

Prayer: Our Spiritual Lifeline, #8

**Praying:
"Lead Us Not into Temptation"
(Mt. 6:13)**

--CEFC 6/3/18

I am pretty certain that when my life is done,
and I am ushered into glory in the presence of God,
and I gain a clear vision of ultimate reality,
I will look back with regret on how little I prayed.

I will see in the face of our Lord
a loving longing to share his very life with me.
I will catch a glimpse of all the riches of relationship that could have been mine,
but which I failed to experience
simply because I did not invest myself in the practice of prayer.

We've been invited into the heavenly throne room,
as sons and daughters of the King by the Lord himself—
**"Ask and it shall be given to you;
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door will be opened"** Jesus declared.

And he asked his disciples,
**"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?
If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts
to those who ask him!"** (Mt. 7:9-11).

The apostle Paul expanded on that truth--
**"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—
how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** (Rom. 8:32).

What a wonderful and gracious and generous God he is!
Psa. 81:10--**"I am the LORD your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it."**

And it is in prayer that we open our mouths
to receive all the good things our heavenly Father wants to give us.

We see this so clearly in Jesus' model prayer—
what we call "The Lord's Prayer."

First, Jesus says, consider who you are praying to—
he is no pagan god, who needs to be cajoled and coaxed,
and somehow sweet-talked and manipulated

into taking an interest in us.
No, we can approach him as our loving Father.
And he is holy—always good, always doing what is right and true.
He is a wise and benevolent King,
a ruler whose kingdom is one of perfect peace.

This is our God—a God who deserves to be honored and obeyed.
He is the source of all goodness, truth, and beauty.

And this great God invites us to ask him for all that we need—
We are to pray, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**"
If we ask for bread, will he give us a stone?
Shall we not trust in his generous provision?

And our Father in heaven knows that in this sinful world
we will slip and fall;
and we will get dirty—
He promises to wash us clean
if we but come clean with him.
We are all burdened with a moral debt which we cannot pay,
a debt which he stands ready to cancel forever.
So, Jesus calls us to pray for purification--
**"Forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us." //**

This morning we move to the last petition in this prayer,
where, in this world that is fraught with dangers,
Jesus summons us to seek our Father's powerful protection:
"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

Let me briefly talk about what this petition says,
before we explore three aspects of what it means. /

At first blush,
asking God not to lead us into temptation seems a rather odd prayer to pray—
for temptation seems a bad thing
that our God would not want to lead us into in any event—
So why should we need to ask him not to do it?

Doesn't James tell us explicitly that
**"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me."
For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;
but each person is tempted when they are dragged away
by their own evil desire and enticed" (1:13,14).**

God doesn't tempt anyone to do evil,
but God does test us in the midst of the temptations we experience—
and, in fact, both Greek and Hebrew
use the same word to express both ideas.
So, for example, when the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert,

Jesus was tempted by the devil
and he was tested by God at the same time.

Every temptation is also a test,
and neither is a pleasant experience.

This prayer just reflects our very natural cry for help to be protected from both.

For both temptation and testing involve a confrontation
with something that is distressing for us,
which we must somehow endure and overcome.

Hence, the second part of this petition:
"and deliver us from evil."

Should it be "evil"—as a general description?
or should it be "the evil one"—that is, Satan, the devil,
that we seek deliverance from?

Both are accurate translations of the Greek.

In the end, I don't think it really matters much which we choose—
for Satan is simply the personal focus of that more general condition,
and he seems to have a hand in all that negatively affects us in this world. /

Martin Luther sums it up well when he says,
"In this prayer we ask our heavenly Father to set us free
from all evil of body and soul, honour and estate:
and finally, when our last hour comes, to [graciously grant] us a happy end,
and to take us from this valley of tears to himself in heaven."

This is a prayer for divine protection—
both for rescue in life and for deliverance in death.

So, let's back up and consider what this prayer means for us—

First, it reminds us of the danger we must face.

Every single day, whether you realize it or not,
you are engaged in a spiritual battle for your soul.
There are forces at work that can destroy you as a person.

Every day we will be confronted with temptations of all sorts—
temptations from the ungodly corruptions of the world around us,
temptations from the distorted desires of the flesh within us,
and temptations from the evil designs of the devil who stands against us.

And doesn't it seem that in this #MeToo moment in our culture
almost every day we read about some casualty in this moral contest,
some person who gave in to some immoral urge
and lost the battle.

