

The Sermon on the Mount
Lead Us Not Into Temptation, Part 1
Matthew 6:13
April 7, 2013, am
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church

Well, this morning I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 6 and to the Lord's Prayer, as we complete our study of this wonderful wonderful pattern and model of prayer for us. It was in a personal letter in 1789 that Benjamin Franklin wrote those words that have now become famous: "In this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes." Of course, it's become very popular and it is true that, certainly in our lives, death and taxes are constant realities. While it's become popular, it's not entirely true, because the Bible teaches that there is, for us, another certainty in this life. It is the certainty of temptation and the sin that results from it. Temptation is a universal experience, and becoming a believer doesn't change that. In fact, our Lord, who obviously was, in the perfection of His being without sin, was tempted. Hebrews 2:18 says: "Jesus Himself was tempted... *(and as Hebrews goes on to say in chapter 4)* in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Not just at the beginning of His ministry but throughout His ministry and throughout His earthly life, He faced temptation. So we too will be tempted as long as we live. Understand this. Christian maturity does not mean that you will be tempted less. Maturity means that you will choose to sin less even though you continue to be tempted.

Although temptation is a constant, daily reality, it doesn't change the truth that you and I, as followers of Jesus Christ, have been commanded to be holy and to pursue holiness. In 1 Peter 1:15, Peter writes "...like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Understand, if you're a Christian, you were made for holiness. In fact, in Romans 8:29 Paul says that "those whom God foreknew, *(that is, those whom He eternally set His electing love upon)* He predestined *(that is, He predetermined your destiny, and this is the destiny He predetermined)* that you would become conformed to the image of His Son..." You were created in Christ in order to ultimately be like Jesus Christ; not in your personality – you were made distinct and to be who you are – but your moral character. You were made, in your moral character, ultimately to resemble Jesus Christ. And by the way, that process began at the moment of your salvation. Paul describes it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18. He says: "We all, *(that is, all of us as believers)* with unveiled face, *(that is, with now clear understanding of the Scripture, we are)* beholding as in a mirror the glory of our Lord..." In other words, you take this book and as you study and read this book, you see reflected in it the image of our God, the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see who He is and

what He's like. And as you stare at that image, Paul says we are being literally metamorphosized. We are being transformed into the same image from one level of glory to another. Our lives are about constant, slow but steady, transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. Do you understand that by God's grace (if you're a Christian), you are not what you used to be? In regeneration, you were given a new disposition which longs to obey God, longs to imitate Jesus Christ. And the process of sanctification began the moment you believed. It's a slow process. That's why it's likened to physical growth. It comes in fits and starts. It's not without its setbacks and its sins, but it is progress nonetheless. The Bible knows nothing of somebody who trusts Jesus as Savior and goes on a spiritual flat line for ten to twenty years until someday he decides to really follow Jesus. Sanctification begins at the moment you're given new life.

And here's the really good news. Let this sink into your mind for a moment. If you're a Christian--if you're a true follower of Jesus Christ, He has promised that someday you will be just like Him in your moral character -- just like Him. In 1 John 3:2 we're told: "Beloved, now *(right now, if you're in Christ as you sit here this morning)* we are the children of God, but it's not appeared as yet what we will be. But we know that when He appears, *(when He comes back)* we will be like Him, for we will see Him just as He is." We are going to be like Jesus Christ. We are going to be a perfect reflection of His moral character someday. But we are not yet what we will be. We are not yet what we want to be. We're not yet what we ought to be. And so in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray daily, confessing our sins and seeking God's forgiveness.

But in the sixth and final petition, Jesus teaches us to pray for more than just forgiveness. He teaches us to pray for real, personal holiness. Let's read it again together. Matthew 6, beginning in verse 9. This is how our Lord taught us to pray. This is the model:

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'"

Now in the first three petitions of this model prayer, we have learned that we are to pray first and foremost about God. We are to pray about God's glory: May Your name (God) be set apart and treated as holy. We are to pray about God's kingdom: May Your kingdom advance. May other hearts come under the spiritual influence of Your kingdom. May my heart grow in its submission to the rule of Jesus Christ. And may the literal kingdom of Jesus come soon. We're taught to pray for the will of God to be done (that is, for His sovereign will to be embraced and accepted in our lives--His providence to be accepted) but also for His revealed will (what He has given us here in His Word) to be obeyed, believed and obeyed as it is in heaven.

