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DATE: July 25, 2026
SERIES: The Shape of Prayer
MESSAGE: Do Not Lead Us Into Temptation
PASSAGE: Matthew 6:13
SPEAKER: Matt Meyer

Our Father, who is in heaven...Hallowed be your name...Your kingdom come...Your will be done...On earth, as it is in heaven...Give us this day our daily bread...And forgive us our debts...As we also have forgiven our debtors...And do not lead us into temptation...

And do not lead us into temptation. That phrase, that's the phrase we're going to look at together tonight, from the Lord's Prayer, and I wonder if you find that phrase interesting? Or maybe a little problematic?

I grew up in a church where we prayed the Lord's Prayer every single Sunday, and I have to keep—we said trespasses in my church instead of debt, so I have to always catch myself. But that particular line, this line of do not lead us into temptation, it just—for years, I had it memorized after doing it every Sunday, so it just kind of rolled off my tongue for a long time without much thought.

But I've been pondering it in preparation, obviously, for our time together tonight. So I want to pose some questions that I've been thinking about, for us to think about together, on this particular line from this prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. And as I mentioned that, if you want to follow along, you can turn to Matthew chapter 6. We're in the first part of verse 13, just the first part. The part that says, "and do not lead us into temptation."

So here's some questions for you, though. First one is this: Why do we need to ask God not to lead us into temptation? Would God lead us towards temptation? Why would a good God lead us into temptation? Why do we need to ask him not to lead us there? That's question number one, that, those kind of all together.

Question number two, does Jesus mean for us to pray that God should just pave the way for us that doesn't include temptation or testing or trial? Just make the rest of life easy? Is that what he's telling us we should be praying for?

And then number three, how, this is more practical, how should we define the word temptation here? Right? What's the difference between temptation and testing or trial? And I think that's enough questions for us to deal with tonight.



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So to get started, I'm going to start at the end because I think that's important. How should we define temptation? Right? How was Jesus defining it? When the people that were listening to him heard it, how did they hear it? Right?

So if we go back to the original Greek language, which is what the New Testament is written in, the word for *temptation* is the word *peirasmos*, okay? *Peirasmos*. And it actually, just to make it more confusing, it actually has multiple meanings. So it can mean an experiment or a trial or a test. Or It can mean temptation, just like it's translated. So it can be understood either as a condition of things by which we are enticed towards sin, we are enticed away from God, away from holiness. Or it can be understood as adversity, affliction, trouble, trial, struggle, possibly sent by God, to test us, to test or prove one's character, faith, and holiness.

So it can either mean, right, we're being tempted or enticed away from God, towards sin, or it can mean there's trouble, there's struggle, there's a trial going on that God might be using to test us, to help us grow character and faith and holiness. Or just to make it muddier, it could be either one, it can mean both at the same time.

So how do we tell the difference? How do we know which one does it mean? Right? I think the difference is found in who is the thing coming from? And which direction is it leading us? A test would be from God, for our good, for our growth, to lead us forward in faith—and by the way, God has regularly tested those who partner with him to bring the kingdom to earth, right? Which is what we've prayed for in the Lord's Prayer, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So God regularly tests those.

I'll give you some examples. He tested Abraham in Genesis 22, right, with the sacrifice of Isaac? And the question was, would Abraham trust God with his future? Would he trust God with his future? God tested the Israelites in Deuteronomy chapter 8. This is the story where he provides manna from heaven, right? And he says, now only gather enough for today, except on the day before the Sabbath, when you gather to, you know, double the amount. But the question was, would they trust him for tomorrow's bread, or would they gather more than they needed? God also tested Jesus when he was here on earth. The question was, would Jesus trust his father to make him king, even if it meant a cross? Would he trust his father to make him king, even if it meant a cross?

See, the test, by the way, it's not for God. It's not for him to find out or figure it out. It's for us. It's for us to understand where are we at? Think of it as an opportunity to grow in faith, to grow in trust, to grow in character. There are a number of passages, by the way, in the New Testament that speak to this idea using this word *peirasmos*.



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So I'm going to invite you to keep your finger in Matthew 6 or if you're on a phone or whatever, you're going to get to switch to something somewhere else, but we're going to come back to Matthew 6 later. But to get a good understanding of this word *peirasmos* and testing and temptation, we're going to jump to a few different passages.

