

A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer  
Part Ten: *“and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*  
Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4b  
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The Seventh Petition: *“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”* /  
Aramaic: *“Wela tahlan l’nesyuna Ela patzan min bisha”* (Matthew 6:13)



Matthew 6:13 (RSV) ~ *And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Matthew 6:9,13 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> *Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven ...*

<sup>13</sup> *And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*

Luke 11:4b (RSV) ~ *and lead us not into temptation*

Luke 11:4b (NRSV) ~ *And do not bring us to the time of trial.*

In December of 2017 Pope Francis created quite a stir when, while being interviewed on television by Fr. Marco Pozza, a Catholic theologian prison chaplain in Padua, Italy, he shared his views on the line in the Lord's Prayer that begins with "and lead us not into temptation." Father Marco began the interview with the Pope by saying: *We come to the [petition in the Lord's Prayer], 'lead us not into temptation.' I have friends, some believers and some not, who ask me every now and then, 'Father Marco, can God lead us into temptation?' I like to interpret the [petition] this way: 'Since Satan is tempting me, help me not to fall into the snare of his seductions.' I cannot believe that God would tempt me.*"<sup>1</sup>

Pope Francis responded with this provocative statement: *"This, 'lead us not into temptation,' is not a good translation. In fact, if we open the Gospel in the latest edition of the Italian Episcopal conference, we read, 'do not abandon us to temptation' (Lk 11:4; Mt 6:13). The French have also changed the text, with a translation that means 'Do not let me fall into temptation.' I am the one who falls. It is not God who tosses me into temptation in order to see how I fall. A father does not do this. A father helps his child get up right away. The one who leads us into temptation is Satan. This is Satan's craft. The meaning of our prayer is, 'When Satan leads me into temptation, please God, give me a hand, give me your hand.' It is like that painting in which Jesus holds his hand out to Peter, who is imploring him, 'Lord, save me, I am drowning, give me your hand!' (cf Mt 14:30).*"<sup>2</sup>

There were immediate responses to this around the world. How dare Pope Francis so freely tinker with the scripture and change "lead us not into temptation" to "do not let us fall into temptation"? or "do not abandon us to temptation"? The editor of *Catholic World News*, Philip F. Lawler, said that *"if Francis actually intends to change the prayer, 'it's very upsetting' because it is so deeply ingrained for Catholics."* Conservative evangelicals in this country also were alarmed. R. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said that he was *"shocked and appalled,"* by the Pope's comments. He went on to say that: *"This is the Lord's Prayer. It is not, and has never been, the pope's prayer, and we have the very words of Jesus in the New Testament. It is those very words that the pope proposes to change. It is not only deeply problematic, it's almost breathtaking."*<sup>3</sup> By the way, we all know that Jesus spoke Aramaic, not Greek, and so we do not have the very words of Jesus but how people remembered them as they then sought to translate that into Greek, which is a very different language.

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<sup>1</sup> *Our Father: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer by Pope Francis: A Conversation with Marco Pozza* (NY: Image, 2017), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Our Father: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer by Pope Francis*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/08/world/europe/pope-francis-lords-prayer-translation-temptation.html>

This petition within the Lord's Prayer has caused confusion and debate going back all the way to King Henry VIII, who had it translated as "suffer us not to be led," before it was reversed to "lead us not ..." Of course, there was the little boy from NY City who thought this petition was saying "Lead us not to Penn Station!" Catholics around the world already long had been discussing this confusing petition in the Lord's Prayer, which is especially problematic in the Italian, French, English, and German translations that use the language of "lead us not into temptation," possibly giving people the false impression that God leads people into tempting situations. But this is not the case in many other languages, who long have been using the phrasing the Pope was suggesting. Indeed, the Pope himself as a child growing up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, would have prayed in Spanish "Do not let us fall into temptation," but later, as Pope and living in Rome, he was forced to use the Italian phrasing "lead us not into temptation." Those are two very different petitions, aren't they? So in suggesting a change to this petition, the Pope was merely going back to his linguistic roots in the Spanish language. The Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Hawaiian languages also use a variation of "do not let us fall into temptation." English-speaking Episcopalians long had been saying: "Save us in this time of trial." However, the phrasing of this petition as "lead us not into temptation" has been a stumbling block in the French, Italian, English, and German languages, which may lead them to a view of a God who actually leads people into situations of being tempted by evil.

