

The World's Greatest Prayer: Protection – Time of Trial

Rev. Perry J. Fruhling, St. Mark's Faith & Life Center. 02 March 2008

Grace and peace...We're in the midst of a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. Because that's how Jesus taught us to pray, to pray that prayer so we'd know what prayer's about. We're in week five. In your outline it's called The Prayer of Protection. The words Jesus used, **Matthew 6:13, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."** Tell me, how would you feel if when this sermon series was being divvied up, the other pastors said, "Temptation, boy, Perry, you'd really be good at that one!" I guess they thought I had lots of experience in the area and wanted someone who's been around the block! How many of you in the last seven days were tempted by something? The ones who didn't raise your hands mean you were the tempters. But The Lord's Prayer says, "*Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.*" We're going to try to talk about what the Bible says about temptation.

The definition of temptation - in the original languages the definition of "tempt" is to entice or to solicit somebody to sin or to fall away. The idea you get from the original language is there is somebody over here in a trench coat standing in the shadows and you're walking past, "Psst! You want to buy a Rolex?" That's been our experience. Those of you who've been around the faith long enough know that there's always temptation out there at some level. There are a million temptations that we struggle with. There's the obvious kind of active temptations such as the temptation to sexual immorality, affairs, emotional affairs, affairs of the heart. There are substance problems - temptations to drug abuse, alcohol abuse. There are temptations to overspend, to use food in the wrong way. Then you can drop down a level from that to a deeper level of temptation, which has to do with your heart and your attitudes. For example the temptation to keep the peace. There is the temptation to withdraw when you need to speak up because you don't want to hurt somebody's feelings or cause conflict. Then there are those temptations of having too much of a good thing like food.

I love the story of the man who was being tempted to go to the donut shop and pick up some of his favorite crême-filled donuts. But he was trying to fight it. So he said, "Lord, I'm giving this temptation up to you. If there is a parking space right in front of the donut shop, I'll take it as a sign from you that you want me to have the donut. Otherwise, I'll take it as a sign that you don't want me to have it and I'll head to work." And sure enough, right in front of the donut shop there was an open spot, on the ninth time around the block!

We've all been there and we all get tempted. Look at the big picture: There's God over here and God wants your best. He wants to love you and protect you and guide you. Then the bad guy over here named Satan is tempting and he wants to destroy us. Then we're somewhere in the middle of this big cosmic battle which God wins, by the way. I read the rest of the Bible. We're stuck here being tempted to go one way but wanting to follow God another way.

There's a complicating factor here. Not only is the devil tempting us but we have a tempter inside of us. We are our own worst enemy also. Luther said this in the Small

Catechism: *"God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch over and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our sinful self may not deceive us, or draw us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins. And we pray that though we are so tempted we may still win the final victory."*

There's some good news about this. Being tempted and struggling with temptation is a sign of life. Life means that there is a struggle within where part of you really wants to follow God. There're different kinds of people I get concerned about: 1) Those who have given up the struggle and rationalize their behavior. They've given in so much to temptation that there's no life because there's no struggle any more. We have to be pulled out and rescued. Guess who the rescuer is. It's what God does. 2) On the other hand are those people who don't struggle at all with temptation called Super Christians. They say, "I remember when I use to struggle with that." They make you feel as if you're alone with your struggles with sin. I love being around Super Christians and drinking in the love! They've arrived. I think they're not tempted because they're so busy judging, condemning and being superior that Satan's not going to mess with them. He's not going to mess up a good thing.

It's those who are living in reality that have the struggle. But our problem is, we try to solve it our way. That's humankind's first solution. The theology of man's solution to temptation is this: Stop it. It's bad. Don't do that. If you don't think you're in that crowd...think yo-yo diet. That's a "stop it" thing. Or the New Year's Resolution you write down, "I will never 'blank' again." Then three years later you're "blank"ing. Or three weeks later you're "blank"ing. You fill in the blank. That's the just-stop-it mentality. It sounds easy but doesn't work.

WHY DOESN'T THE STOP-IT MENTALITY OR HUMAN SOLUTION WORK?

1. **Temptation strikes us at our weakest point.** Temptations don't play fair. They don't hit you when you're strong, when you're victorious and you're ready to go. Temptation hits you when you're hurt. When you're under stress. When you have an emptiness inside your heart that can't be filled. When you've got financial problems, medical problems, family problems. That's when the temptations start really coming at you and cut you off at the knees. "I'm going to stop doing that" is kind of a shallow answer and temptation doesn't play fair.

It reminds me of a prayer I read a while back. "Dear Lord, so far today I'm doing all right. I've not gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or self indulgent. I've not lied, complained, cursed, or eaten any chocolate. I've not given into temptation and used my credit card once today. But I'll be getting out of bed in a minute and I think I'm going to need Your help."

2. **The law, like the "don't-do-it" mentality, is a good thing but it arouses sinful passions in us.** **Romans 7:5** says, *"Our sinful passions were aroused by the law."* That sounds kooky. When Moses brought down the commandments on the tablets – here're the things you do and here're the things you don't – they were for their good. But one of the effects of the law was – your sinful passions try to break the law. You realize you can't live and obey the law. You've got to go

to a place of grace where the law doesn't control you any more. You've got to go to Jesus.

An example: Let's say my wife and I are leaving for the evening. We tell the kids "We'll be gone for a while. Whatever you do don't eat the cookies in the freezer." You can see the light coming on in the kids' heads. Before I said that they're thinking, "I think I'll have an apple." But not any more! There're cookies in the freezer. If the law says "You can't do this." What do we want to do? Do it!