First one is in 1 Peter, chapter 4. So if you want to flip over there, 1 Peter is near the end of your New Testament, right? It's right before 2 Peter. It's also right after James, which is after Hebrews. So it's near the end. Okay? And we're going to first look in chapter 4.

So while you're turning there, I want to tell you, the word *peirasmos* is used in twenty-one different passages in the New Testament, and several of those are helpful for us. We'll look at them tonight. Here's why: Because testing can feel disorienting. Like things aren't going the way they're supposed to. Yet, ironically, testing or temptation is often a sign that you're moving or we are moving in the right direction towards God. Which is why Peter tells the persecuted Christians—his letter is to persecuted Christians who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire—and here's what he says to them in chapter 4, verse 12: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal [the trial, the struggle, right] among you, which comes upon you for your testing.” *Peirasmos*, that's our word. Don't be surprised at it, he says, as though some strange thing were happening to you. He's saying this is a normal part of life. Don't be surprised. Tests or trials always seek to lead us forward towards God in faith.

Earlier—so flip, I would say, flip back one page in 1 Peter—earlier, Peter talks about this as well in chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, he uses the word again. Verse 6, it says in this, “you greatly rejoice.” Okay, so let's stop for a minute because we just jumped in the middle. What are they rejoiced—in what are they greatly rejoicing? First five verses of chapter 1, where Peter has just told them, you greatly rejoice because you've been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, and you were protected by the power of God through faith. That's what he's just told them, that's what they're rejoicing in. So he says, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.” *Peirasmos*. Why? “So that the proof of your faith, there we are again, moving us towards God and faith, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

You see the direction that passage is pointing? It's leading towards forward, towards this result of praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes back, there will be honor and glory given to him because of



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you, because of your faith as you go through this trial. See, it's moving forward. Testing and trials are always opportunity to move towards God in faith and trust.

James tells us something very similar. So again, flip back just a couple of pages to James chapter 1. He uses the word as well. James chapter 1, verses 2 through 4. "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials." *Peirasmos*. "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." So again, what direction is it pointing? Where is it leading? The trial. What does it result in? Endurance, perseverance, perfection, maturing of the individual, becoming more like Jesus.

Tests are from God for our good, to move us forward, to move us towards God and faith and trust. Tests and trials are also opportunities to grow in our character, to become more like Jesus. But, *peirasmos* is also translated *temptation*, in the sense of enticing someone towards sin or wrongdoing. And unlike a test, temptation doesn't move someone forward—it lures them off course. It prevents them from realizing their full potential by tripping them up and keeping them stuck. Temptation, by the way, is never from God. We're going to see that in just a minute. It's always from evil. And sometimes, evil can take a test or a trial, and use it as a temptation to lead us off track, which is why the word is used back and forth the same.

James talks about this idea a little bit further down in chapter 1. Look at verse 12. "Blessed is the man [or woman] who perseveres under trial." *Peirasmos*. "For once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted [*peirasmos*] 'I am being tempted again by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

You see, some version of the word *peirasmos* is used six different times in those four verses. Used for the word trial, it's translated *tempted* four times. But again, notice the trial comes from God, and it moves the person forward toward the crown of life received from the Lord. But the temptation—what's the language even?—it says it carries the person away, moving them off the path. And then we find out something really important to what we're looking at tonight. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself does not tempt anyone."

Now, we're going to put all this together here in just a minute. I want to show you one more passage where this verse is used. 1 Corinthians chapter 10, where *peirasmos* is used again. You got to go back a little ways further. 1 Corinthians



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comes right after the book of Romans, where we were earlier this year. Chapter 10, verses 12 through 14. Paul says this: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." He's setting up a warning, saying, if you think you're strong, if you think you can endure the trial, if you think that you can't be tempted, take heed lest you fall. And then he goes on to say this: "No temptation [peirasmos] has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation, will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." Flee from trusting in things other than God. So not only does God not tempt anyone, he is faithful to not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. He provides a way of escape so that we can endure it.

So now, go back to Matthew chapter 6, right? Try to put all of this together. When Jesus tells his disciples to pray, and do not lead us into temptation, most scholars agree, he does not mean temptation the way we think about it. He means trial or test. Who knows why they translated it, the translators translated it, that way? But because God does not lead us into temptation, he does not tempt anyone. So, if we put that together, it can't mean—why would Jesus say, "don't lead us into temptation, God," when you don't tempt anybody? So it would sound more like, "and do not lead us into trial. And do not put us to the test."