In the final three petitions of this model prayer, we're learning how to pray for our own needs, how to pray for the needs of this life--"Give us this day our daily bread", for the forgiveness of sin--"Forgive us our debts...", and for the pursuit of holiness. Now it's possible that in these last three requests there is a veiled reference to the Trinity. Several have seen this. It's through the Father's providence that we receive our daily bread. It's His world and He provides. It's through the Son's sacrificial death that we are forgiven for our sin. And it's through the Spirit's power that we are rescued from temptation and evil. That may or may not be true, but what is true is this. The fourth petition, notice verse 11 "Give us this day our daily bread". That deals with all the physical needs of this life. Jesus teaches us to pray for everything we need to sustain physical life on this planet – for jobs and careers, for food, for shelter, for clothing, for health, for everything that has to do with our physical lives. But the fifth and sixth petitions deal with the spiritual needs of this life. And today we come to the sixth and final petition.

Now before we begin our study of it specifically, I need you to understand why we say that it's only one petition and not two. There have been those in the history of the church who've seen two petitions in verse 13. Luther and Augustine both divided verse 13 into two different petitions. One is: "Do not lead us into temptation (*the second*) but deliver us from evil." And so they taught there were not six petitions, but seven petitions. However, I have to agree with most biblical scholars who follow John Calvin in this. And that is, that verse 13 has only one petition in it. Why is that? Well, notice that word *but* in the middle of verse 13. It's a Greek conjunction. There are several Greek words for *but*. One of them is like ours; it can be used in a variety of circumstances and it's not very strong. However, this Greek word is stronger than the typical English word *but*. It's a strong adversative. We could translate it like this: *but rather on the other hand*. It's a word that connects the two clauses of verse 13 into one unit. Let me translate it for you the way we could, like this: Lord, lead us not into temptation, but rather on the other hand, deliver us from evil. So verse 13 then, is not two petitions, but it's one petition with two distinct parts.

Now look at it carefully again. Look at verse 13 that we're going to begin to study today: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Our Lord is teaching us here, in teaching us to pray this, that we need not only to be forgiven for sin in the past, but we need to be preserved from sin in the future. We not only need pardoning grace (forgive us our debts), but we also need sanctifying grace. We not only need to be forgiven from the guilt of sin, but we need to be delivered from the power of sin. A.W. Pink writes: "We cannot rightly desire God to forgive us our sins unless we sincerely long for the grace to abstain from sin in the future." Simply put, this final petition is a prayer for personal holiness.

Now this sixth petition is, as I said, one request with two parts. There is, first of all, the negative side, and that is pray for spiritual protection from sin. Notice the first half of the verse: "Lead us not into temptation..." And then there's the positive side. We're told to pray for personal holiness--the second part of the verse: "...but deliver us from evil." Now let me just say as we

begin, I think this is the most difficult part of the Lord's Prayer to understand. And therefore, I think it's often the most frequently neglected as well. Frankly, as I have studied it this week, I've been reminded that it deals with some of the most profound and complex theological ideas and issues in the entire prayer. My own brain has been stretched and challenged as I've studied it, and my own theology has been enriched. And so to do this final petition justice, we're going to carefully unpack it not only today, but Lord willing, next Sunday as well. And next Sunday, we'll get into some of those more difficult and complex issues. Today, I want us to set the framework for understanding it.

So let's begin today with the first part of this verse – the negative side – in which our Lord says pray for spiritual protection from sin. Look again at the first half of verse 13: “And lead us not into temptation ...” Now let's notice first of all the meaning of this word *temptation* because Jesus describes our problem in this one word. This is the chief enemy of our souls. And immediately, we're confronted with a challenge because the very same Greek word can have two very different (similar but different) meanings. First of all, this word that's used here that's translated *temptation* (the family of words) can mean an external test or trial to determine the inner quality of the person. We normally use, in English, the word *trial* or *test* to describe this idea. When a test comes from God, and when it comes from God with a good purpose or a good intention – either to strengthen that person or to show the strength that they already possess, then it is not a temptation but rather it is a trial or a test. And the Scripture often speaks of God doing this.

