

“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”

NO. 1402

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Lead us not into temptation.”
Matthew 6:13.*

LOOKING over a book of addresses to young people the other day, I met with the outline of a discourse which struck me as being a perfect gem. I will give it to you. The text is the Lord’s prayer, and the exposition is divided into most instructive heads. “Our Father which are in heaven:” *a child away from home*. “Hallowed be Your name:” *a worshipper*. “Your kingdom come:” *a subject*. “Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:” *a servant*. “Give us this day our daily bread:” *a beggar*. “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:” *a sinner*. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:”—*a sinner in danger of being a greater sinner still*. The titles are in every case most appropriate and truthfully condense the petition. Now if you will remember the outline you will notice that the prayer is like a ladder. The petitions begin at the top and go downward. “Our Father which are in heaven:” a child, a child of the heavenly Father. Now, to be a child of God is the highest possible position of man. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” This is what Christ is—the Son of God, and “Our Father” is but a plural form of the very term which He uses in addressing God, for Jesus says, “Father.” It is a very high, gracious, exalted position, which by faith we dare to occupy when we intelligently say, “Our Father which are in heaven.” It is a step down to the next—“Hallowed be Your name.” Here we have a worshipper adoring with lowly reverence the thrice holy God. A worshipper’s place is a high one, but it attains not to the excellence of the child’s position. Angels come as high as being worshippers, their incessant song hallows the name of God. But they cannot say, “Our Father,” “for unto which of the angels has He said, ‘you are My son?’” They must be content to be within one step of the highest, but they cannot reach the summit, for neither by adoption, regeneration, nor by union to Christ are they the children of God. “Abba, Father,” is for men, not for angels and therefore, the worshipping sentence of the prayer is one step lower than the opening, “Our Father.” The next petition is for us as subjects, “Your kingdom come.” The subject comes lower than the worshipper, for worship is an elevated engagement wherein man exercises priesthood and is seen in lowly but honorable estate. The child worships and then confesses the Great Father’s royalty. Descending still, the next position is that of a servant, “Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” That is another step lower than a subject, for Her Majesty the Queen has many subjects who are not her servants. They are not bound to wait upon her in the palace with personal service though they acknowledge her as their honored sovereign. Dukes and such like are her subjects, but not her servants. The servant is a grade below the subject.

Everyone will admit that the next petition is lower by far, for it is that of a beggar—“Give us this day our daily bread.”—A beggar for bread—an everyday beggar—one who has continually to appeal to charity, even for his livelihood. This is a fit place for us to occupy who owe our all to the charity of heaven. But there is a step lower than the beggar’s and that is the sinner’s place. “Forgive” is lower than “give.” “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Here too, we may each one take up his position, for no word better befits our unworthy lips than the prayer, “Forgive.” As long as we live and sin we ought to weep and cry, “Have mercy on us, O Lord.” And now, at the very bottom of the ladder stands a sinner, afraid of yet greater sin, in extreme danger and in conscious weakness, sensible of past sin and fearful of it for the future. Hear him as with trembling lip he cries in the words of our text, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

And yet, dear friends, though I have thus described the prayer as a going downward, downward is, in matters of grace, much the same as upward, as we could readily show if time permitted. At any rate the going down process of the prayer might equally well illustrate the advance of the divine life in the soul. The last clause of the prayer contains in it a deeper inward experience than the earlier part of it. Every believer is a child of God, a worshipper, a subject, a servant, a beggar and a sinner. But it is not every

man who perceives the allurements which beset him, or his own tendency to yield to them. It is not every child of God, even when advanced in years, who knows the full meaning of being led into temptation. For some follow an easy path and are seldom buffeted, and others are such tender babes that they hardly know their own corruptions. To fully understand our text a man should have had sharp brushes in the wars and have done battle against the enemy within his soul for many a day. He, who has escaped as by the skin of his teeth, offers this prayer with an emphasis of meaning. The man who has felt the fowler’s net about him—the man who has been seized by the adversary and almost destroyed—he prays with hot eagerness, “Lead us not into temptation.”

I purpose at this time, in trying to commend this prayer to you, to notice, first of all, *the spirit which suggests such a petition*; secondly, *the trials which such a prayer deprecates*, and then thirdly, *the lessons which it teaches*.

