

**Give Us This Day: 5. Lead Us**  
**Matthew 6:13; James 1:13-15**  
**October 11, 2020**  
**Pastor Steve Richards**

One day, Jesus was asked, “Lord, teach us how to pray” And Jesus replied, “Pray like this...” And what he taught is what we know as the Lord’s Prayer. We may know the prayer, but do we understand what Jesus was teaching about prayer? Today, we come to this phrase: **Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

Last week, I came across a story of four men who went on a spiritual retreat, and as part of the retreat, they asked each other about their struggles so they could offer prayer and support. So, one of them said, “I struggle with lust, and to be honest the only reason I subscribe to Sports Illustrated is for the swimsuit edition.” The second said, “I have this temptation to gamble from time to time. I know I shouldn’t and it’s costly, but that doesn’t keep me from sneaking off to the casino.” The third said, “My struggle is with drinking. I’m tempted to drink when I know I shouldn’t, and I drink more than I should.” And then it was the fourth man’s turn, but he didn’t seem to be paying attention. He had his phone and his focus was with Facebook or Twitter. And they said, “How are you tempted?” And not even looking up from his phone, he replied, “I’m embarrassed to tell you, but I struggle with gossip, and I’m sorry but you have given me all sorts of things to put on Facebook.” We all are tempted. It’s part of our human condition. Jesus knew that which is why Jesus says, “Lead us, not into temptation...”

Temptation is the lure – that shiny object in our lives that we know we should not but it so hard to resist and once it’s got its hooks in us, we can’t let go. It may not be morally wrong, but it’s so hard to resist. I’m in a conversation with one person but then I overhear another conversation and suddenly I’m focused there. Or I click through the television channels and something grabs my attention – something I would never watch if I was paying attention. In August, I had a physical, and before I saw the doctor, I knew my weight was an issue. The past several months, I’ve put on extra pound. My health club was closed. I wasn’t leaving the house much which meant I would walk by the refrigerator at least a half dozen times a day – and I didn’t just walk by, I had to check what’s inside. The doctor told me my cholesterol was a little high and he recommended I start taking medicine, but I’ve never taken medicine. I told him I had a plan to do something about my weight and what I’ve been eating. He was skeptical and had reason to be. So, I’m trying to take off those extra Covid 19 pounds. I need to change some habits, but I have this hunger – and when I can’t have something, my hunger for whatever that is only increases. My greatest challenge is chocolate chip cookies. I do most of the grocery shopping for our home, and about a year ago our grocery store added fresh warm chocolate cookies near the front entrance. Is there anything better than a chocolate chip cookie fresh from the oven? And what I didn’t realize at the time is that they can speak. Because as soon as I enter the store, I can hear them calling my name. It’s not a sin to eat chocolate chip cookies. And I could go to another store, but when I’ve tried that the other stores have cookies too. And one cookie would be okay, but I’ve learned one is never enough. I think we all have something that lures us, and when we set a rule or draw a line, suddenly we want the very thing that is on the other side of the line.

How fast do you drive when the speed limit is 55? Shout it out – it’s okay, I can’t hear you. Did you say 65? What if the speed limit is 65, how fast do you drive then? I’m guessing it’s more than 65! What is it in us that wants to cross the line? We long to do what we are not supposed to do. And sometimes, the lure leads us to something painful. Over the years, I’ve had conversations with persons – some have been women and some have been men –

conversation with persons whose marriage had fallen apart due to an affair. And when I've asked how that happened, it followed a predictable pattern. What began with a look and then some flirting became an embrace and kiss and then a full blown affair. It looked appealing until they were hooked.

James, the brother of Jesus, said: **Everyone is tempted by their own cravings; they are lured away and enticed by them. Once those cravings conceive, they give birth to sin; and when sin grows up, it gives birth to death.** You have this thought or an idea, and either you say "yes" or say "no." But when you say "maybe," you are playing with temptation. Walter Wangerin, calls this "the moment of the maybe." You start playing with it in your mind and you begin rationalizing – it won't hurt anybody, just try it, nobody will know – but one step leads to another until you cross the line. And that's sin. Last week, we learned the Greek word is *hamartia*. It's an archery term – to miss the mark, to cross the line. And James says once sin takes root, it leads to death. Sometimes it is a physical death, but more often it's the death of a relationship or the death of hopes and dreams.

The Bible begins with this story in Genesis, chapters 2-3. It is an archetypal story, not about people who lived a long time ago, rather this is our story. Adam and Eve are given paradise, just stay away from one tree, but that turns out to be the one they want. And in that tree is a serpent or snake that calls out to them – just try it, God won't let anything bad happen to you. And when they listen and do what God told them not to do, paradise is lost. Adam and Eve are us. For me, it's not a talking snake or talking cookies, but it's a voice in my head. A voice that we can resist, and that's what we are praying for in the Lord's Prayer. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describe how. **Be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil.** And then he describes this armor: the belt of truth, justice as your breastplate, shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. This is what God offers so that you can resist.