Let me show you a couple of examples. Turn back to Genesis 22:1.

Now it came about after these things, that God (*here's our word in the Septuagint. The translators of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek Bible that Jesus and the apostles used primarily in the first century--they translated this Hebrew word using the same word Jesus uses in the sixth petition. But here, notice-- God*) tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac. I want you to go to the land of Moriah, and offer Isaac there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.

This was not a temptation to do evil. This is instead a test of Abram's faith. It was for good purpose and good intention. It was a test. Turn over to Deuteronomy 8:2 and you see God doing the same thing to the children of Israel during the wilderness wanderings. Moses says to them as they're preparing to go into the Promised Land: “You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, (*here's our word*) testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” Notice verse 16: “In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good to you in the end.” There's the

key that distinguishes a test from a temptation. A test or a trial is intended to do good to you in the end. It has good purpose. It has good intention behind it. It's not to cause you to sin. And so God often does this. In fact, Jesus does this with His disciples in the New Testament. There's a fascinating passage in John 6. You remember that a crowd gathers in the early part of John 6. Verse 2: "A large crowd followed Him, they saw the signs He was performing..." Jesus (verse 3) sits down, as He often did, and began to teach." But verse 5 says:

Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing what a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that we may eat?' (*Now notice verse 6.*) This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do."

This was a test for Philip. We also are the recipient of many different tests of our faith. Turn to James 1:2, this familiar text. James says:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (*or tests*) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (*the ability to remain under. And it proves who you really are*)

God knows your heart. His intention is to show you, not primarily to show Himself, who you are. So there is with this Greek word this idea: an external test or trial to determine or to show the inner quality of a person.

But that very same Greek word can also refer, secondly, to an internal solicitation to sin. This is how we normally use the word. Not trial or test but, in English, temptation. It's the same Greek word, but it can be used either of this test or trial, or of an internal solicitation to sin. When the test comes not from God but from another source (and we'll talk about the sources in a moment) and when it comes for evil purposes (wanting you to fail, wanting you to sin), then it's no longer a test or a trial; it's a temptation. And oh, by the way, a test or a trial can also become a source of temptation because of our sinful hearts. This is how the word *temptation*, this concept, is used in James 1:14 when James writes: "Each one is tempted (*or tested*) when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." Clearly in that context, we're talking about not an external test intended to show your faith is strong or to strengthen your faith, but rather an internal solicitation to evil – to get you to sin.

So James uses this word and says we need to rejoice in our trials. Jesus uses this word in Matthew 6 and says pray that God will not lead you into (and He uses the second sense of the word) temptation – an internal solicitation to sin. So the translators, then, have correctly chosen the English word *temptation*. John Owen, the great English Puritan, defines this second sense of this word and the one that's used here in Matthew 6 in this way: "Temptation is anything that has a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience which God requires, into any sin in any degree whatsoever." So it's anything that comes into your life. It's

anything that causes you to turn from the obedience you owe God, toward disobedience and sin. That's a temptation. That's what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 6:13.

Now where does this great enemy of our souls come from? What is the source of temptation? Or better yet, what are the sources of temptation, of this solicitation to do evil? Well, there are several of them and let's talk about them. We need to be forearmed against our enemies. There is, first of all, the flesh, what the Bible calls the flesh. Our enemy is within. The comic character Pogo uttered those famous words: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." That's exactly true. Augustine, the great saint, prayed: "Lord, deliver me from myself." Paul, in Romans 7, cried out: "O wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" You see, our biggest problem with temptation, your biggest problem with temptation, doesn't come from the outside; it comes from within. Your greatest enemy is inside your own soul, and it's what the Bible calls your flesh. Jesus describes this in Mark 7. And I won't have you turn there, but in Mark 7 you remember, he says, Listen. It's not what goes into a man that defiles a man; rather it's what comes out of his heart. It's from the heart and the evil thoughts of the heart that come all of the sins that defile us.

