

Mark 13:1-6

¹As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, **“Beware that no one leads you astray”**. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.

Lanna sent me a picture by text showing a sign that said, “Lead me not into temptation. Oh, who am I kidding? Follow me; I know a shortcut.” Don’t we all know a shortcut?

We are constantly bombarded with temptation, some relatively harmless and some soul-crushing. How do we avoid them and the evil they lead to? That is the heart of “and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

I would like us to divide this petition into three parts:

Lead us

Temptation

Deliver us

As Adam Hamilton (who inspired this series) suggests, this petition should be read: “and lead us (pause), Not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.” so we can focus on our request for God to lead us and to remember, and as James 1:13 says, God tempts no one!

Going along with that thought, it is time to put aside the cliché, “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle.” This is not to deny God, but to recognize that life often gives folks more than they can take by themselves. The tragedy of suicide and the reality of drug abuse and other addictions reminds us that life gives us more than we can handle on our own. And when we feel beaten down that way, we are tempted to travel down deadly lanes.

So, the first request we need to focus on is “lead us”.

I think of two great hymns that we could sing with this petition: “He Leadeth Me” and “Precious Lord, Take My Hand”. God sent Jesus to guide us, and the Spirit dwells with us to show us the way. God leads us; that’s not the issue. The problem is, will we listen and follow? I remember when Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” to Peter. Peter needed to take his place as a follower of Jesus and so do we. Jesus may be our friend but he is also our leader. More on this later.

Our decision to follow depends on which voice or voices we listen to. As the 23rd Psalm celebrates, God wants to lead us toward good things. God encourages us to do what is right. ²“He makes me lie

down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake."

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, wants to keep our souls safe. "So lead us, Jesus", we pray. "Follow me," he says.

We are called to be faithful followers and let him lead us in the way we should go.

One question is, how do we know who we are following? One way is to remember Jesus says his sheep know his voice. When we spend time around Jesus, we too know his voice. John 10:27 puts it this way "27My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

I am always stressing Prayer, Devotions, and Bible Study because those things help us to develop an ear for his voice. They give us the ability to tell his voice from other voices calling to us. So when we hear his voice, we hear the words of someone who loves us and wants the best for us.

The most significant challenge facing the church today is not "Will it survive?", but "Will we follow Jesus?" Will the church listen to Jesus, or will we follow voices of greed, self-centeredness, apathy, division, bigotry, and hatred? Those voices are especially enticing when they are dressed up in religious clothing like the old wolf in sheep's clothing image Jesus used for false prophets Matthew 7:15 "15Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

It is easy to follow Jesus when the paths are smooth. But, sometimes, the ways are treacherous. Sometimes resisting the other voices means taking a stand instead of excusing our behavior. What happens when the paths are challenging? When we pray but we don't like the answer, we get.

Many people have selective hearing. They seem to only hear what they want to hear. Sometimes people pretend not to hear when they don't like the message. A simple example is, "It's time to turn the TV off and do your homework or chores." We act as if we didn't hear. We might fool others, probably not as much as we think, but it is nearly impossible to fool ourselves. So we hear even when we don't want to, even when we act as if we didn't.

Jesus' call to "Follow my lead" is for our own good, even when the path is difficult. In the dance of life, we are called to follow Jesus' lead. Jesus calls us to follow him so that we are safe from the temptations we face, or at least safer.

Safe from temptation is a better understanding of the phrase we render "Lead us not into temptation." We pray for Jesus to show us the way because temptation lures us down other paths each day. We ask Jesus to keep us safe from temptation.

What tempts you?

We are tempted every day in severe and silly ways. Temptation comes in things we laugh about and those that can harm us. But even that extra slice of pizza that seems harmless until we put on our Covid 19, and now I can't swallow it.

My foster mother used to say, "A little dab of pie never hurt anyone; you've got to live." But unfortunately, she had diabetes, and a little dab of pie played havoc with her blood sugar. So, sometimes, things that we make light of can hurt us.

I just read a post by Carey Nieuwhof that pastors are tempted and fall victim to using other people's sermons word for word, and it costs them their integrity and their positions.

https://careynieuwhof.com/5-reasons-you-shouldnt-preach-other-peoples-sermons/?he=sbl_63118%40msn.com&el=email&utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=This+is+why+shouldn+t+preach+someone+else+s+sermon&utm_campaign=4%2F3+-+5+Reasons+You+Shouldn+t+Preach+Other+People+s+Sermons

The internet makes it all too easy to take this shortcut. But it also makes it easy to be exposed. It happened even to a tall steeple preacher in St. Louis. Battling depression after an accident that cost him part of his leg, he resorted to using the sermons of others. He felt he couldn't keep up and felt there was no place for ministers to seek help. He found a psychiatrist, but fell victim to more profound depression and continued his downward spiral. This was so tragic as it cost him his pastorate and his life. He committed suicide.