Almost all of the 62 English-language translations of the Bible use the language "lead us" or "bring us" not into temptation. An exception to this is the revised edition of the New American Bible, which is the basis for English-speaking Catholic masses in the US, which translates this petition as "do not subject us to the final test." Most English-speaking Protestants, however, continue to use the language "lead us not into temptation," making God culpable. We know that the translators of the New Revised Standard Version struggled with this petition when they did a reworking of the Revised Standard Version. The word "temptation" was translated as "time of trial." But even though they changed the RSV's language of "lead us not into temptation" to "do not bring us to the time of trial" in the New Revised Standard Version in both Matthew and Luke it remains God who is doing either the leading or bringing into, so we are still left with this problem.

During the period in which Pope Francis gave his radio interview about the Lord's Prayer in December of 2017, commissions of church judicatories already had been gathering to explore this petition in some of those languages that translated this petition as "lead us not into temptation." Earlier in 2017, Catholics in France and French-speaking Catholics in Benin and Belgium began using the new translation of "do not let us fall (or enter) into temptation." After the Pope's comments, the Italian bishops' conference changed the words of this petition in their

translation of the Roman Missal to “do not abandon us to temptation.” But the German Catholic bishops dug in their heels. I’m actually not at all surprised, having lived in Germany for a number of years, knowing just how scientifically precise they are. They decided to stay with the language “lead us not into temptation” (*und führe uns nicht in Versuchung*). And, actually, since for them a precise translation is what is most important, they are right when it comes to how this petition should be translated from the Greek. All Biblical Greek scholars agree that the Greek says, clearly and unambiguously, “Do not lead us into.” As much as we do not like it, when this petition is accurately translated from the Greek we are indeed led by God the Father, to whom we are addressing this prayer, into temptation. So it looks like we have to accept that this is the correct translation from the Greek. But how about the Aramaic? Does it say something that is more in line with what Pope Francis is suggesting? The answer to this is yes. In the Aramaic no one outside of us leads us into temptation. The Aramaic *Wela tahlan* could be translated as “don’t let us enter.” God is not leading us into temptation. We are the agents entering into temptation of our own accord. In the Aramaic version we are praying for God to help us when we are faced with the trials and temptations that are part and parcel of the world in which we live.

But we not only can agree with the Pope’s rendering of this petition by looking at the Aramaic that Jesus spoke to his disciples. We can agree with him because what Jesus is saying is theologically true. The greater thrust of the Gospel message trumps one Greek word. Jesus tells us that Our Father, Abba, is pure love, pure forgiveness. God would never lead us into temptation. It is Satan who does that. We do, however, live in a world where we will be tested and tempted. It is part of the fabric of our existence ever since we were cast out of the Garden of Eden and exercise free will. While God allows us to live in this world where we will be faced with trials on a daily basis, God never tempts us with sin. Indeed, this very question must have been raised by the early followers of Jesus (perhaps even in relation to this very petition in the Lord’s Prayer) since Jesus’ own brother James felt that he needed to clarify it. James, who became the bishop of Rome and who knew his brother Jesus’ thoughts intimately, wrote: <sup>13</sup> *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.* <sup>14</sup> *But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it;* <sup>15</sup> *then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.* <sup>16</sup> *Do not be deceived, my beloved.* (James 1:13-16)

So God does not bring us into temptation. Satan does. We turn next to the word “temptation,” which in the New Revised Standard Version has been translated as “time of trial.” Temptation, which could also be understood as the tests or trials we will face in life, has to do with our desires for that which stands in the way of God’s will for our lives. God wills that we will have

life and have it more abundantly. Satan wills that which is the opposite of life, namely evil (live spelled backwards) and works on our desires to get us to will inappropriately. We are not the only ones who will be tested by evil or the evil one. Jesus was too. The petition that Jesus taught his disciples in Aramaic “do not let us fall (or enter) into temptation but deliver us from evil (or the evil one),” had deep personal meaning for him for he was tempted and tested in the wilderness. Perhaps there is something we can learn from Jesus’ experience that will help us to better understand this petition in the Lord’s Prayer.