I. WHAT SUGGESTS SUCH A PRAYER AS THIS?—“Lead us not into temptation.” First, from the position of the clause, I gather, by a slight reasoning process, that it is suggested by *watchfulness*. This petition follows after the sentence, “Forgive us our debts.” I will suppose the petition to have been answered and the man’s sin is forgiven. What then? If you will look back upon your own lives, you will soon perceive what generally happens to a pardoned man, for “As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man.” One believing man’s inner experience is like another’s and your own feelings are the same as mine. Very speedily after the penitent has received forgiveness and has the sense of it in his soul, he is tempted of the devil, for Satan cannot bear to lose his subjects. And when he sees them cross the border and escape out of his hand, he gathers up all his forces and exercises all his cunning, if, perhaps, he may slay them at once. To meet this special assault the Lord makes the heart watchful. Perceiving the ferocity and subtlety of Satan’s temptations, the new-born believer, rejoicing in the perfect pardon he has received, cries to God, “Lead us not into temptation.” It is the fear of losing the joy of pardoned sin which thus cries out to the good Lord—“Our Father, do not suffer us to lose the salvation we have so lately obtained. Do not even subject it to jeopardy. Do not permit Satan to break our newfound peace. We have but newly escaped, do not plunge us in the deeps again. “Swimming to shore, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, we have come safely to land, do not let us tempt the boisterous main again. Cast us not upon the rough billows any more. O God we see the enemy advancing, he is ready, if he can, to sift us as wheat. Do not allow us to be put into his sieve, but deliver us, we pray You.” It is a prayer of watchfulness and mark you, though we have spoken of watchfulness as necessary at the commencement of the Christian life, it is equally needful even to the close. There is no hour in which a believer can afford to slumber. Watch, I pray you, when you are alone, for temptation, like a creeping assassin, has its dagger for solitary hearts. You must bolt and bar the door well if you would keep out the devil. Watch yourself in public, for temptations in troops cause their arrows to fly by day. The choicest companions you can select will not be without some evil influence upon you unless you are on your guard. Remember our blessed Master’s words, “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,” and as you watch, this prayer will often rise from your inmost heart—

*“From dark temptation’s power,
From Satan’s wiles defend.
Deliver in the evil hour,
And guide me to the end.”*

It is the prayer of watchfulness.

Next, it seems to me to be the natural prayer of *holy horror at the very thought of falling into sin again*. I remember the story of a pitman who, having been a gross blasphemer, a man of licentious life and everything that was bad, when converted by divine grace, was terribly afraid lest his old companions should lead him back again. He knew himself to be a man of strong passions and very apt to be led astray by others and therefore, in his dread of being drawn into his old sins, he prayed most vehemently that sooner than ever he should go back to his old ways, he might die. He did die then and there. Perhaps it was the best answer to the best prayer that the poor man could have offered. I am sure any man who has once lived an evil life, if the wondrous grace of God has snatched him from it, will agree that the pitman’s prayer was not one whit too enthusiastic. It is better for us to die at once than to live on and return to our first estate and bring dishonor upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. The prayer before us springs from the shrinking of the soul at the first approach of the tempter. The footstep of the fiend falls on the startled ear of the timid penitent. He quivers like an aspen leaf and cries out, “What? Is he

coming again? And is it possible that I may fall again? And may I once more defile these garments with that loathsome murderous sin which slew my Lord? O my God,” the prayer seems to say, “keep me from so dire an evil. Lead me, I pray You, where You will—yes, even through death’s dark valley, but do not lead me into temptation, lest I fall and dishonor You.” The burnt child dreads the fire. He, who has once been caught in the steel trap, carries the scars in his flesh and is horribly afraid of being held again, by its cruel teeth.

The third feeling, also, is very apparent, namely, *meekness of personal strength*. The man who feels himself strong enough for anything is daring and even invites the battle which will prove his power. “Oh,” he says, “I don’t care. They may gather about me who will. I am quite able to take care of myself and hold my own against any number.” He is ready to be led into conflict. He courts the fray. Not so the man who has been taught of God and has learned his own weakness. He does not want to be tried, but seeks quiet places where he may be out of harm’s way. Put him into the battle and he will play the man. Let him be tempted and you will see how steadfast he will be. But he does not ask for conflict, as, I think, few soldiers will, who know what fighting means. Surely it is only those who have never smelt gunpowder, or seen corpses heaped in bloody masses on each other, that are so eager for the shot and shell. But your veteran would rather enjoy the piping times of peace. No experienced believer ever desires spiritual conflict, though perhaps some raw recruits may challenge it. In the Christian a recollection of his previous weakness—his broken resolutions, his unkept promises—makes him pray that he may not be severely tested in the future. He does not dare to trust himself again. He wants no fight with Satan or with the world. He asks that, if possible, he may be kept from those severe encounters. His prayer is, “Lead us not into temptation.” The wise believer shows a sacred fear—no, I think I may say an utter despair of himself. And even though he knows that the power of God is strong enough for anything, yet is the sense of his weakness so heavy upon him that he begs to be spared too much trial. Hence the cry, “Lead us not into temptation.”