Now James makes this very clear and I want you turn to James 1. And notice what he says beginning in verse 13: "Let no one say when he is tempted..." Now stop there. The word *tempted* here is the very same family of words translated in the first verses of this chapter *trial*. Remember what I told you? The same word can mean either an external test or trial meant for good or an internal solicitation to evil. The same Greek word is used in the first few verses of James translated *trial* (even in verse 12 translated *trial*); and in verse 13, it's translated *temptation*. Why? Well, the context makes that clear. Let's read on: "Let no one say when he is tempted, (*when he is solicited to do evil*) 'I am being tempted by God.'" Either directly--there are people who say: God, You did this. You're the One who put me in this situation. You're to blame. James says don't do that. But also, we're tempted to do this indirectly. Many of us don't get quite so blatant in our accusation against God. We say things like: Well, it's not my fault. It's the woman whom You gave me. So our attack on God is a little more indirect, but it's still an attack on God. Listen. Here's the bottom line. If you blame anything other than yourself for your sin, ultimately you're blaming God. If it's somebody in your life, if it's some circumstance, whatever it is – if you blame anything other than yourself, you're blaming God. And James says don't do that, don't say the problem is God: "...for God cannot be tempted by evil (*one Greek word – God is untemptable, literally*) and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (*God never solicits – He tests, but He never solicits anyone to do evil. So how does it happen? Verse 14.*)" "Each one (*that's every single person*) is tempted when he is carried away and enticed..." Those two Greek words translated *carried away* and *enticed* are two fishing words. It pictures a fish sort of resting among the reeds or among the weeds. And it's a hot summer day and he's just there, resting, doing nothing, not in any trouble. And all of a sudden, the bait plops in the water in front of him, and he is carried away. His attention is drawn to that bait. And then there is something in him that is enticed by that, that longs to have it, and he responds to the bait, snatches it.

So what carries us away? What causes us to be enticed? It's not merely the external bait. Notice we are "carried away and enticed by our own (*what?*) lust." The problem is not the bait outside. It's the enemy within, because the enemy within, our flesh, responds to that bait and says: Ooh, I like that. I want that. Notice he says: "his own lust." Just like fishermen use different bait to appeal to different fish, even based on the season and the time of day. We all have this problem but we have a unique blending or set of lusts. Now the word *lust* in English typically refers to sexual desire. And sometimes this word is used that way, but not most of the time. Most of the time in the Bible, this word *lust* simply means a strong craving or desire, and usually it's used negatively. It's a strong craving or desire for something God has forbidden. And notice this comes from within. By the way, this word *lust* is used in the Septuagint to translate the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet." Paul uses it the same way in Romans 7 - talking about longing for, craving things that God has not allowed us to have. These lusts –here's where I want you to understand the theology of this. Every person is born depraved, and part of that depravity is characterized by this unique blending of lusts that we inherited from our parents. We all have our own unique set that we inherited – our cravings that maybe don't match perfectly to the guy down the street, but they're common in the sense of they're common to all mankind. And when we're saved, when you became a Christian, you were regenerated. You were made a new person in Christ. But in addition, the Bible says there was a part of you that was left unredeemed. Its beachhead is your body (obviously your body's not redeemed), but it's more than just your body because Paul talks in 2 Corinthians 7:1 about cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the body and the spirit. But there's a part of you that is unredeemed, and the major characteristic of that part of you that is unredeemed are these cravings, these longings for things that God has not allowed and permitted. Peter calls them, in 1 Peter 2:11, "fleshly lusts (*fleshly cravings*) which wage war against your soul." You know that feeling. You know what it's like to have those cravings that reside in your unredeemed humanness wage war against your soul. This is the source (one of the sources) of the temptations you and I face – those cravings that reside in our unredeemed humanness that launch at external bait.