The story of Jesus being tested in the wilderness is found in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13, and in an abbreviated version in Mark 1:12-13. We will look at Matthew’s version from 3:16-4:11, which needs to be understood against the backdrop of Jesus’ baptism. Please take out your handouts as we look at this passage together, which begins with these words: <sup>16</sup> ***And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.*** <sup>17</sup> ***And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*** (Mt 3:16-17)

On your handouts, please underline “Spirit of God” and “my beloved Son.” What I want you to notice about this is that after Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit of God identified Jesus as “my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Right after this the story of Jesus’ temptation begins with these words: ***“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”*** (Mt 4:1). Note that it actually is the Spirit of God, whose voice came from heaven and identified Jesus as his beloved Son, who leads Jesus into the wilderness. But, importantly, it is the devil, not God, who will be tempting Jesus to see if he will remain loyal to God.<sup>4</sup>

But who is this devil? Who or what is this power or being that is referred to in this petition either as “evil” or “the evil one”? This prompted some interesting discussion during our Zoom call this past week. Some rejected anything like the traditional kind of devil. For them the image of a red devil with a pitchfork was anathema. Another person said that evil referred not to some

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<sup>4</sup> This, of course, is not the first time in the Bible that God has allowed someone to be tested. We think, for example of Abraham. In Genesis 22:1-2 we read: ***After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”*** <sup>2</sup> ***He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”*** God also allowed Job to be tested by Satan. The people of Israel were tested for forty years in the wilderness. Being tested is quite different than being God leading a person into a situation to be tempted to sin. It clearly says in the passage here that is the devil who will tempt Jesus in the wilderness, not God, even though God allowed Jesus to go into the wilderness as a kind loyalty test.

outside being or force but rather our own misguided egos. It kind of reminded me of the three-year-old who said “*And lead us not into **temptation**, but deliver us from ego.*” Yes, evil certainly can refer to our misguided shadow side. It can be a more generalized condition or subjective state. And there definitely can be people who are evil, as Scott Peck’s book *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* clearly shows. Some say that as many of 20% of the population are psycho-sociopaths who desire and do only what is evil. They have the Spirit of Satan in them. In both the Lord’s Prayer and in the story about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, the evil one seems to be an individual spiritual being, who you will see is variously described in this passage as the devil, Satan, or the tempter. (Find these three words and underline them.) In classical Christian theology (with which I agree) the Bible, from beginning to end, portrays a battle between God and Satan. Both God and Satan are fighting against each other to be ‘God’. “*God is life [or the life instinct] and Satan is Death [or the death instinct]. God created all things; Satan seeks to decreate all things. The battle between God and Satan takes place not only in the world outside us, but also in our souls, our minds, and our hearts.*”<sup>5</sup> The Bible, thankfully, ends with a final victory of God over Satan. Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness are an important chapter in this battle. We also are characters in this battle as we too are asked to show our loyalty to God and God’s life-giving values in this world. As we continue looking at this episode where Jesus’s loyalty is being tested in the wilderness, let us ask ourselves whether we struggle with the same temptations, as we also keep in mind the petition from the Lord’s Prayer which Sunday we pray with the words “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