Overdramatic? Maybe, but temptation can have tragic consequences.

We can also be tempted by morally and ethically wrong things, even when they seem harmless. I used to think my 9th-grade algebra/spelling teacher overreacted to a very minor issue. Mr. Wells had a thing about government pens. Most families were associated with Redstone Arsenal or Marshall Space Flight Center. Parents would bring home pens from work with US Government on them, and the kids would use them in school. He hated that and said it was stealing and banned them in his class. He knew that temptation works that way, luring us from things that don't seem to matter to soul-poisoning acts. So, in his eyes, the first step to significant wrongdoing began with something that we called okay.

It may not pens for us, but what might it be that we know is wrong, that we dismiss as making no difference, and we do it anyway?

Even Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, when he was hungry, to make bread to relieve his hunger. What could it hurt? It could hurt him because he needed to depend on God here. In the same way, he was to use his power to gain political authority and prove God would protect him. What could it hurt? Jesus knew it would lead him away from God's path.

Most of us remember those stories of temptation in the wilderness. Luke 4:1 says, "13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time." The next time it came in the form of someone close to him.

Peter rebuked Jesus when he explained to his disciples that a cross awaited him in Jerusalem. “Don’t be silly. This cannot happen to you. You are the Christ.” This was a temptation to take the safe path and abandon his calling. Temptation can even come from those closest to us!

In response, Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus told him, “I am the leader, and you are the follower. So get back there in the follower’s place. Get behind me. I will lead, and you will follow.”

I know it sounds overdramatic, but we are in spiritual warfare with temptation. Sometimes it is the temptation to take the easy path. Sometimes we are tempted to give up.

I remember the temptation to give up. When I first did a 600-pound squat in competition. I had gone down and broken parallel. That means the break at the top of the leg goes lower than the knee. I started to rise, and there was a point where I heard the give-up voice: “This is too much. You can’t do this.” I had to decide to silence the voice. I needed to continue standing up straight, and risk failure or give up, and let the spotters assist me as I gave up. I took the risk in my mind, and it was worth it. I hit my personal best.

We can do great things when we silence that call to quit because it is too hard. But, on the other hand, we might be tempted to take the easy path of our prejudices and opinions and label those who disagree with us with disparaging remarks. We can be tempted to take the “Play it safe or give up.”

I know how easy it would be to give up my mild-moderate commitment to racial justice and support for the LGBT community and other justice issues. Unfortunately, the voices of “That is not popular,” or “That might offend someone” echo in my mind. That is why I chose the hymn “Fight the Good Fight.” It is a battle, a spiritual battle to stand up and speak up for what we believe is right.

We ask Jesus to keep us safe from Satan, the source of so many tempting voices.

That old cartoon image of the devil sitting on our shoulder whispering in our ear has more truth than we want to admit. I believe Satan tries to lure me down paths I shouldn’t go. Not only that, but he makes them appear as good choices.

In the New Testament, Satan is personified evil. He is the evil one, the devil who opposes God’s will. Some people see Satan as a symbol of the evil that resists God and that’s okay. I tend to side with C S Lewis, who pointed out that the devil’s greatest weapon is to convince people he doesn’t exist. We pray to keep us safe from evil or the evil one. Either way, evil seeks to grab us and drag us down paths of spiritual and sometimes physical death.

Evil is that voice like Palpatine in Star Wars that whispers, “Give yourself to the dark side” as Luke Skywalker is called to feed on his hatred and feed off his anger. Evil calls good people to dangerous places. The evil one can kill our souls and can work to destroy the soul of a nation.

Satan can lead a nation down a path of hatred and bigotry that destroys its soul.

Martin Luther's words were used to lure Germany down such a path. At one time he had sympathy for the mistreatment of the Jews, but later changed his mind and published "Jews and Their Lies" a piece that undergirded the Holocaust. This genocide was perpetrated by an overwhelmingly Christian nation. This same kind of hatred leads to the slaughter of Tutsi and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. In both cases, most of the perpetrators claimed Christianity. Hatred in Buchenwald, Rwanda, or Charlottesville is hatred. It is deadly for individuals and victims and for the nation's soul. This is the evil one at work wherever the forces of racism, hatred, and bigotry are found.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" is a prayer of resistance to Satan and temptation and a prayer for leadership from Jesus.

Jesus, keep us safe from the work of the evil one, keep us safe from temptation, and lead us where you would have us go.

"And lead us (pause) not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."