Nor have I quite exhausted, I think, the phases of the spirit which suggests this prayer, for it seems to me to arise somewhat out of *charity*. “Charity?” you say. “How so?” Well, the connection is always to be observed, and by reading the preceding sentence in connection with it, we get the words, “as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation.” We should not be too severe with those persons who have done wrong and have offended us, but pray, “Lord, lead us not into temptation.” Your maid servant, poor girl, did take a trifle from your property. I make no excuse for her theft, but I beseech you, pause awhile before you quite ruin her character for life. Ask yourself, “Might not I have done the same had I been in her position? Lord, lead me not into temptation.” It is true, it was very wrong of that young man to deal so dishonestly with your goods. Still, you know, he was under great pressure from a strong hand and only yielded from compulsion. Do not be too severe. Do not say, “I will push the matter through, I will call the law on him.” No, but wait awhile. Let pity speak; let mercy’s silver voice plead with you. Remember yourself, lest you, also, be tempted, and pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” I am afraid that badly as some behave under temptation, others of us might have done *worse* if we had been there. I like, if I can, to form a kind judgment of the erring. And it helps me to do so when I imagine myself to have been subject to their trials and to have looked at things from their point of view, and to have been in their circumstances and to have nothing of the grace of God to help me. Would not I have fallen as badly as they have done, or even gone beyond them in evil? May not the day come, to you who show no mercy, in which you may have to ask mercy for yourselves? Did I say—may it not come to you? No, *it must* come to you. When leaving all below you will have to take a retrospective view of your life and see much to mourn over. To what can you appeal then, but to the mercy of God? And what if He should answer you, “An appeal was made to *your* mercy and you had none. As you rendered unto others, so will I render unto you.” What answer would you have if God were to treat you so? Would not such an answer be just and right? Should not every man be paid in his own coin when he stands at the judgment seat? So I think that this prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” should often spring up from the heart through a charitable feeling towards others who have erred, who are of the same flesh and blood as ourselves. Now, whenever you see the drunkard reel through the streets, do not glory over him, but say, “Lead us not into temptation.” When you take down the papers and read that men of position have betrayed their trust for gold, condemn their conduct if you will, but do not exult in your own steadfastness, rather cry in all humility, “Lead us not into temptation.” When the poor girl seduced from the paths of virtue comes across your way, look not on her with the scorn that would give her up to destruction, but

say, “Lead us not into temptation.” It would teach us milder and gentler ways with sinful men and women if this prayer were as often in our hearts as it is upon our lips.