Maybe you noticed that we added a comma to this part of the prayer: Lead us, not into temptation. Some of you may remember a sermon in which Pastor Tami addressed this. Why would we pray for God not to lead us into temptation? Would God lead us into temptation and if God did, it must be for a good reason, so why pray for God not to do that? James tells us: **No one who is tested should say, "God is tempting me!" This is because God is not tempted by any form of evil, nor does he tempt anyone.** God does not lead us into temptation. We do. There are two paths before us: one is the path that God has for us and the other is the one that leads me into temptation. And my prayer each morning is "God, lead me. I want to follow in your path." As we find in Psalm 23: Lead me in the paths of righteousness. God will lead. God does not force us to follow, but God is already ready to lead me.

Finally, **Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** The Greek word for deliver also means "rescue" or keep me from evil. Whenever I'm tempted. Whenever I'm ready to do the thing I shouldn't do, deliver me, rescue me, keep me.

A few weeks ago, we dropped off our dog, Winston, at our daughter and son-in-law's house. Mark was preparing to barbeque ribs. He marinated a rack of ribs and set them on the kitchen counter and then he went outside to get the grill ready. That's when Winston arrived. [slide] Look at that face - so cute and innocent. [camera] But while Mark was outside, Winston went into the kitchen, put his front paws in the counter, took the whole rack of ribs in his mouth and walked out the back door, ready for a tasty treat. Only Mark caught him in the act and saved the ribs, but Winston had a taste of the forbidden fruit. So after the ribs had been barbecued and eaten and the kitchen cleaned up, once again Winston entered the kitchen, emptied the trash

and proceeded to eat what was left of the ribs, eating the bones and even the napkins they had used to clean their fingers. But they didn't know he had done that until after we picked him up, brought him home, and suddenly had to clean up the consequences of Winston's actions. And it wasn't pleasant. It also involved a trip to the vet the next day and an x-ray to see where all the bones had gone. I wish I could say the consequences provided a lesson that will keep Winston out of the kitchen. What Mark and Lauren didn't know is that we put up a baby gate to keep Winston out of the kitchen whenever we are not in it. Because Winston needs someone to rescue him, to keep him out of trouble. As long as we close the gate he cannot get to temptation. And that's how it is for us when we pray – God please close the gate. God, deliver us, rescue us, rush in and save us from evil. God is ready if we are ready to accept God's help.

We are tempted – every one of us, but we have a choice. And God will lead you, even rescue or keep you from evil. It's why I'm often praying the words of a familiar song: *Lord, I need you, oh I need you. Every hour I need you. My one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need you.*

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 11, 2020**

**Weekly Prayer:** Lord of all, you are faithful and merciful. You have put your ear to our hearts both when we prayed and when we doubted. You know well what we fear and what we question, what we long for and when we have turned away from you. And even when we become deaf to you, you never stop listening for us. All we ask is to be made whole. Amen.

#### **Monday, October 12**

##### **Scripture: Psalm 23:1-3; Romans 8:12-14**

The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters.

**Observation:** King David, who became Israel's greatest king, worked as a shepherd, and likely wrote Psalm 23. He knew a shepherd's job description from his own experience, and pictured God as his shepherd. Centuries later, the apostle Paul said the defining characteristic of a child of God is allowing God's Spirit to lead you. As a shepherd leads his flock of sheep in the ways that best protect and nurture them, so God leads those who put their trust in him.

**Application:** David described God as guiding him (and all God's children) "in proper paths." Living as we do in a culture that places great store on our freedom to choose our own path in life, how easy or difficult do you find it to trust God to guide you to the proper paths for your life? Which of your character traits and behaviors can you attribute to God's direction? How can confidence that you are on the proper path reduce your fear when you face tough choices? Where is God leading you today?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, thank you for being my shepherd. Lead me into a truly good life, based not on my own wishes and instincts, but on your eternal principles. Amen.

## Tuesday, October 13

### **Scripture: James 1:12-16**

Those who stand firm during testing are blessed. They are tried and true. They will receive the life God has promised to those who love him as their reward.

No one who is tested should say, "God is tempting me!" This is because God is not tempted by any form of evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Everyone is tempted by their own cravings; they are lured away and enticed by them. Once those cravings conceive, they give birth to sin; and when sin grows up, it gives birth to death. Don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.

**Observation:** The phrase "don't lead us into temptation" (Matthew 6:13, Luke 11:4) may sound as if we have to plead with God to not lead us into settings that lure us off the best path for our lives. But God isn't in the business of tempting us to do wrong. At Messiah, we say the phrase with a comma in it: "Lead us, not into temptation." Matthew's longer version of the prayer added, "rescue us from the evil one." That is the way God leads us. Jesus' prayer promised that God always has our best interests in mind and reminded us to always let God lead us.

