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Lead Us Not Into Temptation

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Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The children were frightened. All about them were the strange sounds of the night. Their car had broken down on a little-used highway west of the city, and they had no choice but to walk down that almost abandoned road until they found a farmhouse where they could call for help. Fortunately their father was with them. Somehow their fears took on a different dimension when he was there. Without him, they were afraid of everything; but when he was by their side, they took comfort in his courage. They simply feared getting separated from him, or they feared they would call and he wouldn't hear; but never did they fear his being overpowered.

There appeared to be a light in the distance now, and it just might mean help. But to get to that light, they would have to open an old wooden gate, walk down a narrow, winding path where there was no light at all, and move carefully through a grove of trees. It was at this point that Sandy, the youngest of the children, cried out,

“Dad, don't take us down that dark road, please! Dad, we're scared! But, Dad, *if there's no other way*, stick to us like superglue!”

“Stick to us like superglue.” What little Sandy was saying to her father was, “If it's all the same to you, Dad, find another way to get us where we need to go. That road seems to me like it's filled with the sounds of enemies. But, Dad, *if there's no other way*, if we have to go down that road, just stay so close to us, Father, that if possible, you are literally *carrying* us down that dark, unknown path to the light.”

Sandy just may have echoed our feelings about life. Most of us realize that we live in a world dominated by darkness, but we are encouraged to “fear not” because our Father is with us. “He will never leave us or forsake us.” He has promised to lead us back into the sunlight of eternity and to stay with us *through the dark shadows* along the way. At every turn, we hear the sounds

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of the enemy; we see the signs of the enemy. We realize that there lurk in the shadows the perilous dangers of testings, trials, and temptations.

We would rather find another way to get where we're going. And so we cry out to God that, *if it be possible*, we would like to try another route, one not so filled with danger and difficulty. But often our Father simply puts His arms about us, draws us close to His side and whispers, "Child, this is the best way there is to get you where you need to go." We are not always sure how to respond. Perhaps we can learn a lesson from Sandy. Maybe the best way to answer would be, "Lord, if that's the only way to get there, let's go; but Lord, stick to me like superglue!"

If you can understand that illustration and that principle, you are on the way to understanding the next statement in Jesus' model prayer. It is a statement which is often misunderstood and often overlooked, but it was of vital interest to the Master—of such interest that He used it to draw to a conclusion his series of life-changing illustrations on how to pray. The statement was this:

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
(Matthew 6:13a)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "BE LED"?

Jesus has been teaching His disciples to pray, not giving them words to recite, but outlining principles for them to follow that would effectively communicate God's heart to them and their hearts to God. It was evident very early in this "model prayer" that the emphasis was not going to be on them and their wants and their feelings, but that the emphasis was to be on who God is and what God wants to do to bring His kingdom into preeminence on earth as it is in heaven. One obvious necessity was that God's will must preempt man's. God is God. He knows what is best. So the believer, praying in harmony with God's model, was to first exalt the character of God by honoring the name of God, and then he was to surrender to the will of God by honoring the Kingdom of God.

It was at that point that man was to petition God for his basic needs. Three things, however, were evident.

- 1) Those petitions were to be for one day at a time.
- 2) They were to be for the needs of the whole body of Christ,

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not just their own needs.

3) They were to be for the basic necessities of life rather than the unnecessary niceties of life that the believer thought he had to have.

Then Jesus taught His disciples the meaning of forgiveness. He taught them how to link their forgiveness of others with a prayer for forgiveness from God. He even paused to explain to this amazed group of followers that *unless they forgave their brothers*, God would not forgive them.

Now Jesus looks confidently at the future, and He teaches His disciples to ask Him to lead them. Incorporated in that request was going to be an amazing premise. Even if they had to pass through Satan's fire, *they were to ask God not to let them fall into Satan's arms*. That is the essence of that penetrating statement that represented the final petition in Jesus' divine outline for prayer. He said, "Pray like this":

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:13a NIV)

Of course, the first thought that comes to many minds is, "How can this request be in harmony with James 1?"