Once more, do you not think that this prayer breathes the spirit of *confidence*—confidence in God? “Why,” says one, “I do not see that.” To me—I know not whether I shall be able to convey my thought—to me there is a degree of very tender familiarity and sacred boldness in this expression. Of course God will lead me now that I am His child. Moreover, now that He has forgiven me, I know that He will not lead me where I can come to any harm. My faith ought to know and believe this, and yet for several reasons there rises to my mind a fear lest His providence should conduct me where I shall be tempted. Is that fear right or wrong? It burdens my mind. May I go with it to my God? May I express in prayer this misgiving of soul? May I pour out this anxiety before the great, wise, loving God? Will it not be impertinent? No, it will not, for Jesus puts the words into my mouth and says, “After this manner pray.” You are afraid that He may lead you into temptation, but He will not do so. Or should He see fit to try you, He will also afford you strength to hold out to the end. He will be pleased in His infinite mercy, to preserve you. Where He leads it will be perfectly safe for you to follow, for His presence will make the deadliest air to become healthful. But since instinctively you have a dread lest you should be conducted where the fight will be too stern and the way, too rough, tell it to your heavenly Father without reserve. You know at home, if a child has any little complaint against his father, it is always better for him to tell it. If he thinks that his father overlooked him the other day, or half thinks that the task his father has given him is too severe, or fancies that his father is expecting too much of him—if he does not say anything at all about it, he may sulk and lose much of the loving tenderness which a child’s heart should always feel. But when the child frankly says, “Father, I do not want you to think that I do not love you or that I cannot trust you, but I have a troublous thought in my mind and I will tell it right straight out”—that is the wisest course to follow and shows a filial trust. That is the way to keep up love and confidence. So if you have a suspicion in your soul that perhaps your Father might put you into temptation too strong for you, tell it to Him. Tell it to Him though it seems taking a great liberty. Though the fear may be the fruit of unbelief, yet make it known to your Lord, and do not harbor it sullenly. Remember, the Lord’s prayer was not made for Him, but for you and therefore, it reads matters from your standpoint and not from His. Our Lord’s prayer is not for our Lord. It is for us, His children. And children say to their fathers ever so many things which it is quite proper for them to say, but which are not wise and accurate after the measure of their parents’ knowledge. Their father knows what their hearts mean and yet there may be a good deal in what they say which is foolish or mistaken. So I look upon this prayer as exhibiting that blessed childlike confidence which tells its father a fear which grieves it whether that fear is altogether correct or not. Beloved, we need not debate here the question whether God does lead into temptation or not, or whether we can fall from Grace or not. It is enough that we have a fear and we are permitted to tell our Father in heaven about it. Whenever you have a fear of any kind, hurry off with it to Him who loves His little ones, and like a father, pities them and soothes even their needless alarms.

Thus have I shown that the spirit which suggests this prayer is that of watchfulness, of holy horror at the very thought of sin, of meekness of our own strength, of charity towards others and of confidence in God.

II. Secondly, let us ask, **WHAT ARE THESE TEMPTATIONS WHICH THE PRAYER DEPRECATES?** Or rather, what are these trials which are so much feared?

I do not think the prayer is intended at all to ask God to spare us from being afflicted for our good, or to save us from being made to suffer as a chastisement. Of course we should be glad to escape those things, but the prayer aims at another form of trial and may be paraphrased thus—“Save me, O Lord, from such trials and sufferings as may lead me into sin. Spare me from too great trials, lest I fall by their overcoming my patience, my faith, or my steadfastness.”

Now, as briefly as I can, I will show you how men may be led into temptation by the hand of God. And the first is *by the withdrawal of divine grace*. Suppose for a moment—it is only a supposition—suppose the Lord were to leave us altogether? We would perish speedily. But suppose—and this is not a barren supposition—that He were in some measure to take away His strength from us, should we not be in an evil case? Suppose He did not support our faith. What unbelief we would exhibit. Suppose He refused to support us in the time of trial so that we no longer maintained our integrity, what would become of us? Ah, the most upright man would not be upright long, nor the most holy, holy any more. Suppose,

dear friend—you who walk in the light of God’s countenance and bear life’s yoke so easily because He sustains you—suppose His presence were withdrawn from you, what would your portion be? We are all so like Samson in this matter that I must bring him in as the illustration, though he has often been used for that purpose by others. So long as the locks of our head are unshorn we can do anything and everything. We can tear lions apart, carry gates of Gaza and smite the armies of the alien. It is by the divine consecrating mark that we are strong in the power of His might. But if the Lord is once withdrawn and we attempt the work alone, then, are we weak as the tiniest insect. When the Lord has departed from you, O Samson, what are you more than another man? Then the cry, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson,” is the end of all your glory. You do vainly shake those lusty limbs of yours. Now you will have your eyes put out and the Philistines will make sport of you. In view of a like catastrophe we may well be in an agony of supplication. Pray then, “Lord, leave me not and lead me not into temptation by taking your Spirit from me.”—

*“Keep us, Lord, oh keep us ever,
Vain our hope if left by Thee!
We are yours, oh leave us never,
Till your face in heaven we see.
There to praise you
Through a bright eternity.
All our strength at once would fail us,
If deserted, Lord, by Thee.
Nothing then could anything avail us,
Certain our defeat would be.
Those who hate us
From then on their desire would see.”*

Another set of temptations will be found in *providential conditions*. The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, shall be my illustration here. “Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny You, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” Some of us have never known what actual need means, but have from our youth up lived in social comfort. Ah, dear friends, when we see what extreme poverty has made some men do, how do we know that we would not have behaved even worse if we had been as sorely pressed as they? We may well shudder and say, “Lord, when I see poor families crowded together in one little room, where there is scarcely space to observe common decency, when I see hardly bread enough to keep the children from crying for hunger, when I see the man’s garments wearing out upon his back and by far too thin to keep out the cold, I pray You subject me not to such trial, lest if I were in such a case I might put forth my hand and steal. Lead me not into the temptation of pining need.”

