LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION
Matthew 6:13; James 1:13-15

INTRODUCTION

Today I want to talk about temptation. For some reason we don’t hear much about temptation in our culture. In our American culture resisting temptation has gone out of style and doing what comes naturally has become acceptable. Our culture says, “If it feels right, it is right for you, and you should give in to your desires.” But Jesus warned his followers to watch and pray lest we fall into temptation. Jesus wants us to take temptations seriously.

In this 6th petition of the Lord’s Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” If the 5th petition of the Lord’s Prayer is the most difficult to pray, in that we are asking God to grant us the same measure of forgiveness that we grant others, then the 6th petition is the most puzzling. What can it mean to pray, “Lead us not into temptation?” Why would God lead us into temptation? Does God lead us to be tempted?

So our main question in this sermon is, “What are we praying for when we pray, ‘Lord, lead us not into temptation?’”

In order to answer this question we will look briefly at the context, then we will look at the word ‘temptation’ and then we will list some things we are praying for when we pray this prayer.

THE CONTEXT

First, the context gives us a clue to what this petition is about. In the previous petition “forgive us our debts,” the request was concerning sins already committed. The prayer is that they may be forgiven. When we commit a sin we need to have it forgiven. The petition “lead us not into temptation” is concerning sins that have not yet been committed. The previous petition focuses on actual sins, this one on potential sins. So this prayer, “Lead us not into temptation” is a prayer that focuses on potential sin that hasn’t happened.

When we add the phrase “but deliver us from evil” we understand that the temptation has to do with evil. This will be significant when we consider the different usages of the word ‘temptation.’

THE WORD ‘TEMPTATION’ HAS TWO USES

Now let’s look at those usages. To understand the meaning of the word ‘temptation’ we need to see that this word can be used in two different ways or with two different connotations...
One is that it can mean *to entice to evil*. The other is that it means *to try a person or to put a person to the test*. Now there is a relationship between these two meanings. When we are tempted by being enticed to evil that can be a test of our character, our integrity, and our faith. James talks about both of these usages in James chapter 1.

**TEMPTATION AS TRIALS**

God does allow us to be tried and tested by difficult situations. This is the type of temptation that James speaks of in 1:2.

*James 1:2 NIV* Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

God does lead us into trials and testings; not to entice us to sin, but to strengthen our faith by showing what is in us. For a clear example of how God uses trials and temptations to strengthen us is to look at the children of Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Many of their trials were for this purpose. Moses explains God’s purpose to them in Deuteronomy.

*Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV* Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

God allows us to fall into trials and temptations for a good purpose.

*When you were in school, did you like to take tests? No one likes to take tests. But the teacher did give us tests, not to make us fail, but to strengthen our knowledge. The test was to show us what we know or don’t know.*

God’s testing is like that. He wants us to know what we know and don’t know about ourselves. He wants to know if we will trust Him and whether our hearts love Him more than our sins.

There are other good purposes in God allowing us to go through trials and testings.

James goes on to say they bring us to spiritual maturity.

*James 1:2-4 NIV* Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. (4) Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
Peter saw that tested faith will bring praise and honor to God at the 2nd Coming.

1Pe 1:6-7  In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, (7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

There are many good reasons God allows us to go through tough times and tests us. Tests help us to mature in our faith, it makes our hope in God become more precious, it makes us stronger in Christ, and it brings praise and glory to Christ at His Coming.

So when we pray “Lord lead us not into temptation” we are not praying that God would not test us and try us because that is how we grow and become stronger in our faith. So what are we praying for when we pray “Lord, lead us not into temptation?”

TEMPATATION AS ENTRICEMENT TO SIN

Now let’s think more about temptation as enticement to sin. The word for ‘temptation’ in verse 13 is the same as ‘trials’ in verse 2, πειρασμός peirasmos.

When we are tempted we can know that it doesn’t mean that God is tempting us to do evil or to sin. James makes that clear in verses 13-15:

James 1:13-15 NIV  When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; (14) but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. (15) Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

The Bible is clear when it says, “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.” That simply means that God never entices us to sin. That would make Him a partner in our guilt! It is our inward evil desires that entices us to sin and our will that gives in to our evil desire and chooses to sin.

