the end, she violates God's only rule, she eats from the sacred tree. Unable to stand up to his wife, Adam also eats from the tree. In the end, they are expelled from the garden and damage their perfect relationship with God. How profound was that day in human history? It was so profound that each one of us carries the sin of Adam. Romans 5:12 says, "*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*" The story of Adam and Eve is not just a Bible story. It is our story. We face temptation daily. Let us listen to this morning's Gospel lesson, Matthew 6:5-13. Let me call this message *Lead Us*.

Matthew 6:5-13 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on

babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Oscar Wild (1854-1900) was an Irish poet and playwright. His life was complex. He is remembered for his literary genius, his criminal conviction, imprisonment and early death. He died at 46. He once said, "*I can resist anything except temptation.*" That is painfully true. I hope that is not your story. If you have ever experienced temptation in your life say, "**Amen!**"

John Paton (1824-1907) was a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands. One-night hostile natives surrounded the mission station, intent on burning out the Paton's and killing them. Paton and his wife prayed during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came, they were amazed to see their attackers leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ. Remembering what had happened, Paton asked the chief what had kept him from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men with you there?" Paton knew no men were present--but the chief said he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station. That story reminds us we are never alone. God has always been with us and God will always be with us. If you are thankful for God's presence in your life say, "**Amen!**"

Today, we look at the next section of the Lord's Prayer, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. Don't speed read those words. Take some time with those words, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. Jesus is connecting temptation and evil. Temptation is defined as the desire to do something, especially wrong or unwise. Evil is defined as profoundly immoral or wicked, especially when regarded as a supernatural force. So, when Jesus speaks of temptation he is not talking about being tempted by a piece of cake when you are on a diet. Jesus is talking about the temptations in our lives that damage our relationship with God. What is it in your life that is damaging your relationship with God? Perhaps, we need to hear less about grace and more about sin? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" Let me state the obvious. Everyone deals with temptation.

Even Thomas Steele deals with temptation. He should have known better. He had recited the line, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*, countless times. Who is Thomas Steele? The Hendersonville, North Carolina newspaper, The Blue Ridge Now, posted his story the other day. The 63-year-old former pastor was sentenced to 73 to 100 months in prison for embezzling \$123,367 from an 83-year-old parishioner over a five-year period. He also must pay her back. The story is not pretty. It is a sad story. He abused her trust. You can call her a fool, or you can call him a crook, but in the end no one wins. He illustrates for us everyone deals with temptation, even preachers. Thomas is not alone. You are not alone.

Even Jesus struggled with temptation. The story is found in the fourth chapter of Matthew. According to the text, Jesus is led in the wilderness by the Spirit, where he fasted for forty days. The author gives us obvious information. After fasting forty days, Jesus was hungry, and the tempter came to him and offered him food. He suggested Jesus use his powers to turn the stones into loaves of bread. However, Jesus refused. Then, the devil took Jesus to the top of the temple in the holy city and requests Jesus to throw himself down. However, Jesus refused. Finally, the devil takes Jesus to the top of a high mountain and shows him the kingdoms of the world in all their splendor. He offers it all to Jesus, if he will worship him, but Jesus refused. The story ends and the devil leaves Jesus, and the angels care for him.

Those three temptations are not accidental. You can distill all temptation down into three categories. Each one is represented in Jesus' temptation. Here are the categories of temptation.

The Temptations of Selfishness – Jesus hadn't eaten in forty days, so he is beyond hungry. Satan suggests to Jesus he change stones into bread. That is not beyond Jesus's power, but he refuses, because others did not benefit. Have you ever been tempted to do something that only benefits you?

The Temptations of Popularity – The temple was the eye of the storm in the holy city. Big crowds would have seen Jesus saved by the angels. That crowd would have followed Jesus. Jesus would have been a celebrity. However, Jesus was not interested in the crowd, he was only interested in the committed. Have you ever been tempted to do some that would make you popular?

The Temptations of Materialism – From the mountaintop Jesus doesn't just see property. Jesus sees wealth. Jesus could have had it all, but he refuses because there is more to life than money. Have you ever been tempted by materialism?

This is the question you must answer. What is your greatest temptation? If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

Temptation is something all Christians face, no matter how long we have been following Christ. But there are a few practical things we can do to grow stronger and smarter in our struggle against sin. We can learn how to overcome temptation by practicing these five steps. They come from Christian blogger Mary Fairchild.

- 1. Recognize Your Tendency to Sin** - The temptation to sin is a given, so don't be surprised by it. Expect to be tempted daily and be prepared for it.
- 2. Flee from Temptation** - When you come face to face with temptation, look for the way out. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says God will give you a way out. Run as fast as you can.
- 3. Resist Temptation With the Word of Truth** - Jesus overcame the devil's temptations in the wilderness with the Word of God. If it worked for him, it would work for us. And because Jesus was fully human, he can identify with our struggles and give us the exact help we need to resist temptation. Read your Bible daily.
- 4. Refocus Your Mind and Heart with Praise** - Praising God takes our focus off of ourself and puts it on God. You may not be strong enough to resist temptation on your own, but as you focus on God, he will inhabit your praises. He will give you the strength to resist and walk away from the temptation.
- 5. Repent Quickly When You Fail** – When you do fail and sin, repent quickly. It is dangerous to persist in your sin.

If you can remember one of those five things say, **"Amen!"** *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

In 1952, a writer named Bernard Malamud wrote a great novel called The Natural. If you haven't read the book, then you may have seen the movie of the same name, starring Robert Redford. The story is about a man by the name of Roy Hobbs. He is the natural, untainted unspoiled. He was born on a Nebraska farm. It was his father who recognized his enormous talent for baseball, and it was his father who taught him the game. But one day, his father dies, and he never got to see his son make it to the big leagues. The Major Leagues are not kind to Roy Hobbs. The innocent farm boy is confronted by temptations. His greatest tempter is a woman, who in time was rejected by Roy. Her scorn was real. She shoots Roy and he walks away from the game early, wounded physically and emotionally. For years, he wonders how life could have been. Years later, at the age of 35, Roy Hobbs returns to the game. Once again, Roy is confronted with temptation. This time in the form of his team owner, who is the embodiment of evil, who has hired his old temptress. They want Roy to throw the game because the owner has made a huge bet against his own team. The moment comes

when Roy must decide what to do. He is standing at the plate all alone. Will he surrender to the temptation and throw the game, or will he do what is right? What tips the scale is a woman wearing a white dress standing behind home plate. Her presence encourages him to do the right thing.

This is the point. In that scene, Bernard Malamud painted the human condition. We are confronted daily by temptation, pulling us, pushing us, enticing us to sin. We think we are alone, but we are wrong. God is standing near us encouraging us to do the right thing. There has never been a moment in your life when you have been alone. God is with us now and God is with us in the face of temptation. He is encouraging us to do what is right. God is with us now. Do you remember the quote from Oscar Wilde? He once said, *"I can resist anything except temptation."* I hope that is not your story. No wonder Jesus taught us to pray, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**