

October 18, 2015

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation.

Several summers ago I remember watching a TV show at my parents' house called "Wipeout." It's a big obstacle course over water; and they add sound effects when people get struck into the abyss. It was really funny watching these contestants trying to make it through an obstacle course.

Sometimes life can be like watching Wipeout. As you raise your children you see them get in a relationship with someone and you know it's going to be trouble. You try to warn them and say, "I don't think you should be dating him." But regardless of what you say or how you try to lead them, they go on ahead anyway. Your spouse really wants to apply for a promotion, but you fear it will cause problems in your marriage because of the time you will be apart. Yet you also don't want to be holding him back from his potential. You fear a wipeout.

The results are anything but amusing. These are our children and our friends that are wiping out and they aren't landing water. They are landing in bankruptcy and divorce and drowning in a world of hurt. It's not that we are better than them; but we know from God's Word what these things will do to people and even what they've done to us.

So Jesus tells us to pray about this. "**Lead us not into temptation.**" In some ways this petition may sound confusing. James says that God surely tempts no one. Doesn't He know where to lead us? How to lead us? Does He really need to be told by us, "Don't get lost."? No. So what does this mean?

God leads us with His Word. He allows us to ignore His Word and stray from His Word. So in this sense we are asking God to keep us from our own deficiencies and the greater dangers that lurk around the corner. One thing is to be aware of how weak we really are and where we are likely to slip. The Greeks used a short phrase to describe it. "Gnowthi seauton - know yourself." The disciple Peter had one of the most well known falls in Bible history. He said to Jesus, "**Even if everyone else falls, I never will.**" Peter was confident that no matter what would come he would stick with Jesus through the thick and the thin. The devil heard those words, and Jesus knew exactly what would end up tripping Peter up. It was his overconfidence in himself. When it came time for Jesus' arrest - Jesus gave the disciples an opening and an opportunity to leave without getting arrested. He commanded those arresting Jesus to let the disciples go. They did. But then Peter came back. He wanted to see what was happening to Jesus. In his confidence he thought that he would be more brave and bold than the other disciples. But when he was in the courtyard some people recognized him. He was asked if he knew Jesus. Instead of confessing to know Jesus; instead of following Jesus; he said, "**I don't know the man.**" He even called curses down on himself. At that moment Jesus looked at him. Peter wept, because he fell into the sin he never said he'd do - disowning Jesus. How did he end up in that situation? It was that he overestimated himself. The devil used that against him and got him to fall.

So when we pray, "**Lead us not into temptation,**" a part of that would be to know for yourself who you are and where your weaknesses lay in light of God's Word. You are so filled with humanism by

today's culture. You are constantly told how great you are and how you can do anything you set your mind to. You are bred to hate anything that is negative. We don't like to hear about sins that we need to repent of. There is something to be said for not always focusing on the negative. We have plenty to be positive about. We have a living Savior and a sure hope of heaven in Christ who died for us and rose from the dead. But when we don't take a good inventory of ourselves, we leave ourselves open to not see our own weaknesses and we give the devil an area to expose.

Think of Judas. He probably counted himself as a good money manager and the rest of the disciples did too. He probably liked the responsibility. Yet he ignored the fact that one reason that he liked handling the money was that he was greedy. If he had seen himself and been honest with himself, he would have said, "I like money too much. Someone else should take care of the money bag for us. I've been tempted to take some money out of here for myself." He didn't. So he took money from the disciples' coffers. The devil used that greed to get him to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

There can be blessings in looking at your weaknesses and focusing on them; if they can keep you from falling into sin. You know, we pass off on our catechisms way too much. We finish catechism and put them on a shelf, never to be dusted off again. If you took time to review the Ten Commandments and their meanings at least on a weekly basis, to do some self reflection, it would make you more aware of where your weaknesses are. In the third part of confession in the catechism we are taught to ask ourselves a simple question.

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, or employee? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by word or deed? Have you been dishonest, careless, wasteful, or done other wrong?

If we ran through that question every night, do you think we'd have reason to repent? Do you think you'd then also find yourself reaching out to your spouse or your parents more - if you just took the time to contemplate where and how you are failing?

I think of a man whose wife was not good at disciplining their children. To make the matters more difficult was that their children were highly autistic. He sat in the back of church in the choir while his wife struggled to keep her children in the pew. He sat in choir and complained about her when he could have and should have gotten off of his rear end and gone and helped her. He could see her failure as plain as day, but he was so focused on her failure that he couldn't see his own. I wish I had said something to her. His failure was that he coldly let her struggle and didn't lift one finger to help. He could see her sin as plain as day, but he couldn't see his own.