There's a second source of temptation and it's the world, not only the flesh, but the world. Not in the sense of the created planet, not in the sense of the human beings on the planet, but rather this word *world* is used in the sense of an organized, complex system of evil in the world that stands opposed to God. Listen to how Paul describes it in Ephesians 2:2. He says: "...you formerly walked (*that is, before you became a Christian, in your sins and trespasses*) according to the course of this world (*literally according to the age of this world*)." Paul's talking about a mindset, the prevailing mindset, the prevailing values of the world – everything in the world today that stands opposed to God. Think of it this way. It's the spirit of the age. You understand that the times we live in has a collective mindset, a collective set of values. That's the world in biblical terms. It's the system that Satan created. Kent Hughes describes it like this: "Those without Christ are captive to the social and value system of the present evil age which is hostile to Christ. (Listen to this) They are willing slaves to the pop culture of the media, the groupthink of the talk shows, post-Christian mores and man-centered religious fads. The spiritually dead are

dominated by the world in this sense.” It’s the groupthink of the age in which we live, the values and the mindset that you read on the front of every newspaper, you hear in every television program we are bombarded with. That’s created by Satan. And by the way, the world in this sense is not merely a New Testament phenomenon. In Psalm 106:35, speaking of the children of Israel, the psalmist says: “They mingled with the nations and learned their practices...” That’s the same thing that we face. It’s equally a problem for New Testament believers. That’s why in James 1:27, James says: “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: *(not only)* to visit the orphans and the widows in their distress, *(to have love for others)*, but to keep oneself unstained by the world. *(by that groupthink, that collective opposition to God, the mindset that characterizes our age)*” You understand that part of the reason Jesus died was to rescue you from the world system that Satan has created? In Galatians 1: 4, we read: “Jesus gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age...” Listen. If you’re a Christian, Jesus didn’t save you so that you could be married to this system Satan has created. He saved you so you would be able to be free from it.

Now the most common manifestation of Satan’s influence in the world system that he’s created is found in 1 John 2, familiar passage. 1 John 2:15. We read: “Do not love the world *(again, we’re not talking about people, we’re not talking about the created world. We’re talking about this system of the groupthink, the current value system of the world)* nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, *(system)* the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in that system...” Notice he’s going to differentiate, now, the various components of this system Satan has created. It may look different today than it looked in the first century, but underlying the world system are these same three components: “the lust *(or the craving)* of the flesh.” This is talking about giving into and pursuing at all costs the physical appetites of the body. We live in a culture that is driven by a desire to satisfy the body whatever it wants. Satan has created such a system. Notice: “the lust *(or the craving)* of the eyes.” That’s materialism. That’s the desire to have whatever you see: I want it! And then finally “the boastful pride of life”; that’s the desire to be somebody and to appear to be somebody – to have a reputation, to be respected. The whole world is driven by these three things. And Satan has created the system--the complex, massive system to promote these three great traps in the world.

Now the third source of the temptations we experience not only come from the flesh and from the world, but thirdly, from the devil. I know this is unpopular, alright? I know I’m running against the trends here, a bit of an anachronism. But listen. Jesus, our Lord, taught very clearly that there is a being of unimaginable evil who, along with the rest of the evil spirits who serve him, is engaged in a constant effort to destroy the lives and souls of people on this planet. You realize *the devil* is a title? It means the accuser, the slanderer. Satan is really his name. And the word *Satan* is a Hebrew word that simply means *the adversary*. He is your soul’s adversary as well as he is God’s adversary. Now Satan is not omnipresent, and most of us are probably not important enough for Satan to show up individually. He can’t be everywhere at once, but he has an army of evil spirits who do his bidding, and they are everywhere. And so I would say this.