And on the other hand, look at the temptations of money when men have more to spend than they can possibly need, and there is around them, a society which tempts them into racing, gambling, whoredom and all manner of iniquities. The young man who has a fortune before he reaches years of discretion and is surrounded by flatterers and tempters all eager to plunder him, do you wonder that he is led into vice and becomes a ruined man morally? Like a rich galleon waylaid by pirates, he is never out of danger. Is it a marvel that he never reaches the port of safety? Women tempt him, men flatter him, vile messengers of the devil fawn upon him and the young simpleton goes after them like an ox to the slaughter, or as a bird hastens to the snare and knows not that it is for his life. You may very well thank heaven you never knew the temptation, for if it were put in your way you would also be in sore peril. If riches and honor allure you, follow not eagerly after them, but pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

Providential positions often try men. There is a man very much pushed for ready money in business—how shall he meet that heavy bill? If he does not meet it, there will be desolation in his family, the mercantile concern from which he now draws his living will be broken up, everybody will be ashamed of him. His children will be outcasts and he will be ruined. He has only to use a sum of trust money. He has no right to risk a penny of it, for it is not his, but still by its temporary use he may perhaps, tide over the difficulty. The devil tells him he can put it back in a week. If he touches that money it will be a roguish action, but then he says, “Nobody will be hurt by it and it will be a wonderful accommodation,” and so on. If he yields to the suggestion and the thing goes right, there are some who would say, “Well, after all, there was not much harm in it and it was a prudent step, for it saved him from ruin.” But if it

goes wrong and he is found out, then everybody says, “It was a shameful robbery. The man ought to be put in prison.” But, brethren, the action was wrong in itself and the consequences neither make it better nor worse. Do not bitterly condemn, but pray again and again, “Lead us not into temptation. Lead us not into temptation.” You see, God does put men into such positions in providence at times that they are severely tried. It is for their good that they are tried, and when they can stand the trial they magnify His grace, and they become stronger men. The test has beneficial uses when it can be borne and God therefore, does not always screen His children from it. Our heavenly Father has never meant to cuddle us up and keep us out of temptation, for that is no part of the system which He has wisely arranged for our education. He does not mean us to be babies in carriages all our lives. He made Adam and Eve in the garden and He did not put an iron fence round the tree of knowledge and say, “You cannot get at it.” No, He warned them not to touch the fruit, but they could reach the tree if they would. He meant that they should have the possibility of attaining the dignity of voluntary fidelity if they remained steadfast. But they lost it by their sin. And God means in His new creation, not to shield His people from every kind of test and trial, for that were to breed hypocrites and to keep even the faithful weak and dwarfish. The Lord does sometimes, put the chosen where they are tried, and we do right to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

And there are temptations arising out of *physical conditions*. There are some men who are very moral in character because they are in good health. And there are other men who are very bad who, I do not doubt, if we knew all about them, should have some little leniency shown them because of the unhappy conformation of their constitution. Why, there are many people to whom to be cheerful and to be generous is no effort whatever, while there are others who need to labor hard to keep themselves from despair and misanthropy. Diseased livers, palpitating hearts and injured brains are hard things to struggle against. Does that poor old lady complain? She has only had rheumatism thirty years and yet she now and then murmurs! How would you be if you felt her pains for thirty minutes? I have heard of a man who complained of everybody. When He came to die and the doctors opened his skull they found a close fitting brain-box and that the man suffered from an irritable brain. Did not that account for a great many of his hard speeches? I do not mention these matters to excuse sin, but to make you and myself treat such people as gently as we can, and pray, “Lord, do not give me such a brain-box and do not let me have such rheumatisms or such pains, because upon such a rack I may be much worse than they. Lead us not into temptation.”

