

## LEAD US... DELIVER US

The Lord's Prayer Sermon Series – Week 5

A Sermon by the Rev. Joyce L. J. Lawson

James 1:13-16, 1 Peter 5:8-9  
Matthew 4:1-11, 6:9-13

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Today is week five of our six-week sermon series on the prayer that is known and said by more Christians than any other prayer. Several of you have shared with me your daily commitment to praying The Lord's Prayer throughout these six weeks. That is a great way to not only reinforce and put into practice what you just learned about a phrase but it's also how you can keep in mind what you learned in previous weeks. If any of you missed a sermon, I hope you will go to the church website or to the bottom of "Monday Motivation" emails and listen to the sermon you missed. Unfortunately, last Sunday's service had no audio, however, a sermon manuscript was attached to Monday's eblast instead. Let's jump into the recap! I realize it's not the most exciting way to begin a sermon, but I hope it's at least helpful.

On the first Sunday of this series our focus was **"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matthew 6:9)**. I shared with you the important implications of addressing God with the inclusive word "our" instead of "my" and the relational word "Father" instead of something like "Holy God." As we acknowledged God's dwelling place as "heaven," we became aware of the awesomeness of a God who created an immense universe but who is also as close as our breathe. And then I shared with you that "hallowed be thy name" is not our acknowledging of God's holiness, but our request that God's name be revealed as holy to others through us, through our words and actions.

The second Sunday, we focused on the statement, **"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)**. I emphasized that it is not our kingdom and will, but God's, and then we looked to Jesus who most fully embodied God's kingdom and will on earth and concluded that heaven looks like love, peace, mercy and justice, and God's will means tending to those who are hungry, thirsty, sick and without clothes and shelter. To pray for God's kingdom and will to come on earth is to acknowledge God's expectation that we help make earth look more like heaven by rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

On week three, we dove deeply into the statement, **"Give us this day, our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)**. I pointed out that the words "US" and "OUR" mean we are praying for all God's children. I shared with you that a better translation of the original Greek is "Give us this day the essential bread we need to survive." What this means is that those who do not have enough food to eat are praying for actual food. Those who have plenty of food to eat are praying for those without and offering to help provide the food that's needed. And for all who believe that Jesus is "the bread of life" (John 6:35), we are also praying for Jesus to spiritually satisfy our hearts and help us do God's will.

Last week, we considered **"Forgive us our debts, sins, trespasses, as we forgive our debtors, those who sin and trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12)**. With this phrase, Jesus emphasized our need to pray for God's forgiveness every time we pray. Many of us don't do this, and perhaps the reason we don't is because we don't think we're that bad. But after reviewing the seven deadly sins of lust,

gluttony, greed, sloth, anger, envy and pride, and being reminded that sin not only includes the bad things we think, say and do, but also the good things we fail to do, it was clear that all of us sin every day. Of course, it is one thing to humbly admit our sins and joyfully receive God's forgiveness, and quite another for us to extend the same forgiveness to others. And yet, Jesus tells us these two acts of forgiveness are inseparable.

Today, we unpack the statement, "***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil***" (Matthew 6:13). Jesus only gave us a handful of lines to pray and the presence of this line about temptation, clearly indicates that Jesus considers it a topic of daily concern. **This popular Minion character expresses temptation's prevalent reality and enticing lure. "Lead me not into temptation. Oh who am I kidding, follow me, I know a short cut."** So you see, even our children's entertainment show characters acknowledge the common struggle of temptation as well as our tendency to give into it.

Temptation is that longing, lure, hunger for something. It's something we know is wrong or something we've decided is bad even if not morally wrong. Sometimes the object of our desire is not necessarily sinful, but it's something we've chosen not to do or to have for the sake of our health and wellbeing. Many of us know about the experience of dieting, and how that which we've decided not to eat somehow looks and tastes better. It's not necessarily a sin to eat what you've decided not to eat, but that common experience of longing says something about the lure of temptation. It's like when a rule clearly tells us not to do something, and yet that something is exactly what we choose to do.

The Bible begins with a temptation story, but as you read the Bible you discover the presence of temptation throughout it. From the beginning and throughout history, humans have been tempted to do what we are not supposed to do and to have what we shouldn't have. In Genesis, the lure of temptation came from a walking, talking, crafty serpent. With rational although false points, that serpent convinces Adam and Eve that doing what God had told them not to do was good instead of bad. How many of you have seen the Disney's animated movie, "**The Jungle Book**," from 1967. I saw it as a child. In it there is a big snake, a python named Kaa. We see Kaa trying to lure Mowgli with his seductive voice and eyes throughout the movie. There are multiple attempts and Kaa persists until eventually Mowgli's resistance is gone, and he is in a full hypnotic state. But just as Kaa prepares to devour him, he is rescued by another. Interestingly, in first Peter, the devil is likened to "**a roaring lion who prowls around, looking for someone to devour**" (1 Peter 5:8).

Now I don't know about you, but if a serpent, a python or a lion ever approached me, I'm pretty sure I would not have a problem staying clear and saying, "No!" But I don't think temptation tends to come to us in such obviously threatening ways. Instead, it is the subtle, rational, persuasive voice in my head. Consider the voice in your head. The voice helps you come up with reasons why you should do that thing you know you should not do. The longer you and I entertain that voice, the more rational the wrong thing becomes. We rationalize in steps, taking one and then another and then another. We end up with tunnel vision as we focus only on that which has become an overwhelming desire, and we stop thinking about the bigger picture consequences.

When Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, he was also tempted. We are told the devil came to him. How do you think the devil came to him? With a pitchfork and wearing red spandex tights? Of course not, that would be too easy. Most of us would stay away from anyone looking like that. Personally, I think temptation came to Jesus much more subtly, it came the way it most often comes to us; it came with the reasoning of a rational voice. Jesus, you're hungry and you need to eat, you deserve to eat. Jesus, let the people see God dramatically rescue you and then they will follow, and you can avoid the cross. Jesus, there's an easier, more attractive, less painful path than God's way, follow me instead. But grounded in scripture and strengthened by faith, Jesus resisted the three temptations.

After describing temptation as a devouring lion, Peter then says, "**Resist him, steadfast in your faith...**" (1 Peter 5:9). Temptation will always try to convince us to do what we should not do and to not do what we should do, but faith enables us to resist, and to stick to God's way for us.

Have you ever thought it sort of strange that we would pray for God to not lead us into temptation? Why would God lead us into temptation in the first place. Some have questioned this statement over the years because it doesn't make sense to them that God would tempt us. From the book of James we hear, "**No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.**" (James 1:13). God is not tempted by evil, and God does not tempt anyone to do evil. God does not and would never lead us into temptation. God leads us on the right path, on a "**path of righteousness for his name's sake**" (Psalm 23:4).

You may not know this, but the ancient Greek language did not use punctuation marks – no comas, periods, question marks. **They also did not use spaces between words or paragraphs.** Texts were a continuous string of letters with an occasional blank line inserted, but only to mark the end of a major section. Sentence punctuation was not invented until several centuries after Christ. So, when translating ancient Greek, the translator is left with the job of inserting the appropriate pauses and emphasis of punctuation. The translator makes informed decisions about punctuation but cannot know for sure how the author intended a particular sentence to be read. There are those who think there should be a pause, a coma after "lead us," and I think they may be right.

**"Lead us,(pause) not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"** (Matthew 6:13). We are praying for God to lead us – lead us on the path of righteousness. After the comma comes "not into temptation" which is exactly the path we tend to lead ourselves. So, lead me, Lord, not on the path I want to go, but on the path, you want me to go. **"One is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death"** (James 1:14-15).

What happens is that an idea comes across your mind, it's conceived. The idea might completely be yours; it may be from a friend or another trusted source. You may outright say "yes" or "no" to it. But sometimes your mind starts playing with it and it becomes a "maybe." The more you play with it the more chances you give it to take root in your mind. Eventually you decide to act and by doing so you step across

a line and do what you knew you should not do. Sometimes it is not a big deal, but at other times it is, and we do that which is costly and painful for ourselves as well as others. We do that which gives birth to sin, and once fully developed, sin can lead to death, maybe not physical death, but there are other kinds of death, like spiritual and relational death.

We might as well admit that rationalizing comes naturally to us, and we are good at it. For example, no matter what the speed limit, we are tempted to go over. We rationalize by saying, "Everyone else is doing it; I'll be late if I don't go faster; I'm a safe driver..." I know whenever I go into a CVS, I choose not to skip the candy aisle, because if they have a 2 for deal on Dove dark chocolates, that is all I need to convince myself that I should buy a couple bags. After all, I don't want to pass up a good deal and dark chocolate is good for us. How often have you rationalized the purchase of something you didn't need by saying, "If the store has it in my size or if it's on sale, then I must be meant to buy it?" We tell ourselves that after the third or fourth beer or glass of wine, we are completely fine getting in our car and driving. We tell ourselves that popping a pill at a party with friends is no big deal, but then step by step we become addicted. We tell ourselves that a look, touch, kiss are all innocent, but then an affair begins that results in hurtful, devastating consequences.

Time after time, we lead ourselves into temptation. So, lead us, Lord, lead us away from the things that tempt us – things like anger, hate, gossip, cheating, drugs, alcohol, power... Jesus knows the right way, shows us the right way, but he does not force us to go that way. Instead, He waits for you to invite him to lead you. I encourage you to consider praying every morning, **"Lead me, Lord, lead me, use me, guide me, help me to be the person you want me to be today."** And if you make the wrong choice and get caught up in something bad and hurtful pray, **"Lord, deliver me from evil; deliver us from the consequences of my actions."**

The word "deliver" in Greek signifies an act of rushing, swooping, and rescuing. So, when you and I do what we should not have done and make a mess of things, we are asking God to swoop in and rescue us. When we cry out, God will rescue us, but that doesn't mean there are not consequences that we will need to live with. We are going to be tempted; it's part of the human condition. But just as certain as temptation is God's desire to rescue us. With God's help, lessons can be learned, and we can become stronger and better able to make the right decisions that keep us on God's pathway.

Part of what we pray when we pray the Lord's Prayer every day is "lead me, Lord, lead me on the path you want me to go, not where I want to go, but where you want me to go. And when I step off your path and go my own way, deliver me and others from the painful, hurtful results of that which I should not have said or done – that which was contrary to your will. So, let's end today's message by slowly and thoughtfully praying the Lord's prayer..

***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, (pause) not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.***