Listen carefully. Ultimately, the source behind all of our solicitations to evil, the source behind all of our temptation, is Satan. Now why would I say that? Well, think about the other two. The flesh – what is your flesh ultimately a reflection of? According to John 8:44, it's a reflection of your first father, the devil. And you do the desires that he has placed within you. And what about the world system? Where did that come from? Satan created it. And so ultimately, he is behind all temptation to disobey God. In fact, in Matthew 4:3, Satan is called “the tempter”. This is who he is. This is what he does. But listen carefully. While he can use the flesh, and has created, in a sense, the flesh through leading Adam into sin, and therefore all of our parents were born in sin and passed that along to us. Although he has created a world system, often Satan and his army of evil spirits are the immediate and direct source of our temptations. I mean, after all, isn't that what we find him doing at the very beginning of human history? Turn back to Genesis 3:1 “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field (*By the way, the serpent is identified in Revelation 12 as no one else than the devil and Satan – Revelation 12:9. He was more crafty than any beast of the field*) which the Lord God had made. And so he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from every tree of the garden?’” By the way, listen. Study Genesis 3 because this is how Satan still works. What does he do here? He magnifies the prohibition: Is it true, Eve, that God has said you can't eat from any of the beautiful trees in this garden? Was that true? No, that wasn't true, so why did he say it that way? He said it to magnify the prohibition, and he does this with us. God's given us so much that's good and that we can enjoy, but he comes to us and says: Has God really said you can't have that? And then he goes on to question the Word of God directly. Verse 5, then he attacks the goodness of God: “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.” Listen, God's holding out on you. That thing is really good. Satan still does this. Nothing's changed. He's still the tempter. He's still working the same plan. Satan continues to this day to be the source of temptation for unbelievers just as he was for Eve; for example, and probably the most graphic illustration, is Judas. In John 13:2, we read: “During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...” Satan tempted Judas to betray Jesus, and Judas gave in.

We also, before we came to Christ, along with every other unbeliever were in lockstep with Satan. Ephesians 2:2 says: “...you formerly walked (*in your sins and trespasses*) according to (*here's what you walked in lockstep with*) the prince of the power of the air, (*that's where Satan rules, that's a description of Satan. He rules in the atmosphere surrounding this planet, but listen to how he rules. He is the prince*) of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” In other words, the devil controls the spiritual atmosphere currently at work in unbelievers. Now that is very helpful because it helps us to understand the world in which we live. Satan's primary work, his primary objective, is a religious one – to “blind the minds of the unbelieving (2 Corinthians 4:4) so that they wouldn't see the light of the gospel...” And how does he do that? He does that through human philosophy and false religion. Every satanic human philosophy that dominates our world today, and every false religion is the product of the creative genius of Satan himself. This is how he tempts mankind.

But Satan's work of tempting is not restricted to unbelievers. He was also the one, you know, who tempted our Lord in Matthew 4:1 – "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." So it shouldn't surprise us then, should it, that Satan continues to be the source of many of the temptations that you and I face as believers? Have you ever considered this? Directly, immediately, through his fallen army, he brings temptation into your life and mine. Let me give you a few examples. Consider 1 Chronicles 21:1 – "Then Satan stood up against Israel and Satan moved David to number Israel (*to, in his pride, take a census to show how great his army was, and to say basically, This is how we're going to defeat our enemies and care for ourselves, not the Lord.*)" Do you understand that Satan still works this way? Satan is still tempting you to put your confidence in you and in your resources. He is still tempting you to pride so that you disobey and dishonor God.

Look at Job 1:6 Of course, the very familiar example of Job. "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came among them... The Lord said to Satan, (*in verse 8*) 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.'" And Satan says, Well, yeah. I mean, look at what You've done. Does Job fear God for nothing? I mean, look – You put a hedge around him and his house and everything he has. You blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. Of course he loves You and serves You. Verse 11: "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; and he will surely curse You to Your face." And we'll talk about this next week--the Lord permits Satan to do this: "'Behold, all that he has is in your power, don't put forth your hand on him.'" So Satan departs from the presence of the Lord." But what is Satan trying to do in Job's life? What is the temptation in this episode? Again, it's the same kind of temptation you and I face. Satan, here, desires to use tragedy and physical illness to tempt us, like he tempted Job, to be angry and bitter with God, to curse God. Listen. Maybe some tragedy has come into your life, some difficulty. God intends that for good, but Satan intends to use that for evil to tempt you to become angry and bitter with God, just like he wanted to do with Job.