So, again, *mental conditions* often furnish great temptations. When a man becomes depressed he becomes tempted. Those among us, who rejoice much, often sink about as much as we rise. And when everything looks dark around us, Satan is sure to seize the occasion to suggest despondency. God forbid that we should excuse ourselves, but, dear brother, pray that you are not led into this temptation. Perhaps if you were as much a subject of nervousness and sinking of spirit as the friend you blame for melancholy, you might be more blameworthy than he. Therefore pity rather than condemn.

And on the other hand, when the spirits are exhilarated and the heart is ready to dance for joy, it is very easy for levity to step in and for words to be spoken amiss. Pray the Lord not to let you rise so high or sink so low as to be led into evil. “Lead us not into temptation,” must be our hourly prayer.

Further than this, there are temptations arising out of *personal associations*, which are formed for us in the order of providence. We are bound to shun evil company, but there are cases in which, without fault on their part, persons are made to associate with bad characters. I may bring up the pious child whose father is a swearer. And the godly woman, lately converted, whose husband remains a swearer and blasphemes the name of Christ. It is the same with workmen who have to labor in workshops where lewd fellows at every half-dozen words let fall an oath and pour forth that filthy language which shocks us each day more and more. I think that in London our working people talk more filthily than they ever did, at least I hear more of it as I pass along or pause in the street. Well, if persons are obliged to work in such shops, or to live in such families, there may come times when under the lash of jest and sneer and sarcasm the heart may be a little dismayed and the tongue may refuse to speak for Christ. Such a silence and cowardice are not to be excused, yet do not censure your brother, but say, “Lord, lead me not into temptation.” How do you know that you would be bolder? Peter quailed before a talkative maid, and you may be cowed by a woman’s tongue. The worst temptation that I know of, for a young Christian, is to live with a hypocrite—a man so sanctified and demure that the young heart, deceived by appearances, fully trusts him while the wretch is false at heart and rotten in life. And such wretches there are who,

with the pretense and affectation of sanctimoniousness will do deeds at which we might weep tears of blood. Young people are frightfully staggered and many of them become deformed for life in their spiritual characteristics through associating with such beings as these. When you see faults caused by such common but horrible causes, say to yourself, “Lord, lead me not into temptation. I thank You for godly parents and for Christian associations and for godly examples. But what might I have been if I had been subjected to the very reverse? If evil influences had touched me when, like a vessel I was upon the wheel, I might have exhibited even grosser failings than those which I now see in others.”

Thus I might continue to urge you to pray, dear friends, against various temptations. But let me say the Lord has for some men, very *special tests*, such as may be seen in the case of Abraham. He gives him a son in his old age and then says to him, “Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him for a burnt-offering.” You will do right to pray, “Lord, lead me not into such a temptation as that. I am not worthy to be so tried. Oh do not so test me.” I have known some Christians sit down and calculate whether they could have acted as the patriarch did. It is very foolish, dear brothers and sisters. When you are called upon to do it, you will be enabled to make the same sacrifice, by the grace of God. But, if you are not called upon to do it, why should the power be given? Shall God’s grace be left unused? Your strength shall be equal to your day, but it shall not exceed it. I would have you ask to be spared the sterner tests.

Another instance is to be seen in Job. God gave Job over to Satan with a limit, and you know how Satan tormented him and tried to overwhelm him. If any man were to pray, “Lord, try me like Job,” it would be a very unwise prayer. “Oh, but I could be as patient as he,” you say. You are the very man who would yield to bitterness and curse your God. The man who could best exhibit the patience of Job will be the first, according to his Lord’s bidding, fervently to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” Dear friends, we are to be prepared for trial if God wills it, but we are not to court it, but are rather to pray against it even as our Lord Jesus, though ready to drink the bitter cup, yet in agony, exclaimed, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” Trials sought after are not such as the Lord has promised to bless. No true child asks for the rod.