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone, (James 1:13 NIV)

God can't tempt anyone. It is impossible. Then why ask God not to lead us where He cannot lead us anyway? Do these two verses conflict with one another? No, Beloved; these two verses cannot conflict with one another because:

All Scripture is God-breathed (II Timothy 3:16a NIV)

and because

No... Scripture is of any private interpretation. (II Peter 1:20)

and because

Every word of God proves true. (Proverbs 30:5 TLB)

No, as usual, not only do these two verses not contradict one another, they actually serve to *illuminate* one another and to *explain* one another. It is imperative, then, that we read the verses just before and just after the James passage to get the whole counsel of God. It says this:

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Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me”. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone...

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers,

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:12,13,16,17 NIV)

That entire passage tells a wonderful story, a story about a God whose very name is perfect love and whose very essence is perfect faithfulness. It also tells a story of the people who belong to this God and the method He uses to conform those people to His image. That method is testing: purifying, refining by trial, pain that leads to power! The central portion of that passage indicates that as this precious God is leading His people through those trials, one thing is for sure; He will never entice His own to do evil. He cannot do that and still be God. No, on the contrary, He is the author of everything that is good, and everything that is complete, and above all, *He is constant*. He is *The Constant* in a world of shifting breezes and continual change.

So in context the passage confirms that God *will not lead us into temptation*, but *He will indeed lead us through trials*. Understanding the difference between those two statements will make this part of the model prayer come to life before our very eyes. There are several words that we must deal with. The first is the word “lead”.

Jesus is asking us to pray to the Father, asking Him not to “lead” us into sin, but we have already determined that God cannot do that. So the question is, what does He mean when He says “lead”? The word “lead” used here (particularly the one used in the Luke passage) is a word that might well be used of a shepherd. It does not simply portray one who is at the front of the pack with everyone following; it has to do with the concept of gently guiding and overseeing. In fact, many concordances add the phrase “to bear or to carry” to their definition of “to lead”. So you see, the prayer is not for God NOT to drive us into the devil's camp; the prayer is asking God, as *He is gently carrying us through life's storms*, not to let the devil have the upper hand. The difference is not slight; it is enormous.

WHAT IS A TEMPTATION?

Before we can fully understand this prayer request, we must explore the meaning of the next key word. That word is translated “temptation” in many of our Bibles, but that is not an accurate rendering at all (as we have already seen).

This word actually means “*to put to the test in order to ascertain character.*” When it is used of Satan putting man to the test to cause him to fail or to do evil, it would be accurately translated “temptation”. But when used of God’s dealings with His children, it always means “to be tested for the purpose of determining character”. Hence, the same incident might be a temptation from Satan and a test from God at the same time. The difference would be in objectives. God’s goal is never that we fall or fail. His goal is always that we be transformed in character by rightly responding to the situation or trial.

Satan’s goal, on the other hand, is never that we be translated into the image of God. His goal is always that we deny God’s presence, refute God’s purpose, or steal God’s glory.

You may get up tomorrow morning and go out and get into your car only to find that the battery is dead. You have an important appointment. You want to be on time. This is a test. God is discerning the character you possess relative to interruptions. Will you rest in Him and praise Him for the all things of life? He will be glorified if you do, and He will move into your situation to make the best of the problem. Satan, on the other hand, desires that this be a temptation—to lose your temper, to curse God, to demonstrate impatience, to use improper language, to vent your hostilities on others, thus destroying your testimony. Satan would like for you simply to take matters in your own hands without stopping to honor God, thus solving in the flesh what was designed to glorify God through the Spirit.

Suppose you turn on the television and see something you shouldn’t see. (That’s not hard to do these days.) People say that television has changed its standards to conform to today’s society. What it has really done is to *remove its standards* so the world can govern its choices. But nevertheless, you turn on your television and something comes on that you shouldn’t watch, and you know it. That is a temptation from Satan for you to succumb to the lust of the flesh, but it is also a test from God to ascertain your character. God, in you, will shut it off. Immediately. (Not

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after you have enjoyed it for a spell.) How you respond will reveal to you just what your character is really like relative to holiness (God already knows). Should you win the victory and respond correctly immediately, God is glorified, you are encouraged, and Satan is thwarted in his efforts to tempt you. He meant it for evil. God used it for good.

HOW DOES GOD “DELIVER” US?

So to be led is to have the Shepherd guiding you; to be tempted is to be exposed to life in such a way that God is determined to test your character while Satan is determined to draw you to evil. *We are to ask God to guide us in such a way that in our tests, we will not fall victim to the evil one.* Rather, we pray, “Dear Lord, deliver us.” And that word “deliver” is our next key word.)

