

**Sermon- Lead Us Not Into Temptation**  
**Sunday June 18, 2023**

Happy Father's Day! Today we celebrate all the fathers here and in our lives.

We also want to honour all the men. We honour you for using your strength to protect and care for others and for all the sacrifices you make.

Can we show love to all the men now?

I also want to recognize that today is a difficult day for many. Maybe your father is no longer here, maybe you have a complicated relationship with him. We want to acknowledge your pain on this Father's Day and pray that your Heavenly Father would comfort you and be with you today.

Now today, we're talking about temptation. And I want to start with a question: When you think of temptation, what comes to your mind?

Maybe you think of *indulging your desires*. Eating a slice of cheesecake or buying that item on your Wish List.

Maybe you think of *indulging in some behaviour*. Binge watching a Netflix series or playing video games all weekend.

Maybe you think of *indulging a harmful thought pattern*. Dwelling on negative thoughts or replaying fantasies in your mind.

What do you do when you face temptation?

Turn to your neighbour and tell them your biggest temptation. Just kidding, don't do that!

Because temptation is not only extremely personal, it's also extremely hard. When you're tempted, it feels like you're standing at a crossroad and in front of you are two paths.

On one side there's the path you know you should take. You know it's the right thing to do. You know things will be better if you do it. But you also know that this path will be a lot harder.

And then there's the other path. You know you shouldn't take it but it feels like it's calling your name. You know it will be easier and more fun. And what's the big deal anyway? No one needs to know. No one will get hurt. Besides, don't you deserve a break? Don't you owe it to yourself?

When you're standing at the crossroad of temptation, you know what you *should* do but you *want* to do something else. Part of you wants to do the right thing, but you don't know if you can do it. So you're torn, conflicted and restless.

What do you do when you face temptation?

We're in a series called *Pray Like Jesus*. We've been unpacking the Lord's Prayer and looking at how Jesus teaches us how to pray. Before we get into our message, let's pray the Lord's Prayer together.

**Our Father in heaven,  
may your name be kept holy.**

<sup>10</sup> **May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.**  
<sup>11</sup> **Give us today the food we need,<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our sins,  
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**  
<sup>13</sup> **And don't let us yield to temptation,<sup>[b]</sup>  
but rescue us from the evil one.<sup>[c]</sup>**

**(Matthew 6:9-13, NLT)**

Today, we come to the verse, *Lead us Not Into Temptation*. Now, isn't it strange that Jesus says that? Doesn't the Bible say that God doesn't tempt us? So why does Jesus tell us to pray *Lead us Not Into Temptation*?

Temptation is the crossroad where you need to decide between two paths. And the problem isn't that you don't know which path you should take. The problem is that you know the right path but you don't know if you can take it. And even if you do, how do you stay on that path when things get hard?

Today we're talking about temptation. What I want to do today is look at, What is temptation and How do you stay on the right path even when things get hard.

First, **What is temptation?**

The word temptation comes from the Greek word *peirasmos*. *Peirasmos* is temptation to sin. The Bible uses this word when Jesus is tempted in the wilderness.

**Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be *tempted*<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)**

**When the devil had finished all this *tempting*, he left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:13)**

Jesus also uses this word when he warns his disciples about temptation.

**On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into *temptation*." (Luke 22:40)**

**"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into *temptation*." (Luke 22:46)**

*Peirasmos* is temptation to sin. But *peirasmos* has another meaning. It's testing of your faith. That's why in the Bible, *peirasmos* is also translated as tests and trials.

**Blessed is the one who perseveres under *trial* because, having stood the *test*, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)**

**In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of *trials*. (1 Peter 1:6)**

So *peirasmos* is both a temptation and a test. It's the same situation but it with different interpretations and different outcomes.

Here's an example of this. Has anyone heard of the Marshmallow Experiment?

In 1972, Stanford University conducted a study known as the Marshmallow Experiment. In this famous study, a child is given a choice. You can have a marshmallow now or if you wait, you can have two marshmallows later.

You see, this experiment is both a temptation and a test. It's a temptation to see if you want instant gratification. But it's also a test of your self-control and restraint. Children who resisted the marshmallow not only got more marshmallows later. But they did follow-up studies with these children and they found that these children developed better character. They had better social skills, better academic success and better mental health.

Now when you're tempted, your temptation isn't going to come in the form of a research experiment. It's going to come in the form of adversity. Things will be hard and you'll struggle to make it through. Maybe it's:

- A financial struggle or mental health challenge.
- A shattered dream or a lost opportunity.
- A betrayal or a problem at work.

When you face adversity, it's both a temptation and a test. The temptation is to eat the marshmallow right now.