To put my meaning in a way which it will be clearly seen, let me tell an old story. I have read in history that two men were condemned to die as martyrs in the burning days of Queen Mary. One of them boasted very loudly to his companion of his confidence that he should play the man at the stake. He did not mind the suffering. He was so grounded in the gospel that he knew he should never deny it. He said that he longed for the fatal morning even as a bride for the wedding. His companion in prison in the same chamber was a poor trembling soul, who could not and would not deny his Master, but he told his companion, he was very much afraid of the fire. He said he had always been very sensitive of suffering and he was in great dread that when he began to burn, the pain might cause him to deny his Master. He begged his friend to pray for him and he spent his time very much in weeping over his weakness and crying to God for strength. The other continually rebuked him and chided him for being so unbelieving and weak. When they came to the stake, he who had been so bold recanted at the sight of the fire and went back, shamefully to an apostate’s life, while the poor trembling man whose prayer had been, “Lead me not into temptation,” stood firm as a rock, praising and magnifying God as he was burnt to a cinder. Weakness is our strength and our strength is weakness. Cry unto God that He try you not beyond your strength and in the shrinking tenderness of your conscious weakness, breathe out the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.” Then if He does lead you into the conflict, His Holy Spirit will strengthen you and you will be brave as a lion before the adversary. Though trembling and shrinking within yourself before the throne of God, you could confront the very devil and all the hosts of hell without one ounce of fear. It may seem strange, but so is the case.

III. And now I conclude with the last head—THE LESSONS WHICH THIS PRAYER TEACHES. I have not time to enlarge. I will just throw them out in the rough.

The first lesson from the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” is this, *never boast of your own strength*. Never say, “Oh, I shall never fall into such follies and sins. They may try me, but they will find more than a match in me.” Let not him that puts on his harness boast as though he were taking it off. Never indulge one thought of congratulation as to your strength. You have no power of your own. You are as weak as water. The devil has only to touch you in the right place and you will run according to his will. Only let a loose stone or two be moved and you will soon see that the feeble building of your own natural virtue will come down at a run. Never court temptation by boasting your own capacity.

The next thing is, *never desire trial*. Does anybody ever do that? Yes. I heard one say, the other day that God had so prospered him for years that he was afraid he was not a child of God, for he found that God’s children were chastised and therefore, he almost wished to be afflicted. Dear brothers and sisters do not wish for that. You will meet with trouble soon enough. If I were a little boy at home, I do not think I should say to my brother, because he had been whipped, “I am afraid I am not my father’s child, and fear that he does not love me because I am not smarting under the rod. I wish he would whip me just to let me know his love.” No, no child would ever be so stupid. We must not for any reason desire to be afflicted or tried, but must pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

The next thought is, *never go into temptation*. The man who prays “Lead us not into temptation,” and then goes into it, is a liar before God. What a hypocrite a man must be who utters this prayer and then goes off to the theater. How false he is, who offers this prayer and then stands at the bar, and drinks and talks with depraved men and showy women. “Lead us not into temptation,” is shameful profanity when it comes from the lips of men who resort to places of amusement whose moral tone is bad. “Oh,” you say, “you should not tell us of such things.” Why not? Some of you do them and I am bold to rebuke evil wherever it is found and shall do so while this tongue can move. There is a world of hypocrisy about. People go to church and say, “Lead us not into temptation,” and then they know where temptation is to be found and they go straight to it. *You* need not ask the Lord not to lead you there; He has nothing to do with you. The devil and you, between you, will go far enough without mocking God with your hypocritical prayers. The man who goes into sin willfully with his eyes open and then bends his knees and says half-a-dozen times over in his church on Sunday morning “Lead us not into temptation,” is a hypocrite without a mask. Let him take that home to himself and believe that I mean to be personal with him and to such barefaced hypocrites as he.

The last word is, if you pray God not to lead you into temptation, *do not lead others there*. Some seem to be singularly forgetful of the effect of their example, for they will do evil things in the presence of their children and those who look up to them. Now I pray you consider that by ill example you destroy others as well as yourself. Do nothing, my dear brothers and sisters, of which you need to be ashamed, or which you would not wish others to imitate. Do the right thing at all times and do not let Satan make a “cat’s paw” of you to destroy the souls of others. Do you pray, “Lead us not into temptation”? Then do not lead your children there. They are invited during the festive season to such-and-such a family party where there will be everything but what will benefit their spiritual growth or even their good morals. Do not allow them to go. Put your foot down. Be steadfast about it. Having once prayed, “Lead us not into temptation,” act not the hypocrite by allowing your children to go into it.

God bless these words to us. May they sink into our souls and if any feel that they have sinned, oh that they may now ask forgiveness through the precious blood of Christ and find it by faith in Him. When they have obtained mercy, let their next desire be that they may be kept in the future from sinning as they did before and therefore, let them pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” God bless you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 6:1-24.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—23 (VERSE 3), 1001, 668.

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