3. I'm sure all you willpower freaks will be discouraged by this, but **willpower is an overrated concept**. It's ok. But it doesn't sanctify you and it doesn't save you from temptation. Do you realize what happened in *The Fall*? Lots of things got broken in The Fall, like our brains and our bodies. So did our willpower. I believe if willpower could work we would all be attending the Church of Self Help today. But you know where we are. We're at the church of a blood stained cross for those who cannot help themselves. That's why He came – because willpower failed. In **Luke 19:10** Jesus says, "*The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*" Our problem isn't the temptation thing. Our problem is much more profound. We're lost. So willpower doesn't bring us out of that. Sometimes we think if "I can just become more disciplined." I believe in discipline and think it's important but it's part of a big picture. But the ones who say, "Just choose to do better," have forgotten where they came from. They couldn't have chosen to save themselves.

That's the depressing news. You can't do it. What's the **GOOD NEWS? God has a path**. God has a way. In **Matt 6:13**, Jesus taught us to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.*" I'm going to talk about these things that God talks about in terms of four principles that are God's way if you have to struggle with temptation. I was tempted to talk about ten things but I resisted the temptation.

1. We all need to connect to God as the source – **reconnect with Him as our source of grace**. Big picture: the goal of our life is not to stop doing bad things. That's kind of a shallow goal. When you're 97 and asked, "How was your life?" "*Pretty good. I didn't do a lot of bad things.*" So what? The goal of life is to live...to have a life of purpose, filled with God's grace and relationships of grace. It's not the absence of all the bad things. So we need a source to go to preserve us. And that is God and His grace. He's our lifeline.

Think about the devil's strategy. Do you think the devil's strategy is to get you to have an affair? Or do you think the devil's strategy is to get you to do drugs? Or overspend? Not at all! I think he's much more sophisticated than that. He is trying to use all these temptations we're struggling with to get us to the ultimate temptation. He wants you to cut yourself off from God. He wants you to cut yourself off, to sever yourself from the only source of grace that we can ever have. He wants us to do it our way. Now we're away from the flock. We're away from protection. We're vulnerable. We're helpless. We're alone. He can do what he wants to with us if he cuts us off from the source. You and I cannot succeed over any temptation this week in a vacuum. There's got to be a replacement, a refilling of something that God has. You need His love and guidance. He's the one

who fills us up with the grace we need to replace whatever the temptation is driving us to.

2. The next, after going to God as the source, sounds so simple. It's so hard but it's so true. It's one word: flee. **Flee the temptation.** Get out of Dodge!

2 Timothy 2:22 says that. "*Flee the evil desires of your youth.*" Think about Joseph. **Genesis 39.** He was a slave in Potiphar's house. The Bible says that he was a handsome man. In the Hebrew it says "hunk". He's a good-looking slave. And there's this lady there and she's got low character and she makes a play for Joseph. So what does he do? He gets up and runs away. She grabs his cloak on the way out. Joseph becomes the first streaker in history but he gets out. What does he not do? He doesn't sit down with her and say, "Sally, tell me about your dysfunctional marriage. I think I can work with you." No! He got out of Dodge. He was being tempted. Flee! I think we all think we're like John Wayne or something, that we're this strong. Sometimes you just need to get out because it's stronger than you are. So run when you're weak. Run to God.

I've counseled with couples who have overcome affairs in their marriage. True healing and strength has come by re-establishing a relationship with Christ. It's not like, "I can overcome this on my own." In the end there is a higher calling on their life that calls them back to the relationship with their spouse. Something more than good looks, personality, or romance – it's an awareness of God's depth of grace for them, their children, and their spouse.

3. We **restore the soul.** That sounds kind of vague. I believe that temptation is diagnostic. I believe the particular temptation that you're struggling with – sex, drugs, donuts, whatever it is – your temptation reveals a diagnosis of an area that you need God's healing in. A particular and specific arena that you're weak in, that you're failing in and that you've got injuries in. For example: somebody who has a substance problem – drugs or alcohol. They may have an emptiness inside where there's no love so the substances kind of medicate that. God's saying, "I want to fill that up." Or people with a food problem. They may feel powerless. They can't say no to anything because they don't have permission to. God's saying, "I can supply the power for your feeling of helplessness." Or people with an anger problem. Anger management rage problem. God may be saying to that person, "You need to learn what vulnerability is. You need to learn how to experience your helplessness. You need to realize you can't control other people to do things your way."

You have to look at what is the temptation saying. Is it an issue of brokenness, inability and hurt or is it an issue of rebellion and sin. We kind of carry both in our hearts. **James 5:16** says, "*Confess your sins to each other that you may be healed.*" Healed, cured, restored. We have to be honest and put the spotlight on both of those. Which is it? We need to restore our souls. We need to ask God to restore our souls. Then not only does God say reconnect, and flee and go under restoration...

4. He also says **use people.** Use people to help you with the temptation. I don't believe in a person who can have victory over a temptation without people in their

life. It's very difficult because often it's kind of an area we're embarrassed about and don't want to admit to somebody. You've got to pick your people well. You're going to need people, the right kind of people, to help you with the temptation because it's going to hit. What you need is regular structured friendships. It may be a small group or a best friend; people you meet with regularly where you talk about God and you open your hearts up, your struggles in your marriage, your dating life, your career – all that.

And you talk about life. You bring yourself to them on a regular basis. If you fall and can't get up, they're there for you. Condemnation and judgment are checked in at the coat rack. And they want to give you grace. They know that's what you need.

That's what works. That's how God does it. He gives us Himself, He tells us to flee where we're weak, He tells us to start getting into restoration of whatever we're dealing with and He brings peace. Those are the magic keys. You're going to be tempted all the rest of your days. Especially if you're trying to do God's work. It's a sign of life.