**Application:** James was definite: "No one who is tested should say, 'God is tempting me!'" When something happened that strained your faith, have you ever said (or had someone say to you), "Why is God doing this?" How can James' assurance that "Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above" (James 1:17) correct and reassure you when you feel like blaming God for bad things in your life?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, lead me, not into temptation, but into the path of a rewarding and fruitful life that you have laid out for me, and for all your beloved children. Amen.

## Wednesday, October 14

### **Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

**Observation:** When the apostle Paul lived, many people shared the belief that "do whatever you want" pretty much defined "the good life." (It even had a big philosophical name—hedonism. You may have noticed that some people still believe that today.) Paul told the Galatian Christians that a truly good life results as we open ourselves to letting God's Spirit lead us. He listed nine dynamic qualities the Spirit produces in our lives.

**Application:** Which of the nine fruits do you find already most present in your life? Which of them are you most eager for the Spirit's power to grow more of in you? What is your part in nurturing a soul "climate" in which the fruit of the Spirit can grow?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Paul made sense. Why would anyone make a law against "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"? Please grow that wonderful fruit in my life. Amen.

## Thursday, October 15

### **Scripture: John 3:17-21, 16:12-15**

God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him isn't judged; whoever doesn't believe in him is already judged, because they don't believe in the name of God's only Son. "This is the basis for judgment: The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil. All who do wicked things hate the light and don't come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. Whoever does the truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God."

"I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He won't speak on his own, but will say whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and proclaim it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said that the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you.

**Observation:** Though many people think Christianity is about condemnation, Jesus said he did not come to judge the world. Instead, he told the Hebrew leader Nicodemus (right after the well-known John 3:16 passage) that we humans condemn ourselves when our choices show that we love darkness more than light. Loving the light takes continued growth, and Jesus was direct with his disciples: "I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now." But he promised that the Holy Spirit would continue his work of teaching and leading them.

**Application:** Have you ever known someone who "loved darkness more than the light," who feared having their actions exposed to the light? Have those words ever applied to any part of your inner life? In what ways does John 3:21 invite you to keep moving toward God's light, even when it may alter your wishes or comfort level?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you knew, long before we figured it out, that condemnation is a lousy motivator. Help me learn to live in the glow of your love and guidance, and to extend your spirit to other people in my life. Amen.

## Friday, October 16

### **Scripture: Luke 9:20-25; Hebrews 12:1-4**

He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ sent from God." Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected—by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts—and be killed and be raised on the third day." Jesus said to everyone, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will save them. What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?"

So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.

Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up. In your struggle against sin, you haven't resisted yet to the point of shedding blood.

**Observation:** When Peter said Jesus was the promised Messiah, Jesus agreed—but said frankly that being the Christ (“anointed one”) meant suffering, not earthly power. And it meant that for those who chose to follow him, too. In Hebrews 12, the writer used Greek Olympic Game images to urge believers to run the entire race set before them with endurance. The key to Christian spiritual stamina, the letter said, is to fix our eyes on Jesus. We must set aside anything that hinders us, and keep our inner focus always on Jesus, who endured even the cross for us.

**Application:** In what ways have you had to answer Jesus' question: “What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?” What choice(s) have you made, or do you face, that promise gain, yet might cost your values, self-respect or honor? In what ways can you gain the strength and self-knowledge to choose rightly?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, even in our tolerant culture, when we serve as you served, and stand firm for God's principles as you did, it can feel like suffering. Give me a heart that's always oriented to your ways, even when under pressure. Amen.

**Saturday, October 17**

**Scripture: John 10:2-5, 11-15**

The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The guard at the gate opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he has gathered all of his sheep, he goes before them and they follow him, because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger but will run away because they don't know the stranger's voice.”

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him. “I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep.

**Observation:** One metaphor Jesus chose to describe his role was “I am the good shepherd.” To do his job well, a shepherd had to thoroughly understand sheep. He had to know what makes them thrive, and what things are harmful (or even deadly) to them. Based on what you can learn (or already know) about shepherds, in what ways is Jesus most like a shepherd? (A modern classic about shepherds is Phillip Keller's *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*.)

**Application:** Jesus painted a beautiful image of the shepherd calling each of his sheep by name: “He goes before them and they follow him, because they know his voice.” Like the shepherd, God leads us by calling each of us by name. He calls each one of us to follow Him, not willing to leave anyone behind. When have you heard God calling you to follow Him? How did you hear God? How does it strengthen you to realize that God knows and calls you by name? In what ways are you training yourself to “hear” and “recognize” Jesus' voice, so that you can follow him to a life of eternal safety?

**Prayer:** Lord God, you are the shepherd and I am your sheep. You lead me away from trouble and onto higher ground. Thank you for calling me by name and guiding me every day. Amen.