Every day you will be put to the test—
you will face temptations.
Some of these tests may seem obvious;

some will be more subtle.
But every day you will face them.

Sometimes the temptation come to us in times of prosperity—
we may experience God's blessing in material forms—
a good income, a comfortable life,
good relationships at home and with friends,
and we are tempted to forget about God,
and to think of these things as our right.
We can become puffed up with pride,
and think too highly of ourselves
as those who must deserve
the good things we have received.
We look down on others
as either lazy or ignorant or just plain deplorable,
and we thank God we are not like those people.
God hates such moral arrogance.

Other times the temptation comes through adversity—
things go badly, and we become discouraged,
and easily blame God for our misfortune.
We turn our backs on him,
because we think he has turned his back on us.

And we are always in a battle with the disordered desires of our hearts—
We love the wrong things,
or love the right things in the wrong way.

We can be tempted to lust by lewd images on a smart phone,
or we can be tempted to greed by attractive ads on television.

One of the temptations I fight comes simply through the secular nature of our society—
In the world's eyes, God seems totally absent in the areas that matter—
in the worlds of business, politics, academia, and media.
I find myself drifting into that godless way of thinking,
and I sometimes wonder if all this Christian stuff is really real.
Am I deluded in believing all this?

In this world, I am in danger.
We all are. All the time.
And the Bible speaks of a personal focus of the evil of this world--
He is called the "evil one," Satan, or the devil.
He hates us,
because he hates God.

And John writes in his first letter,
"the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

Peter warns us, "**Be self-controlled and alert.**
Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

The devil specializes in deception.

He wants to undermine the truth of the word of God—

“Did God really say . . . ?” is his most common question.

He wants to point us to false messiahs—

counterfeit saviors—

people and things we turn to in our time of need

that are not God and cannot save.

And he wants to undermine God’s moral truth—

as if it were old-fashioned or repressive

or just out of touch with modern sensitivities.

That’s why Paul has to say,

“Do not be deceived:

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes

nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy

nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers

will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Or again,

“Do not be misled:

“Bad company corrupts good character.”

We must beware of entering into the ways of the world around us,

associating with **“bad company”**—

maybe it’s the way we interact on the internet—

we get caught up in commenting on Facebook or Twitter,

or we just listen to political talk that stirs up our passions,

and we become abusive and rude.

“Do not be misled:” Paul says,

“Bad company corrupts good character.”

Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning;

for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame” (1Cor. 15:33-34).

Every day you will be engaged in a battle for your soul,

but it is a battle that is rarely against a clear enemy right before our eyes.

It’s more like guerilla warfare.

No, Paul says, **“our struggle is not against flesh and blood,**

but against the rulers, against the authorities,

against the powers of this dark world

and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).

It is the ultimate war on terror.

Dutch Christian and Prime Minister of the 19th century, Abraham Kuyper

put it this way—

"If once the curtain were pulled back, and the spiritual world behind it came to view,

it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive,

sweeping everything within its range,

that the fiercest battle ever fought on earth would seem, by comparison,

a mere game.

Not here, but up there—that is where the real conflict is waged.
Our earthly struggle drones in its backlash."¹

This is a dangerous world—

**"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour"** (1 Pet. 5:8).

Do you believe that?

On December 22, 2006, a Siberian tiger named Tatiana attacked her keeper
at the San Francisco Zoo.

"The tiger ate her hand. It slowly proceeded to eat the rest of her arm."

That's how Vikram Chari described the horrifying spectacle
that he and his six-year-old son witnessed.

For those who work with wild animals, this bloody assault was a reminder
of what they already know but don't always remember—
the creatures they've become so accustomed to can turn on them at any moment.

"If you're not afraid of it, it will hurt you," said animal behaviorist Dave Salmoni.

"You can't get the wild out of a cat because he's in a cage."

Lots of us think we can tame sin—

we can manage it and control it and keep it domesticated in our lives.

But like a tiger, sin turns and masters us at the first opportunity.

You cannot get the wild out of sin simply by caging it.²

So long as we live in this fallen world, we are in danger—

As Martin Luther put it in his famous hymn:

*For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

So, first, this prayer for protection points to **the danger we must face.**

And second, it points us to **the weakness we must acknowledge.**

Jesus urges us to pray this prayer

because he knows that on our own we will surely fail.

When he was in the garden of Gethsemane he commanded his disciples

to **"Watch and pray so that you will not fall³ into temptation.**

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41).