In Luke 22:31, Jesus says to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat..." Satan was behind the temptation of Peter to deny his Lord. Now again, what's the temptation? A temptation you and I still face – Satan uses, with us, just like he used with Peter, the fear of man to tempt us to deny our Lord and to deny what we believe. How many times have you been in a setting where you've kept your mouth shut? You understand that Satan may very well be behind that temptation as well as your own flesh? Just like he did with Peter, he uses the fear of man to tempt us to deny our Lord and to deny what we believe. Consider Acts 5:3, the story of Ananias: "Peter says to Ananias: 'Why has Satan (*now remember Ananias is a brother in Christ, why has Satan*) filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?'" Again, there's a common temptation here. Satan tempts us, like he tempted Ananias, to lie. To lie to what end? To lie in the advance of blatant self-promotion with others, even in the church – to make ourselves look good.

In Ephesians 4:26 and 27, we read: “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger (*because if you don’t deal with your anger before you go to bed*) you will give the devil an opportunity.” Listen. Satan tempts us to anger because he then can use that to advantage in our souls. Every time you’re tempted to anger, not only may it be an expression of your own flesh, may it be a source of temptation from the world system Satan has created, but it may be from Satan and his army directly, because he loves to tempt us to anger because it gives him an advantage. It weakens our defenses. In 1 Corinthians 7: 5, Paul writes: “Stop (*to married couples*) depriving one another, except by agreement (*he’s talking about sexual involvement, except by agreement*) for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and (*then I want you to*) come back together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Do you understand what Paul is saying? He’s saying Satan will use your circumstances to enflame your sexual lust. Satan also uses persecution to tempt us to deny our faith.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 – Paul writes: “I sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, (*that is, through persecution to abandon the faith*) and our labor would be in vain.” This is what Peter’s talking about in 1 Peter 5: 8, 9 when he says: “Be on the alert, be sober because your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” I think in context he’s primarily talking about persecution. He wants to destroy your faith. He wants to tempt you to deny Christ.

Understand this. The main problem we have in pursuing holiness is temptation. And temptation comes to us from our own flesh, from Satan himself and His emissaries, and from the world system that he has established. Do you understand this? Your soul, according to Jesus, according to the Scripture, is under constant attack from the world, the flesh and the devil. When I was in seminary, I read what many believe to be John Bunyan’s greatest work, even surpassing *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It’s called *Holy War*. And in that book, he describes an attack and siege on a city he calls Mansoul by the evil prince Diabolos. And the city eventually can only be rescued by King Emmanuel. In this allegory, Bunyan pictures the human soul – your soul, my soul – under constant siege and attack. Let me ask you. Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that your soul, like the allegorical city of Mansoul, is under constant attack? If you don’t, then you will never see it as important to pray: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Let me ask you this. How would you respond if, this next week, you visited your doctor and your doctor told you that you have a virulent, highly aggressive cancer, a cancer that, left untreated, will take your life within just a few weeks? How would you respond? Well, knowing about that danger, if you’re like most people, you would seek immediate help from the very best oncologist that you could find. What our Lord wants us to know is that we are facing dangers far worse than cancer. Every day we are facing deadly spiritual dangers that can bring about our destruction – the world, the flesh and the devil. And so, we must aggressively, intensely, fervently seek help from the only Person who can address these deadly, spiritual dangers. You see, behind this petition lies the truth that you and I are weakness itself. And left to ourselves, we will fail, we will fall. We do not have the power to stand up against the world, the flesh and the devil. John

Calvin writes: “We conclude from this petition that we have no strength for living a holy life except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations acknowledges that unless God deliver him, he will be constantly falling.” Do you understand that? Do you believe that? Jesus says we are to come before our Father as the daily habit of our lives, praying: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Next week Lord willing, we’ll unpack more of what that means. Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are weak people, spiritually weak. We sense that. We see that, in how frequently we give in to temptation in our lives. Father, I pray that You would wake us up to the danger. Help us to see the reality that You have described for us in Your Word – that our souls are every day under siege. Forgive us for acting like we’re at peacetime. Father, I pray that You would help us to be alert to these dangers. And may we learn what it means and cry out to You in the words our Lord taught us: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.