Our scripture today begins with these words: “***Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil***” (Mt 4:1) There are a few things I want you to notice about this verse. First, where does Jesus go? Into the wilderness. Here “wilderness” refers not only to physical geography but also spiritual geography where he was completely isolated, without people to support and encourage him. Second, who calls Jesus into the wilderness? The Spirit of God does. God freely allows Jesus’ faith to be tested by a powerful non-human force or figure, who in this passage is called by three names: the tempter, the devil, Satan. Note, though, that it is Satan, not God who does the tempting. Third, Jesus prepared himself spiritually to engage in spiritual warfare in the same manner that Moses did when he was called by God up to Mt Sinai. Scripture says Moses “***was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights; neither ate bread nor drank water.***” (Ex 3:28; cf. Ex 24:18). Today’s scripture likewise says that Jesus “***fasted forty days and forty nights.***” The purpose of Jesus’ fasting was not about losing weight in poundage but rather all of the earthly weights and things that prevented him from being able to surrender to and hear the voice of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert Richardson, *The War Between God and Satan: A Grand Narrative* (Lewiston: EMP, 2021), p. 25.

The scripture continues by saying that “*afterwards [Jesus] was famished*” (Mt 4:2). Not just hungry. But famished. Could not wait to eat! And it is at this point that the tempter came to him. You know that tempter can take many forms and has many faces. This particular tempter wanted to draw on Jesus’ weakness of being famished. When I visited with Rachel recently I learned a new word: “hangry” as my 2 ½ year old grandson was so hungry and tired that he was hangry, too angry and upset even to be able to eat. I think it is true to say that we are more easily tempted when we are hungry or tired. We all know never to go to the grocery store when we are hungry! We should never make important decisions when we are tired. That’s when we lose perspective, and can’t see as clearly, and give into temptation. It is when we are hungry or hangry or tired that our self-control and will power to resist temptation break down.

But it is not only physical hunger that can leave us vulnerable. So much temptation is about filling some kind of a void that is within us. Anne Marie Drew has said that “*the devil knows where in the desert of our own hearts to tempt us. And most often the temptation strikes at an empty space, a void that we don’t know how to fill. Years ago, I was talking to a teenager about her sadness and loneliness and she said ‘It’s like I have a huge hole inside me and I don’t know how to get it filled up.’ Satan offers many ways to fill that hole, none of them good. But while we’re waiting for and working with God to fill that empty space, we can get ourselves in trouble.*”<sup>6</sup>

Don’t think that the devil or Satan is a red creature with horns and a pitchfork who tries to fill that void in our lives! The tempter usually takes the form of ordinary people who interact with us in ordinary situations, at work, school, in social situations, on social media. But we need to beware of those occasions in life when we are famished and tired, all those times when we feel a void within us that needs to be filled, because it is then that we can be caught off guard. That is when we make mistakes in judgment, and overspend or overindulge, or have that drink or extra piece of cake you don’t need, or allow your friends or co-workers to talk you into something.

Jesus was famished. The scripture says: <sup>3</sup>***The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”*** (Mt 4:3). Note here that Satan is using the words that the Spirit of God had used at Jesus baptism, identifying him as “My Beloved Son.” Here the Tempter says that if you are the son of God, satisfy your physical hunger by using your powers to turn stones into bread. But Jesus didn’t take the bait of the tempter, reminding him of the story of the Israelites wandering for forty years in the wilderness where they were hungry and thirsty and had to rely on God to supply them with manna, as he

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<sup>6</sup> Anne Marie Drew, “Brave Emptiness: The Geography of Demons,” in *The Desert*, Weavings XVI:3, p. 34.

quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3: ***“It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*** Jesus indicated that his identity was not as a child of the world, but as a child of God, who was taking his marching orders not from the growling of his stomach or the pleasures of the physical world, or the need for security, or any kind of void in his being, but from God and God alone.

But the tempter didn’t give up! Sort of like the saying that “opportunity may knock only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.” If he couldn’t tempt Jesus by pointing to fears around **security and survival**, he thought he could get to him from a different angle. How about the human need for **esteem and approval**. Don’t we all dream about being loved and popular? Wouldn’t we all like people to applaud when they see us, to think we are fabulous and spectacular? Don’t we love having our egos stroked? The scriptures say: <sup>5</sup>***Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,*** <sup>6</sup>***saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”*** (Mt 4:5-6)

The devil was pretty smart. Jesus had just refuted the devil through scripture, so the devil decided to quote scripture right back at Jesus, even if it was taken out of context, to try and entice him. It says in the scriptures [in Psalm 91:11-12], Jesus, that angels will catch you! Of course, Jesus, like Superman, could have leapt from the temple and the angels would have rescued him. And he would have had an instant following as a celebrity! He could travel the world, selling tickets, so that people could see him perform great feats.