And they did fail to watch and pray,

¹ cited in Ferguson, *Daniel*, p. 199 with reference there.

² Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 131

³ ESV: *enter*

and they did fall—every one of them.
They all abandoned their Master,
and Peter denied him three times.
Such is the weakness of the human heart.

Again, from Luther's hymn:
*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;*

And a failure to acknowledge our own weakness is the first step toward destruction—
Prov. 16:18--"**Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.**"

Gal. 6:1--**Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin,
you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.
But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.**"

1 Cor. 10:12--"**So, if you think you are standing firm,
be careful that you don't fall!**"

I know that just because I am a pastor,
I am not invulnerable—
and maybe because I am a pastor,
I am more vulnerable.

It sometimes seems that way,
when I hear those sad reports of pastors whose lives and ministries
have been shipwrecked by immorality.

Some of these are pastors I have known and respected—
pastors who I knew
knew as well as I do
about the all spiritual dangers that abound in this world.

Yet they still fell.
We are weak.

I know that if it could happen to them, it could happen to me.
I have to be on my guard—and so do you.
Prayer is a means by which we keep our guard up
and stay alert to the evil all around us and within us
and acknowledge our own inability to win that battle against it on our own.

Maybe, if we just put our minds to it,
we can escape the most visible and notorious of sins,
which everyone would condemn.
but our weakness surely extends to the more subtle sins—
sins like pride and envy and greed.
How easy it is to develop a discontented spirit
that results in resentment
toward those who seem to have it better than we do,

which is really a resentment toward God.
Or we may get caught up in selfish ambition and the idolatry of work—
sins that can actually be applauded by the world.

Face it, friends.

We are moral weaklings—all of us.

If it weren't so, why do you think Jesus would need to urge us
to pray for help?/

I'm sure many of you saw at least some of the highlights
of the Royal Wedding two weeks ago—

and I hope you saw the wedding sermon
given by the American bishop.

It was very well delivered—I wish I could speak like that!

And it was far more substantive than anyone,
and perhaps especially the royal guests,
would have expected at such an occasion.

It was a wonderful homily on love,
with one basic message—

What a wonderful world this would be
if we just loved one another.

But that's the problem, you see—

we don't love one another,
and, worse than that, in our own power, we can't.

I'm sure there may be some here who would disagree with me on that.

You think more highly of human nature—
even of your own human nature.

Aren't people basically good, you may say—

and with the right education and opportunity,
won't people will do the right thing?

I'm afraid that's not how the Bible sees it,

and that optimistic view of humanity is difficult to justify
in the light of human history.

No, our hearts are corrupt—

we are captives to our self-centeredness.

We are morally weak—prone to sin, every one of us.

The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.

And my years as a pastor have only increased my conviction that that is true.

And that's why we need a Savior—everyone one of us.

We first, need to be forgiven for what we have done,

and then we need a power beyond ourselves
to keep us from further moral self-destruction.

That's what I always tell young couples who come to me for pre-marital counseling.

I tell them that the greatest threat to the health of their marriage

is not financial stress
or conflict with in-laws

or sexual differences.
No, the greatest challenge to the health of their marriage will be their own selfishness.
It is the weakness of the human heart.

That's why Jesus says, "**Watch and pray so that you will not fall⁴ into temptation.**"
And that's why, in this model prayer,
he urges us to pray,
"**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**"

We cannot win this moral battle on our own.

But there is cause for hope.
For in prayer, there is a **Power we must claim**.

James writes, "**Submit yourselves . . . to God.**
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Notice the order—first submit yourselves to God—
call upon him and his power—
and then "**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**"

You see, we are in a spiritual war,
but as Paul puts it,
"**The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world**" (2 Cor. 10:3).
We do rely on our own moral will power, self-discipline, and resolve
to get us through.

That will never be enough.
We need the power of God.

And we have this promise--
"**No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.**
And God is faithful;
he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.
But when you are tempted,
he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

And it is through prayer that we stay alert to the temptations we face,
and it is through prayer that we gain the power
to seek the way out that God provides.

We are to put on the full armor of God—
we are to clothe ourselves with the truth of the gospel in all its grace.
And Paul ends that description of all that protective covering
with this:
"**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions**
with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Eph. 6:18).

⁴ ESV: *enter*

Prayer is the supply line through which the power of God comes to us
as we engage the enemy on the front.

It is important to notice the "**we**" in this prayer—

"deliver us from evil."