- Your marshmallow could be spending too much time on social media.
- It could be retail therapy, overeating or substance abuse.
- It could be crossing physical boundaries in a relationship.
- It could be doing something that betrays your values.

The temptation is to eat that marshmallow right now. But the test is to resist it. What happens when you take the test? The test will reveal things. It will your heart, it will reveal your character, it will reveal the kind of person you want to be.

So what does it mean to pray Lead Us Not Into Temptation? A responsive prayer is going to come up on the screen. We're going to pray this prayer together. I'll pray the part that says LEADER and you'll pray that part that says PEOPLE.

**LEADER: Jesus, help me to see the adversity I face right now as both a temptation and a test.**

**PEOPLE: Don't let the Enemy have his way with me.**

**LEADER: Don't let him lead me astray and bring me down.**

**PEOPLE: Give me instead your strength to resist his lies and attacks.**

**LEADER: Hold me in your love and grant me your sustaining grace.**

**ALL: May this test build our faith, refine our character and shape us in your love so that we can become who you want us to be and enjoy the blessings you want us to have. Amen**

Now turn to your neighbour and say to them, *Don't eat that marshmallow!*

Resisting temptation isn't the end. Because in your fight against temptation, there will be more battles ahead.

**How do you overcome the battles and stay on the right path?** Here are three big ideas to keep you on the right path.

First, remember that **Life will be hard.**

Do you realize that your biggest problem isn't the actual challenge you face but the fact that you're surprised you even have to face it? Think about that. Why is that true?

It's because you expect life will be easy. You think that:

- Relationships will be easy.
- Work will go well.
- Your spouse will meet your needs.
- Your kids will behave.

In other words, you believe that life will be easy. But where did we ever get that idea? The Bible says that we live in a fallen world and things aren't working the way they should.

In Genesis 3, part of the curse is that relationships will be strained and work will be hard.

Jesus, the Son of God himself suffered intensely. He even warned us that In this world you will have trouble.

So where do we get the idea that life will be easy?

John Eldredge describes how our culture makes it hard for us to accept suffering. He writes:

**The era we just lived through – what I would call the Comfort Culture – weakened us for the trials we are facing... when you grow up in a world where everything is done with a few clicks on your phone, it doesn't exactly develop resilience. Anyone living in the developed world has experienced a level of ease unimaginable to previous generations... by way of contrast, the World War II generation emerged from the Great Depression with a sense of reality, grit and resilience... We've been set up for this loss of heart, set up to be overcome, set up to give in... (John Eldredge, *Resilience*)**

Because we expect life to be easy we haven't developed resilience. We haven't learned patience, we haven't learned perseverance, we haven't learned how to suffer well.

So what do we do when things get hard? We lose heart, we lose hope and all of a sudden, that marshmallow is looking like a really good idea!

So remember, life isn't supposed to be easy. Life is hard. You will suffer, sometimes unfairly, you will go through hardships and adversity.

**... do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to *test* you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)**

How do you stay on the right path even when things get hard? Remember that life will be hard, nothing strange is happening! But you can rejoice because God's glory will be revealed one day when Jesus returns to set things right.

The second big idea for staying on the right path is, **God is refining you in the fire.**

Victor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor. During World War II, he spent three years in a Nazi concentration camp. It was during this time that he observed something that would change his life.

He noticed there were two types of prisoners. The first type couldn't find meaning in their suffering. They would get consumed by their circumstances and swallowed up in their despair.

But then there was another type of prisoner. These prisoners experienced the same suffering as the other prisoners but with only one difference. They learned to find meaning in it. They found something to hope for. They learned that life can have purpose even in spite of their suffering.

Now which prisoners do you think were more likely to survive - the ones who didn't find meaning or the ones that did? Frankl noticed that the prisoners who didn't find meaning would quickly lose hope and die. But the prisoners who found meaning would thrive in the concentration camp and would eventually survive it.

Frankl would later write:

***“What [people] actually need is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of [them]. What [they] need is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled...” (Victor Frankl)***

Now Victor Frankl wasn't a Christian. But his observations are consistent with the instructions we read in the Bible.

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> whenever you face *trials* of many kinds,<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)**

James says there's something you can look forward to that will help you persevere whenever you face trials. What is that goal? It's having a mature character, a compassionate heart and a persevering spirit.

Now the words temptation and testing occur more than 200 times in the Bible. Another word that's used interchangeably is the word *refine*.

Raw ore is a natural rock that contains valuable minerals like gold. But raw ore is never pure, it always contains impurities and imperfections.

So how does ore become gold? First, it's crushed, ground up and dried. Then it goes through an intense refining process. A goldsmith builds a blazing fire and then he takes the ore and places it in the furnace.