When I read about this second temptation, I felt a deep sadness because it brought back a very painful memory. After Russ and I had been called to be co-pastors of Vista La Mesa Church in San Diego after a lengthy interviewing process and had arrived at our first day at the church eager and excited to get started, a prominent member turned to us and said: “Now show us your bag of tricks!” In other words, who we were as people was not enough for them. Our simple desire to be servants of God was not enough. Rather we were being asked to put on a show for God, to be glamorous, to be spectacular, to energize worship through staged performance. If you truly are ministers, then you better show us your bag of spiritual tricks! Wow us with your programs and your preaching! Put on a show! Entertain us! As I said this is a very painful memory.

Wow us Jesus! Jump off the cliff, show us your bag of tricks, so that you can prove you are the Son of God! Run across Niagara Falls on a wire while juggling at the same time! He resisted the devil's second temptation because he knew that faith could not be built upon the sensational or spectacular. In fact, not only did Jesus not give into the tempter's enticement here to throw himself down from the temple, but he also later was to refuse to give into the devil's taunts, who whispered to him while he hung dying on the cross, ***"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross"*** (Mt 27:40). No, Jesus consistently refused to be a spectacular stunt man and become a celebrity with a following of fans! In response, Jesus reminded the tempter of a time when the Israelites tested God in Massah [Mass-a] (Exodus 17:1-7), and repeated what God had said to them then: ***"Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*** (Deut. 6:16)

When the devil saw that he could not get Jesus through the temptation of security, or the need for approval or esteem, he turned to the most powerful temptation of all, namely the temptation for **power and control**. The scriptures say: <sup>8</sup>***Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."*** The devil was handing Jesus the whole world if only he would worship him. All Jesus had to do at this point was to compromise his mission and his ministry. If Jesus would have given into this temptation, he could bypass the cross. Jesus could have the whole world without having to suffer and die for it. What a temptation! We all are tempted by power and ambition, aren't we?

How did Jesus stay focused on God while being tempted in the wilderness? We know that when Jesus was in the final hours of his life in the Garden of Gethesemane not only did he go off by himself to pray but he also urged his disciples to do so. Listen to what he instructs his disciples on the night that he is betrayed. Luke writes, ***"And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation'"*** (Luke 22:39-40; cf. Mark 14:37-38).

There is a connection between prayer and temptation. Jesus tells his disciples that the most important way to deal with temptation is to pray.

What do you think Jesus prayed when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness? I believe that the words that came out of his mouth were the exact same words that he shared with his disciples when they later asked him how to pray, namely: "do let me not fall into temptation, God, but deliver me from evil (or the evil one)." It was praying these words that fortified him, strengthened him, and prevented him from giving in to the temptations of the devil. No wonder he later was to teach this petition to his disciples and to all of us, knowing that we too will face temptations and trials in our own lives.

And so Jesus, tempted by the evil one, strengthened by prayer to God to help him resist temptation, again quoted scripture and said: <sup>10</sup> ***“Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”*** (Deut. 6:13) After being tempted by the devil, Jesus was ready for his ministry. This scripture ends by saying: <sup>11</sup> ***“Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”***

Like Jesus, we too will face many temptations, tests, trials, and tribulations. And when we face those times of trial in our lives, with Jesus we are called to pray ***“lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”*** And, as we look at the evil one squarely in the face, we are called to utter these final words with great power and passion, slamming the door right in the devil’s face, as we claim our loyalty to God professing, ***“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen!”***

**Closing Prayer:** God, we know that you do not lead us into temptation but that you are there when the evil one whispers in our ears tempting us to turn away from you and your goodness. We ask that you would be with us as we face all the many times of trial in our lives as we follow in your footsteps and your example by praying that we would always keep our focus on you and your kingdom. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.