We are to pray for others as well as for ourselves.

We need each other in this spiritual battle (cf. Heb. 3:13; 10:25),
for who wants to be alone behind enemy lines?

And in prayer we can supply protective cover for others
who may be in the line of fire themselves.

Paul concludes his words on spiritual warfare this way:

"With this in mind, be alert

and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18).

Even Paul requested prayer for himself for courage to go forth in battle—

"I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ

and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle

by praying to God for me" (Rom. 15:30).

And again, to the Thessalonians, he makes the same request,

**"pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people,
for not everyone has faith.**

But the Lord is faithful,

and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one" (2 Th. 3:2).

He encourages the Colossians by informing them that

Epaphras **"is always wrestling in prayer for you,**

that you may stand firm in all the will of God,

mature and fully assured" (Col. 4:12).

We must not fight alone,

and we must strengthen each other through our prayer.

So please, pray for me,

and we must all pray for each other in this church family—

that we **"may stand firm in all the will of God,**

mature and fully assured."

Our prayer for ourselves and for each other

is but an echo of the prayer of Jesus himself for us.

He is our Intercessor before the Father (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34),

as he prayed in that high priestly prayer for his followers found in John 17—

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world

but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

Again, listen to the words of Luther's great hymn:

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

That Word is Jesus.

So let us pray:

"Our Father, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

We are lost without his power.

And finally, when we pray this Lord's prayer
we end with words of praise—

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

These words were almost certainly not in the Gospel accounts of this prayer,
but very early in the church they were added

as an appropriate way to bring it to a close—

These words express the Praise that is God's due.

They echo David's prayer in 1 Chr. 29:11--

**"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.**

**Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all."**

These words remind us again of the greatness of our God

and that our lives, and ultimately everything in creation,

exists for his glory.

We come now to the Lord's Table

where we celebrate this glorious gospel.

Here we are reminded that Jesus endured the ultimate test of faith—

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize

with our weaknesses,

but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—

yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

And where we all fail, he was triumphant.

He was faithful to the end,

and in obedience to his Father,

Jesus allowed himself to be put under the power of the devil.

In the paradox of weakness,

by his humiliating death on a cross,

Jesus conquered that strongman

and he has plundered his household.

And now, as the Risen Lord,

he promises his victorious power to us.

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence,

so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us

in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Let's come to the table,

let us confess our sin,

and let us put on the full armor of God,

and let us pray for his protection in our lives.

I invite our servers to come forward as we prepare our hearts to come to this table.

Prayer---

In the words of Charles Wesley—

*Soldier of Christ, arise
And put your armor on;
Strong in the strength which God supplies
through His eternal Son.*

*Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in his mighty power;
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
is more than conqueror.*

The early church father Cyprian:

“When we have once asked for God’s protection against evil and have obtained it,
then against everything which the devil and the world can do against us,
we stand secure and safe.

For what fear is there in this life to the man
whose Guardian in this life is God?” (*The Lord’s Prayer*, 27).

The Lord’s prayer—pray together--

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.

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

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Communion—

Benediction:

May the Lord rescue you from every evil attack

and bring you safely to his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Tim. 4:18)

Prayer: Our Spiritual Lifeline, #8
June 3, 2018

**Praying:
"Lead Us Not into Temptation"
(Mt. 6:13)**

So why should we pray? Jesus' model prayer assumes that in this fallen world, we will constantly find ourselves in need, in debt, and in danger. We are invited to come to our heavenly Father and to seek his generous provision, his gracious forgiveness, and his powerful protection. By our prayer, we will prove him to be worthy of all our praise.

I. The Danger we must face.

II. The Weakness we must acknowledge.

III. The Power we must claim.

IV. The Praise that is God's due.

Discussion Questions:

**Praying:
"Lead Us Not into Temptation"
(Mt. 6:13)**

- How is your progress in the practice of prayer?
- How do you feel the moral and spiritual danger that we are all in? How does it affect you?

You may want to divide the group into men and women and talk about the kinds of temptations that you particularly struggle with.

Take time praying for each other—that we would be alert to dangers and receive God's power to overcome the temptations we face.

- Review the memory verse: Phil. 4:6,7. Consider again this quote from Martin Luther: "Pray and let God worry."
 - Discuss your "prayer goals" for the month. How are you doing?
- *Take some time to pray together in your group—
Use the "Lord's Prayer" pattern, guiding by your group leaders, spending a few minutes in each phrase.