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## Sermon

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### ***Lead us not into Temptation but Deliver us from Evil***

Genesis 3:1-7; James 1:12-18 ; Luke 22:31-34

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We have been looking at the prayer Jesus taught his followers. Jesus laid out a pattern of prayer which first acknowledges who God is and asks for his will and rule to be done. Then follow three requests: for provision, for forgiveness and for protection.

Today we focus on: **Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

Just in case anyone is not clear on this, we are all tempted, we all have to resist the pull to do things which are wrong. What form those temptations take may differ but we all have the struggle. Last week, Tim made the connection between the daily bread and that so too there is the need for daily forgiveness. The same applies to temptation. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil – today!

The word temptation needs a little unpacking. In Greek, it is *pei-ras-mos*. It has a range of meanings including test, trial and temptation.

When we were at school facing tests and examinations, some of us may have thought the teachers wanted to show us up and fail us. But we know now with a bit of wisdom and distance that our teachers wanted us to pass. The purpose of their tests was to show that we did know what we had been taught.

So it is when God tests someone, he wants to prove the character so that individual is found to be trusting in God and able to bear responsibility.

Temptation is different – the motive is to destroy the person. In temptation, it is not an assessment of character so much as a carefully directed stiletto through a weak point in the armour to take the person down.

Let's turn to the letter of James. James uses this word in both ways here. God tests in order to reward and develop the person:

(V12) Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.<sup>1</sup>

Then he uses the same Greek with the meaning of temptation (V13):

When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

James stresses that it is not God who tempts us – he cannot be tempted and he never tempts. We are tempted by our own evil desires. It is the flesh, that part of us which rebels against God, that wants the things that are selfish and destructive.

The devil is also called the tempter but for temptation to be successful we need to take the bait. If there is no desire in us for the temptation it does not work. You cannot tempt me to walk a tightrope – I really don't want to!

Continuing with James', there is a progression involved:

<sup>15</sup> ... after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

First the wrong desire, then it conceives and brings forth sin and sin results in death. These things grow and spawn ever more serious consequences.

In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain was angry because his offering was not received with favour by God.

Gen 4:6: Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." <sup>2</sup>

It is a dramatic picture of the way temptation builds to actual sin – crouching at the door, it desires to have you but you must overcome it. Of course, in Cain's case, his anger found expression in violence leading to murder.

Now Jesus says we are to pray, "Lead me not into temptation." We need to realise this is a Hebrew idiom. It is not that God **would** lead us into temptation, we are asking that he will protect us from our own vulnerability to temptation. "If we are to be protected from temptation, we must lean on God to protect us."<sup>3</sup>

God does not lead us into a life that is free from temptations. Rather, He teaches us how to look to Him for the strength we need to deal with temptation appropriately.

## ***The Mechanism of Temptation***

I think it is useful for us to consider the mechanism of temptation more closely, to help us recognize it and call out to God for help. What exam

ple is clearer than the first temptation which led to the fall and all our woes? Turn to page 9 in the Bible and look at it with me.

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:12

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 4:6-7

<sup>3</sup> Bock D. L., 1996, *The NIV Application Commentary – Luke*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p310

Genesis 3:1 **Did God really say?** Why change your tactics when they work so well? This worked well then and is used over and over again. Did God really say? Cast doubt on the clear instruction we have been given.

Does it really matter if I have just one drink? Did God really say, “Do not steal?” “Do not commit adultery?”

We hear it over and over again and people fall for it over and over again.

Then Eve responds to the question but **inaccurately**, which weakened the resolve she might have had. God had said they might eat of any tree in the garden except that one. He did not say, “You must not touch it.” When we add to his commands, we weaken what is important. If someone breaks the exaggeration, there is no harm, so then they think there will be no harm in breaking the part God really did say!

**Next the serpent lied**, “You will not surely die.” Yes they would but not instantly – this sin was to introduce sin to humanity. The rest of what he said contained some truth but subtly suggested a selfish motive to God. They would be changed by eating the fruit, they would know good and evil but somehow there is a suggestion that God was trying to stop them having something good rather than protecting them from a danger.