After the ore has been exposed to the heat for awhile, something begins to happen to it. The impurities begin to separate and the imperfections are removed. And that's when the ore becomes gold.

That's a picture what God is doing right now in your suffering. He's refining you in the fire. It feels like you're being consumed by the fire, but God is using it to burn away the imperfections to purify you and grow your patience, and love.

It's a funny thing. Whenever people are asked, When did you grow the most? What's the number one answer? It's times of suffering. It's times in the furnace.

Because for reasons I do not fully understand, the furnace is where God purges your sin and refines your character. God says to his people:

**I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. (Is 1:25)**

**I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. (Is 48:10)**

So stay on the right path when things get hard, remember that God is refining you in the fire.

The third big idea for staying on the right path is this: **You are not alone in the fire.**

In the Old Testament, there's a story about three young men. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are Jewish exiles. They were taken to Babylon and later given positions of authority and influence.

But one day King Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree. He announces that when his musicians play their instruments, everyone in the kingdom must worship the image he's set up. Whoever doesn't will be thrown into something. Any guesses what they're thrown into? A furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are at a crossroad. On one side, they know God's Law. They know that the first commandment prohibits them from worshipping any image or god.

On the other side, they have King Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the world who will throw anyone into the furnace if they don't do what he says.

What would you do? It would be easy to think: Well, our nation has been conquered. Our people are in exile. It feels like God has forgotten us anyway. So what does it matter? I have a cushy job, I have good prospects. If I stay alive I can do more for God right?

But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to compromise their faith. Instead, they find the courage to stand up for God and take the right path.

- Even though it feels like they've lost everything, they choose to believe that God is still good.
- Even though it feels like God has abandoned them, they choose to believe that God is still on the throne.
- Even though it feels like there's no hope, they choose to believe that God is still faithful.

The king is furious. So he summons them and says, I'll give you one more chance. If you worship my image, I'll let you live but if you don't you go into the furnace.

And remember what they say?

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us<sup>[a]</sup> from Your Majesty's hand. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3:17-18)

Don't you love their boldness? Wouldn't you love to have a faith like that? Wouldn't you love to have an "Even if He Does Not" faith? Even if God does not take away my pain, even if he does not make things easier, even if he does not give me what I want – I will still follow God and stay on the right path.

The king is furious. So he orders the fire heated even hotter and throws them into the furnace.

Some of you are in a furnace right now. The furnace is where dreams get thrown into the fire.

- It's where the heat is turned up.
- It's where all your comforts and props are stripped away.
- It's where your heart is ripped open and your sins and fears are exposed.

When you're in the furnace, it feels like you've lost all joy and hope. It feels like your best days are over and your future is lost. You feel so exhausted, desperate and broken.

And in the furnace, you begin to wonder, does anyone know I'm here? Does God even care? Will I die here in this furnace?

But the furnace is where you discover something. The furnace is where you discover that you are not alone.

After awhile, King Nebuchadnezzar runs to the furnace. He expects to see the three men tied up and burning in the fire. But that's not what he sees. Instead, he sees the three men but they're unbound and unharmed.

And not only that, because he sees a fourth man in the fire, one who looks like a son of the gods. Who is this fourth man? This man is Jesus and he knows a lot about the furnace.

- He was tempted by the devil in the desert.
- He was abandoned and betrayed by his own friends.
- He was falsely accused, unjustly tried and brutally tortured.

Why? Because Jesus, the sinless Son of God came into the world and went to the ultimate furnace for you. He went to the cross for you, he died for you so that you could receive his forgiveness, so that you could receive his eternal life.

So even though you're in the furnace right now, remember that you are not alone. Remember that Jesus went to the furnace for you. Remember that he suffered for you and died for you. Remember that he who went to the furnace *for* you is standing now in your furnace *with* you. He is the fourth man. He is Jesus and he's with you in your fire right now.

Let's pray.

## **Prayer**

Thank you Jesus for the cross. Thank you for going to the furnace for us.

Be with us now.

Be with us in our waiting, our trusting, our hoping.

Be with us in our heartache, our brokenness and our pain.

Take our fears and give us courage.

Take our weakness and give us strength.

Take our shame and cover it with your blood shed on the cross for our forgiveness, making us new, reconciling us to yourself and telling us, You are my beloved child.

Even as you refine us in the fire, remind us of the good work you are doing. Shaping our character, building our faith and preparing us for our calling. We don't know when this season will end and sometimes we don't know if we can hold on, but Jesus you are holding on to us. So remind us that even in the fire, even in the confusion, even when it feels like you're not there - your grace is sufficient and your power is made perfect in weakness.

In Jesus' name. Amen