Now, let's think about that for a minute.

Because Again, this question I posed earlier, does Jesus mean for us to pray that God should just pave the way, make it easy? Doesn't include any trial, no struggles, no adversity for the rest of your life? Is that what we're asking Jesus to do? Because we've seen in these other passages tonight, that testing and trials are opportunities to trust, to strengthen our faith, to grow, to become more like Jesus, then why would Jesus tell us to ask God not to lead us into trial or testing if that's going to help us grow? So we're still kind of stuck.

So why is Jesus suggesting we pray that? I think it's Jesus acknowledging we live in a sinful, broken world, and hard, painful things will happen to us. And we can and should ask God for relief from those things. By the way, this idea is mirrored in the second half of the verse, "but deliver us from evil," but that's Ryan's stuff to talk about next week, so that's all I'm going to say about that.

God will probably, I think, still test us from time to time to give us opportunities to grow in faith, but there will be plenty of other things that happen to us, trials, adversity, challenges, struggles that come our way just because we live in a sinful, broken world. So we don't necessarily need to ask for trial or testing. We can say, "please don't lead us into trial."



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In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus himself prayed to avoid the testing of the cross. Remember he asked for another way. Matthew chapter 26, Luke chapter 22, both accounts—what does he say? You can look it up later. “Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me.” The cup is his suffering that's coming in a few short hours, his crucifixion. He says, “Father, if it's possible let this cup pass. Is there another way?” And we know the beauty of Jesus is that he came back and said, “but not my will, but your will be done.”

But it's worth noting Jesus prayed for himself to avoid testing. So one scholar says it this way about this verse in Matthew 6, about “do not lead us to temptation” or “do not put us to the test.” This request is not, he says, not just for evasion of pain and things we don't like, though it frankly is that. But, it expresses the understanding that we as humans can't stand up under much pressure, and that it's not a good thing for us to suffer. It is a vote of no confidence in our own abilities.

So when we pray, regularly—if we were to pray the Lord's Prayer on a regular basis, as we're doing this summer—when we pray that, it's a way of reminding ourselves, “I'm not very strong, God. Not in my own abilities.” Which is why Paul says, take heed, if you think you're standing, take heed lest you fall. So this scholar goes on to say, God expects us to pray that we will escape trials and we should do it. The bad things that happen to us are always challenges to our faith, and we may not be able to stand up under them. They are dangerous.

And then finally, he makes note of the structure of the overall prayer. We've talked some about this, right? That the first three Ryan has talked and others have talked about, the first three requests are about God, the last three requests are about us. But this is what he's saying as this series of requests begins. It starts with asking for the glorification of God, hallowed be your name. May your name be made famous, be made holy, be made like no other name. May people know that. But it ends with the acknowledgment of the feebleness of human beings. It ends with the acknowledgment that we are not as strong as we think we are, whether that be physically or spiritually. It does not take much to bring us down, to lead us off track, to tempt us to doubt God, to tempt us to trust in other things, things other than him.

I've had this experience both ways this summer, physically and spiritually. Earlier this summer, two or three weeks ago, I had gout in my left toe. Just my left toe. And it took me down for like two to three days. I couldn't do anything. Like, I couldn't put my, I couldn't put it in a shoe, it was so swollen, was so sore. All I could do was lay on the couch and watch the World Cup. Not a bad, not a bad time to be laid up. But it was just my toe, and it took me completely out for two to three days. That's physically, right? It does not take much.



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But then even this week, more recently, right, just a few things happening at once. A few things not going the way they're supposed to. Some water appearing around the drywall and the vent on my air conditioning in my basement of my house. My son calls me and says, "hey, there's water dripping." So I gotta, what's that, what's going to happen there? And then shortly later, my other son calls and says, "hey, my car is making some noises." Turns out his muffler is rusted out. Both of them do things happen to me in the same day.

And here's what I noticed about myself. I felt insecure about God's provision. I doubted his provision for me. I felt more anxious that day than I did the day before. But I'm also sitting in this passage thinking about these ideas and realizing those two things are opportunities to trust God. And by the way, I'm well aware, I wouldn't call these trials, right? There are plenty of people in the room probably tonight that are going through much harder things. But I'm just trying to illustrate it doesn't take much to trip us up, to steer us off track, to tempt us to doubt God, to trust in things other than him.