The subject of deliverance is a popular one in our age. Perhaps it has been in every age, but in reading books by the great Christian authors of days gone by, you do not seem to reveal the same intensity of interest in this subject as you do today. There are many reasons, but they are not vital to this study. What is vital is what Jesus meant when He prayed “deliver us from the evil one”. Some translations will simply say “deliver us from evil”; others will read “deliver us from the evil (one)”. While the latter seems to be found in the majority of our Bibles, it really is incidental, because the Scripture is clear that all evil originates from the evil one, “the father of lies”. So the intent is, either way, for us to be delivered from the evil intents of a personal adversary named Satan.

There are several words used in the New Testament that are translated “deliver”, but the one used in this particular passage can be best defined as “To snatch or draw one from evil”. The picture is one of someone suddenly realizing that he is about to fall into a mire of quicksand, so he calls out for help, and someone reaches out, grabs him by the arm and “delivers” him. It is the same word used by the chief priests and scribes while Jesus was being crucified. They cried out:

He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. (Matthew 27:42,43)

Jesus was surrounded by the taunts of His enemies. He

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faced certain death and certain failure from man's perspective unless something supernatural happened. So His adversaries, energized by the chief adversary, Satan, dared His Father to *deliver Him from this evil*.

Now it is imperative that we see *how God delivered Jesus* so that we can understand how God wants to deliver us. But first, we must see how Jesus prayed for deliverance lest we be overcome with theology that is attractive to the flesh at the expense of the Truth. Seeing the impending Cross, He prayed for deliverance in this manner:

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, by thy will (Matthew 26:39b)

In other words, He prayed,

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

He prayed, "Father, if there's any other way, let's take it; if not, stick to me like superglue." That's how Jesus prayed for deliverance. Now how did God deliver Him? He let Him suffer innocently and die shamefully. If not, stick to me like superglue. That's how Jesus prayed for deliverance. Now how did God deliver Him? He let Him suffer innocently and die shamefully.

You say, "That's deliverance?" Yes, perfect deliverance. Had God done anything else, it would not have been possible for "His kingdom to come; for His will to be done on earth as it was in heaven." God's best demanded what appeared to be man's worst. God's plan demanded that He must die for us to live. Had Christ come down from that Cross, walked away free, and set up a Kingdom on earth, it would not have been the Kingdom on earth as it would be in Heaven. Sin had to be dealt with first. Sin could only be dealt with through suffering and death. God delivered Jesus by letting Jesus pass the test. Physically, the results indicated total failure. Spiritually, they represented total victory. *The Father delivered the Son from the evil one*. He did so by letting the evil one do what Satan, in his blinded condition, thought would lead to defeat.

For God, to deliver us from the evil one, often He must not deliver us from the test but rather lead us, carry us, bear us in His arms through the test so that His Kingdom can come, His will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

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We need not fear that the fire will be so intense that we will be burned. That's not possible. Scripture reminds us that

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (I Corinthians 10:13 NIV)

He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. God is faithful. He will not let the test exceed your capacity to bear the test and to pass the test successfully. His objective is to provide a way for you to stand up under the test—for you to bear the test.

Now what is the way of escape? The way of escape is the Word of God. It is man's way out of Satan's arms. It will not deliver us from the test, but it will "bear us up" in the test. You saturate your mind with the Word of God. You exercise your mind in the Word of God. You flood your heart with the Word of God. Then every time the heat in the furnace nears the boiling point, if you turn your heart to the Word of God, and the sword of the Spirit will rescue you.

Now I don't mean that you come to Sunday School and you come to church and you hear the Word of God. That is a wonderful thing to do, but that won't deliver you. To be delivered by the Word of God through the Spirit of God, the Word of God has to be in your heart. These words must be laid upon your heart and must be on the tip of your tongue and on your lips. The Scripture says they are to be on the doorposts of your house. They ought to be as frontlets before your eyes. Wherever you look, whatever you think, whatever you do, the Word of God, the Word of God, the Word of God.

In order to have the Word of God before you, you have to memorize it and meditate on it day and night; not occasionally, but day and night, that you might observe to do. Then when you're in the furnace near the boiling point, you turn your heart to the Word of God, and God will deliver you.