So when we pray, "**Lead us not into temptation,**" maybe it would also help to friends and family to show us where are temptations are; to be honest with us in a loving way; to not just tell us what we want to hear; and expose where our weaknesses lie. Jesus reached out to Peter and Judas and warned

them of what they would do. But they wouldn't believe it. They wouldn't take the warning. How about you? When your spouse gently asks you, "Do you really need another drink?" Do you blow up in anger at them and accuse them of all kinds of sins? When you are gently asked, "Do we really need to buy that?", do you respond, "You're not my mother! It's my money I can do what I want with it!" But when you pray this petition, shouldn't you welcome such questions which are trying to keep you from the pathway of temptation?

Paul wrote to Timothy about the temptation of riches. They are seductions that come from within and without. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, "**People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.**" Proverbs 6 warns of "**the smooth tongue of the wayward wife. Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes.**" Notice the way that temptation is described. Something that is beautiful, attractive, or useful is placed before your eyes; and it captivates you and draws you in. It speaks smooth talk to you. But in the end the temptation leads to a trap and ruin and destruction.

How do not fall for such lies if no one is there to help us? What did Jesus do when He was all alone in the desert with the devil tempting him for 40 days? He went back to the Word of God for guidance. He spoke it as he resisted the lies of the devil. He studied it throughout His life so that He knew it well and could tell a temptation when it was happening and resist it. What did Joseph do to resist temptation when he was all by himself in Egypt? He did all he could to avoid being alone with Potiphar's wife. What did he do when he was alone with Potiphar's wife? He reminded his wife of her duties. He reminded her of his duties. He invoked the name of God and said he couldn't do such a wicked thing. He called a sin a sin. That is what it takes to resist temptation. You prepare ahead of time by knowing the Word. You try to avoid situations that will get you to slip. You pray that God would give you the strength to keep from doing what you know is wrong.

What bothers me is when we don't avoid the situations that we know we should. You warn and warn; give example after example and statistic after statistic; you quote Bible passage after Bible passage; and we still do what we know we shouldn't! What bothers me is when we pray this prayer but we have no intention of changing our behavior that we know is wrong; when we ignore and get angry at those who warn us of temptation. When we merely pat God on the head and treat our own sins as if they didn't really matter to God. So why do we even come and pray this prayer if we aren't even going to make an effort at resisting temptation? Why do we bother even trying if we are just going to fail anyway? We pray it because of that very thing; we know how apt we are to stray! We need more power than we have to resist temptation. We need God's power.

Here's an interesting thing. The One who taught us to pray that we would not be led into temptation did the exact opposite. Right after he was baptized the Holy Spirit led him into the desert, specifically to be tempted by the devil for 40 days. Why would the Holy Spirit do that to God's Only Son - exposing Him in His humility and weakness to the temptations of the devil - and even starve Him for 40 days on top of that? Because Jesus didn't come to run from the devil. He came to take on our flesh

and conquer the devil as the ultimate God man. Here was One who wouldn't give into His hunger pains. Here is One who wouldn't fall for the lies. Think of the Garden of Gethsemane where the greatest trial Jesus could face was before Him. Jesus didn't run. He prayed. He told the disciples to watch and pray. They fell asleep. Jesus didn't. He faced the death and hell that we were supposed to. He died and He rose from the dead.

He is why we come here. He did this for us. He gave us a place to go with our failures. He gave us a place to find courage to keep on fighting, keep on rising, keep on repenting, and keep on believing. He gave us Himself on the cross. The cross is for those who have failed. It is for those who have given in. It is a place to start fresh and new. This is where we are led to Christ. It is the place to get back up. It is the place to find forgiveness; free and full.

It is this One who conquered Satan who can help us in the midst of temptation. He sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts. he was united with us in our baptism. **Hebrews 2:18¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** He can give you the power to resist; to run; to stand strong; the wisdom to know what to do. He has your life designed so that no temptation to sin will be so great that you can't resist it. It is this living Lord who stands on the other side of the curtain with a crown waiting for those who endure; who don't give in; who don't quit fighting; who keep praying **"Lead us not into temptation."**

The best of athletes are always looking for their own weaknesses, not simply patting themselves on the back for their successes. They don't expect their opponents to give up. They enjoy a good battle. They like it when a weakness is exposed so that they can work at it more.

The devil isn't going to give up on you. Your flesh isn't going to quit. There are going to be obstacles. But James said that you should consider it pure joy when they come at you, because the testing produces perseverance in you; makes you stronger; when you are willing to fight against the temptation and cling to Christ all the more.

Luther's prayer recognized that one of the temptations we have to deal with is our own laziness and apathy against sin and its temptations. If you're going to pray this prayer; then think about what you are praying. You are going to need to have wisdom to know what a temptation is; to give you wisdom to who you are and where your weaknesses are. You are asking God to protect you and strengthen you to resist and stand firm against the assaults of Satan and your own flesh. You are asking God for faith to trust that when you let Him lead you in His Word and sacrament - no matter how painful or difficult the path may be - it is the right one to be on. You are praying that He would keep you on the path and give you the discipline you need when you start to stray. Dear Lord, **"Lead us not into temptation."** Amen.