When we pray “lead us not into temptation” it is not because we are ever thinking that God is enticing us to sin. As the saying goes, “God would not tempt us because He is too good. He will not tempt us for He is holy.”

On the other hand we are not praying that the Lord would take us away from the presence of sin or to never allow us to be tempted to sin. If God were to answer the prayer in this way, He would have to take us out of the world. As long as we live in this we will be tempted because enticement to sin comes from the world, the
flesh, and the devil. We will always have opportunity to sin as long as we are in this world. The world, the flesh and the devil will always be there.

So what are we praying for when we pray, “Lead us not into temptation?”

WHAT ARE WE PRAYING FOR IN “LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION?”

I believe that we are praying that God would keep us from falling into sin when we are faced with either temptation as a trial or temptation as enticement to sin. We are praying for strength not to yield to temptation if we find ourselves in either situation. This is how the translators of the New Living Translation take it. That translation is:

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one

Keep in mind that being tempted in and of itself is not a sin. Jesus was tempted by Satan and He was sinless. The difference is that He didn’t give in to the temptation. Sin is when we give in to the temptation. Martin Luther, “We can’t stop the birds from flying over our heads. But we can keep them from building a nest in our hair.” It is when we allow them to build the nest, that it becomes sin! It is when we give in to our evil desires does temptation become sin. It is when we yield to the temptation that it becomes sin.

Our problem is with the weakness of our flesh. We need to pray constantly for God’s help and strength when we face with temptation to sin, which we will be. This is what Jesus knew about us.

Right before the time of Jesus’ great testing when He was going to the Cross, he had to pray fervently to the Father for strength to do the will of the Father, not his own will. He prayed this in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was in this context that he told the disciples. Mark 14:38 NIV “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Jesus knew the weakness of their flesh that they were prone to failure in face of temptation so he tells them to “watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” Since there is always the possibility of failure when faced with a trial or a temptation, we are not to be eager to go through it.

So we are to pray “Lead us not into temptation.” “Lord, don’t let us get into a situation where we will fall into sin through the weakness of our flesh. Strengthen us not to fall into temptation or fall in the face of temptation.”

WHAT ARE WE CONFESSIONING WHEN WE PRAY THIS PETITION?

What else are we saying when we pray this prayer? We are saying that there is a spiritual warfare going on in us and around us. The spiritual warfare is carried
on by the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are warned about the reality of this warfare in several places in the New Testament.

1 Peter 5:8-9 NIV  Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

John said this about the world:

1 John 2:15-16 NIV  Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. (16) For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world.

Paul said this about the flesh:

Galatians 5:24 NIV  Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We also are also saying that we need God’s leadership in our lives and that we are wanting to submit ourselves to His leadership. Each day I am to be led by the Spirit and if I am led by the Spirit I will be led to show love, joy, peace, etc., rather than expressing the works of the flesh. So when I pray “lead me not into temptation” I am asking for God’s active leadership in my life and that I desire to submit to that leadership.

And finally we are saying that God’s power is sufficient for us to win the spiritual battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. We saying that we want to claim the promises of God where He says,

James 4:7 NIV  Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 John 5:4 NIV  for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Romans 13:14 NIV  Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

So when we pray “Lord, lead us not into temptation” we are crying for God’s help and also expressing our faith in the power of God in our life to overcome these enticements to sin, we are submitting to God’s personal leadership in our lives.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in each of the other petitions in the Lord’s Prayer there is a lot of depth to them. If we meditate on what is related to each of them, it will
make our daily prayer more meaningful and relevant in our lives. This is how Jesus teaches us to pray.

One final word about temptations: we all face temptations but God always has a door of escape that we may be able to bear it. This is the promise of I Corinthians 10:13.

1Co 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

So count it all joy when you fall into divers trials, testings, and temptations, knowing that God is working a great work in you. Although it may not be pleasant at the time of your experience, God has a good purpose in it. But you are to look for God’s way of escape, to His leadership. That will include resisting the Satan and fleeing from Him, it will include faith in the power of Christ overcome the world, and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ to overcome our flesh.

Pray this each day. “Lord, lead me not into temptation” and whenever you are faced with temptation and you will find that God will answer that pray by performing His good purposes in you.

Amen?  Amen!