You say, "How do you know that? Did you make something like that up?" Well, no, it's not made up. You remember in Matthew chapter four, we have the illustration in Scripture where Jesus Christ was face to face with Satan. We have to examine Jesus in that warfare, over and over in our lives, to remind ourselves what

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we are to do when Christ in us is faced with the same tests He was faced with in the wilderness.

The best example of this prayer request can be found in Matthew chapter four. There we read,

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, to be tested there by Satan. (Matthew 4:1 TLB)

God's Spirit led God's Son right into the devil's back yard. He did not lead Him into temptation; He led Him into the battle to lead Him into victory. He did it so Jesus could be sifted or proved or refined by the fire of Satan's attacks. He knew what was in the heart of His Son. He led Him *into the desert* to take a test, a test the Father knew He could pass.

Once there, Jesus denied Himself physical food so that His spiritual food might have preeminence. Then, when He was physically the weakest and thus His potential for spiritual strength the strongest, Satan moved in. Three times he fired his heavy artillery at the Master. Three times the Master responded with the Word of God. Nothing more. Nothing less. There were no theological debates, no well-documented techniques, nor was there any divine intervention on the Father's part to remove the Son from the battlefield or to remove the devil from the battlefield. The Father did not bind Satan, nor did He hedge him about so that he could not get to the Master. No, the Father's secret in defeating the devil was simple. His Son had stored up His Father's Word in His heart, and when the battle got tough, the Word came forth.

Again and again the Word came forth. Again and again Satan fell, rebuffed, until after the final volley of spiritual ammunition, the adversary limped away from the battlefield a defeated foe. Once Satan had departed, then, and *only* then, did the angels come and minister to the Son. Jesus had desired the kingdom to be manifested on earth as it would be in heaven, so He had surrendered to the Father's will. That meant a desert; that meant testing; that meant persecution; that meant to be spit upon, to be cursed at, to be railed at, to be crucified.

Jesus no doubt had prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". Had his prayer been answered? To the letter.

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WHAT DOES THIS PRAYER REALLY SAY?

Three things must exist for us to have daily victory: a knowledge of the Word of God, an understanding of God's purposes, and a surrender to God's will. That means that we can pray honestly,

Dear Lord,

For this one day I pray, that as you are leading me where I will be tested, let not the tests become temptations; rather, Father, bear me up in your arms into the battle that, with your Word in hand, we might watch the devil flee. Lead me not to be tempted in the trials, Lord, not tempted to give up, not tempted to lose perspective, not tempted to fight the devil in my own energy, or even to demand of you that you shackle the devil so that he cannot find me. Lord, send him on, but bear me up that the very trials Satan has designed for evil will instead work together to purify me, to remove the dross, and to surface in me what really exists, that I might know myself, and thus trust in you more. Lord, take me down any road you choose; just stick to me like superglue!

Every day we must pray like that; not necessarily those words, but we must honor those principles. The battle will go on. The enemy will attack. The conflict will continue to rage. God can remove the conflict, and God can remove us from the conflict. Usually, He does neither. He has a higher goal: He wants us to be tested that we might come forth as gold. His desire is that we pass through the fires and emerge more than conquerors. As in that flaming furnace of old, God desires that the world around us see us go *through* the fire. They need to see us go through the fire so they can see our God in the fire with us, delivering us from the evil one. I do not know what personal fires you are passing through today, but I do know one thing: You are not in that fire alone! God is there to deliver you—not from it, but through it.

Daily, then, we must ask for that deliverance. Hourly, then, we must maintain that vigil, that saturation with His Word, so that when the attack comes (not if, but when), He *will indeed* deliver us with a strong hand and with a mighty arm.

He will be our rock, our fortress, our shield.

And Satan? He will be God's defeated foe.

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Lead us not into temptation, Lord.
We pray that prayer, it's true,
But do we really understand
What we're asking You to do?

You can't lead us to be tempted;
James made that very clear.
Is this a prayer we start to claim
When filled with doubt or fear?

Or is this prayer an invitation for
A loving, faithful God
To bear us in His precious arms
Protected by His Word?

Into the very battlefield
The tempter bids us come,
Where we, triumphant in the Lord,
Can stand till the battle's done.

Lead us not into temptation
Does not mean we flee the fray.
It means, dear God, please carry me
Through all life's tests today,

Until the tempter, weary, worn,
Flees and leaves us there,
And God sends forth His angels
To keep us in their care.

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