Trials always tempt us to sin. And because they are unpleasant, that's when temptation whispers, "There's an easier way. Take control. Provide for yourself. No one else is gonna take care of you. Do it your own way."

See, it takes experience and wisdom to recognize if something is a temptation or a trial or a test. And many times, trials tempt us to sin and temptation to sin is always a trial, which is why the word is used so interchangeably for them. And I think most of the time, we are familiar with the temptations that we face, that we regularly struggle with.

You can probably think of one, probably one in your mind, Holy Spirit's prompting you right now. Much of the time, I know when something's a temptation for me. But sometimes, even though we know it, we allow ourselves to be put into a place of temptation, and we expect God to protect us when we could have avoided it by taking responsibility, using wisdom, and not allowing ourselves to be put into that situation in the first place.

Other times, a situation beyond our control—which usually means it's a test or a trial—can become a temptation to sin and trust in something other than God. And most of the time in those cases, we just want out of the situation. Just make it stop, just be over. But sometimes, most of the time, staying in the situation, is how we learn to trust and how we grow.

So one more time, how do we know the difference? How do we know how to decide what to do in a trial or a test or a temptation? And again, just go back to what direction is it pointing you? Is it leading towards God? Is it leading towards



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becoming more like Jesus, our vision statement? Or is it leading you away from God? Is it leading to a shortcut off the path of becoming more like Jesus?

And if that's hard for you to figure out, because sometimes it can be, talk to someone about it. Call a trusted friend, call someone in your Life Group. Because many times, the way out of temptation that Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians—that God would provide a way out so you could stand up under it—many times, for me, it's been a friend, it's been a person that I call, say, "Hey, I'm wrestling with this right now. Can you give me some perspective? Can you give me some truth? I'm bringing this into the light before you, with you before God—can you help me?"

You know, we've noted almost every week in this series on the Lord's Prayer that it's called *the Shape of Prayer*. Because we want to do more than just study this prayer, we want to listen to it. We want to be shaped by it. And I've talked about temptations, both temptations and testing or trials tonight. So to close our time, I'm going to give us about five minutes to reflect together. And we're going to put a couple of questions up on the screen having to do with this phrase, "Do not lead us into temptation. Do not lead us into testing your trial." And Carrie's going to come up and she's going to play some soft music just to reduce some distraction.

But I want you to think about these two questions in your own life for about five minutes and listen to the Holy Spirit. What would he have to say to you? To what extent do I allow myself to be put in places of temptation or testing, expecting God to protect me rather than taking responsibility and using wisdom? How often do I do that in my life? Ask the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, to what extent do I seek to avoid trials rather than trusting God to protect me through hard or challenging things, through adversity?

Ask the Holy Spirit. Give you five minutes to reflect on that and then I'll come back up.

[break]

So before we sing our next song together, I just want to acknowledge that for some people, even mentioning the word, or the idea, of temptation can lead to thoughts of shame and defeat. And that's not what Jesus is wanting to take us to. In fact, I wonder if this part of the prayer "do not lead us into temptation" in Jesus' mind, he had in mind a standard Jewish morning and evening prayer that he would have been familiar with, that he would have prayed regularly as a young Jewish boy, as a Jewish man. Here's that prayer:

Bring me not into the power of sin. And not into the power of guilt. And not into the power of temptation. And not into the power of anything shameful.



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See, Jesus doesn't bring up praying about temptation or trial to put us to shame. He doesn't want us under the power of anything shameful. Whether we have successfully withstood temptation or feel like we fall at the slightest pressure, whether we have trusted God through trials or doubt him from time to time as followers of Jesus, the words of Romans 8:1 are still true of us. Remember this from a couple of months ago: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death."

And learning to participate with God in his deliverance for us, learning to trust, learning what's a temptation, what's a test, which way is it leading—it's a lifelong process. And he loves us. No matter whether we fail or succeed at any given moment. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that you do love us, no matter whether we fail or succeed—that we are your children, that you are seeking to conform us into the image of Christ, that grace is available. And we're thankful that you do test us from time to time for our own sake, for our own understanding of where we are in that process of becoming like Jesus, and that you want to move us towards that and towards you in trust and faith. We thank you that you do bring protection, you do offer a way out. When temptation seems like it's becoming too much, Lord, help us to recognize that way out. Thank you that you bring grace, not shame. We pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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