The response of the woman is the essential description of temptation’s work on us:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was **good for food** and **pleasing to the eye**, and also **desirable for gaining wisdom**, she took some and ate it.

Good for food, pleasing to the eye, desirable for gaining wisdom. Three basic temptations for us all. In 1 John 2:16 AV it is described like this: “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

- There is the “lust of the flesh” - which means the desires of the flesh
- There is the “lust of the eyes” – desiring the things that are not ours
- There is the “pride of life” – involves putting self on the throne of our lives.

Kenneth Grahame paints a picture of giving in to temptation in “The Wind in the Willows” when Toad steals the motor car.

‘There cannot be any harm,’ he said to himself, ‘in my only just LOOKING at it!’

The car stood in the middle of the yard, quite unattended, the stable-helpers and other hangers-on being all at their dinner. Toad walked slowly round it, inspecting, criticising, musing deeply.

‘I wonder,’ he said to himself presently, ‘I wonder if this sort of car STARTS easily?’

Next moment, hardly knowing how it came about, he found he had hold of the handle and was turning it. As the familiar sound broke forth, the old passion seized on Toad and completely mastered him, body and soul. As if in a dream he found himself, somehow, seated in the driver's seat; as if in a dream, he pulled the lever and swung the car round the yard and out through the archway; and, as if in a dream, all sense of right and wrong, all fear of obvious consequences, seemed temporarily suspended.<sup>4</sup>

How does Temptation develop? Phillip Keller, in his book, “A Layman looks at The Lord’s Prayer”<sup>5</sup> lists the stages:

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<sup>4</sup> Grahame K., *The Wind in the Willows*, Chapter 6

<sup>5</sup> Keller, W. Phillip, 1976, *A Layman Looks at the Lord’s Prayer*, Moody Press, Chicago, pp.132-133.

1. False impression given by the tempter that whatever wrong we are contemplating really is not that serious. "Did God really say?"
2. A picture is presented of some action that in some way appeals to our inner needs. Satan makes us see something, or someone, or some situation which he is sure will appeal to our lives. "You will be as wise as God."
3. A desire is actively aroused.
4. We begin to toy with this idea. We play with it. We fantasise about it.
5. We proceed to act on that what was presented to us. But the moment we give in we are dismayed and disgusted by our own defeat.
6. We try to hide our sin. We attempt to excuse or to conceal this matter from God and others.

## ***Resisting Temptation***

We need to know how to **pray for spiritual protection** for ourselves. The Apostle Peter is a powerful illustration of the danger of trying to stand against temptation in your own power.

In Luke 22:31-34, after the Last Supper, right in the middle of his long talk to his disciples, Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Peter objected, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.." Jesus' response was, "I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

So much for victory in his own strength. Luke tells us that a bit later on the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his disciples, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He himself, then prayed against the temptation of avoiding the cross.

When we pray for God's protection from temptation we are agreeing with the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."<sup>6</sup>

**Kill it young:** don't play with a sweet little killer, it will grow into something you can't control!

The earlier we can interrupt that progress the easier it is.

**HALT:** AA and other 12 step programs identify that people are more vulnerable when they are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired – H.A.L.T.** When you are be more careful, choose to put up your defences.

Remember it is not sin to be tempted it is when we give and do it, that we have sinned. It was when the woman bit the apple, it was when Toad took the car that temptation gave birth to sin.

**"Resist the devil"** not the temptation get your mind off the temptation onto God. If you focus on resisting the temptation you will think more about it. James4:7 tells us, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."<sup>7</sup>

The end of the Lord's Prayer helps us when we realise that the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are God's.

Recognise that God is King – we are to obey him. He owns everything and we are his heirs.

Recognise that God is omnipotent – we can trust him and rely on him.

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<sup>6</sup> John 17:15

<sup>7</sup> James 4:7

Recognise that the glory belongs to God – what we do as his people should glorify God.

If I do this action, will I be obedient to my king? Is it showing my trust in his power? Does it glorify God?

I said at the beginning that we are all subject to temptation. However, we can all take these steps and increasingly allow God to lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

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