

## The Prayer of Deliverance

Sterling UMC  
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Matthew 6:9-13

There is an old expression that goes, "There are two things you can not avoid, death and taxes." Well I think that it would be more accurate to say there are three things you can't avoid in this life; death, taxes, and temptation.

Temptation is something we all have to deal with in our lives. It is always there. In fact someone has said temptation is like a telemarketer,

- it comes to us when it is least convenient
- it comes back again and again
- it keeps pushing even after you say "No"
- it makes what it is selling sound great . . . but there is always a catch

Someone asked, "Why is it that opportunity knocks only once . . . but temptation knocks persistently?"

This is especially true as we strive to live as Christians and to live a holy and Godly life in this world. All of us who strive to live a Christian life know what it is like to be tempted. It's like the T-shirt that I saw one time. It said, "Lead me not into temptation - I can find it for myself."

We all understand that temptation is a part of life. We also understand that temptation leads to trouble.

That's why we need what we're going to talk about this morning. The Prayer of Deliverance.

Over the last four weeks we've been looking at each phrase of the Lord's Prayer, in depth and in detail. And this morning as we reach the conclusion of the series we come to this phrase, "*Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*"

We often think temptation is an enticement or a lure to do something evil, wicked, mean, bad and nasty. The really bad stuff – murder, adultery, fornication. All of these different sins that *other* people do and we tend to think that temptation is just about the big things in life. The forbidden, the evil things in life.

But actually I have found that Satan is much more subtle in my life. Sometimes even more prevalent are what I call the subtle temptations. I don't know if any of you deal with any of these but I do.

The temptation to do what works. Not necessarily the right thing but what works.

The temptation to do what's easy. Like when you're a parent and you set your kid down in front of the television and let that baby sit. And a thousand other ways we do what's easy.

The temptation to do what's quick.

The temptation to do what is self-serving or best for *me*.

I find myself often tempted by the temptation to do what's unimportant. To not do what really matters in life, the essential things in life but to do stuff, and then ask, "Why am I doing this? Why am I frittering away my time? Procrastinating and doing the unimportant?"

The temptation to do what I've always done.

The temptation to do what's right for the wrong reason.

The temptation to do nothing. When you see something and you think, "I know I could help that person. I know I could help in that situation. I know I could do that." But you don't do anything.

The truth is temptation is a lot more subtle than we think it is. But the answer to the temptations that we experience in life is in this verse which is the prayer of deliverance. The prayer of deliverance always leads us to the path of escape.

Jesus said, you are to pray, "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*" And then he says, "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" That's the prayer of deliverance and it is the path of escape. For you see when we pray this prayer with faith and sincerity there is a promise that goes along with it.

We hear that promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*The temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. And when you are tempted he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.*" A way out! That's exactly what we need. So this morning we're going to look at the way out. What is the path of escape?

The first step of the path of escape from the prayer of deliverance.

1. I must identify what makes me vulnerable.

Notice I didn't say identify what tempts you. You already know what tempts you. What you may have never really thought through is what causes me to be tempted by that. What makes me vulnerable to that temptation? What makes me weak? What makes me susceptible? More important than knowing what tempts you is knowing the when, where, why, how, and all the other factors that go into that temptation, if you're serious about deliverance.

Jesus said this in Matthew 26:41, "*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.*" In other words, you may be willing, you may want to overcome your temptation but will power is not enough. Yeah, you can force yourself for a while but as soon as you get tired, the will poops out. Jesus

says, Watch and pray. You can't just pray. It's important to pray (and we will get to that in a few minutes) but besides praying you also have to do some watching.

What is he saying you need to watch for? You need to watch for the circumstances that make you vulnerable. You need to identify those and work with them, because every one of us is unique and different and some things tempt you and don't tempt other people.

How do you do this? Let me give you five questions you need to ask yourself.

First, you need to ask yourself, When am I most tempted? In other words what day of the week. Maybe a certain time of the day. Maybe you're more tempted in the morning or at lunch or late afternoon. Maybe you're tempted when everybody else is in bed. You need to figure out when are you most tempted.

You need to ask, Where? Where am I most tempted? Some of you are most tempted at work. Some of you are most tempted at your neighbor's house. Maybe you get tempted in the kitchen. Do you get tempted at a bar? Do you get tempted at the beach? A lot of you get tempted in front of a computer. You need to know your area of vulnerability. When am I most tempted, where am I most tempted?

Three, Who? Who is with me when I'm most tempted? Am I most tempted when I'm alone? Am I most tempted when I'm with friends who lead me in the wrong direction? Am I most tempted when I'm with my co-workers? Am I most tempted when I'm with a crowd of strangers and I think nobody would know me? Am I tempted with my family? You need to figure this out. When? Where? Who?

Four is What? What temporary benefit do I get if I give in to the temptation? You see there's always a pay off. I mean why else would it be tempting if there weren't some sort of benefit? The problem is it usually doesn't last. It's only temporary. So what is the temporary benefit I get when I give in to temptation? Do I get comfort? Do I get excitement? Do I get joy? Do I get pleasure? Do I get a false sense of confidence? You need to know what's the payoff and what the consequence when I do this.

The fifth thing you need to ask is How? How do I feel right before I'm tempted? What are your emotional triggers? You need to know what makes you vulnerable. Is it frustration? Is it stress? Is it when you're bored? When you're lonely?

When, where, who, what, how, you need to know these things. That's step one: identify what makes me vulnerable. Watch. Don't just pray. Watch and pray.

Then once you know that pattern here's step number two.

2. Plan to avoid it.

You don't wait until you're in the situation to decide am I going to give in to this or not? No, you decide before your emotions kick in to gear.

The Bible says this. *"Plan carefully what you do. Avoid evil. Walk straight ahead. Don't go one step off the right way."*

What does that mean? Well if you know the things that make you vulnerable; the when, where, who, what, and how, you need to do what you can to avoid those things. Do not knowingly put yourself into a situation that you know is ripe for temptation

If you know that in a certain place there will be a situation that will tempt you ...stay away! If you know that there are friends who will encourage sin...avoid them. If you know that certain practices will stir up sinful emotions or dull your sensibilities ...stay away. If you know that certain people are a temptation for you, stay away from them or make sure that someone is always with you when you see them. If you know that certain situations always bring out the worst in you ... avoid those situations. Martin Luther said, "We cannot keep the birds from flying over us, but we can keep them from making a nest in our hair."

So you know the when, the where, the why, the who, the what, the how that makes you vulnerable. Then you plan to avoid that area.

3. Step number three: I guard my heart.

I must guard my heart. This is very, very important because the Bible says that out of the heart everything comes. Temptation always starts inside of you. We think temptation is on the outside. No, it is not. The trigger is on the outside but the temptation is actually inside you.

James 1:14 says, *"We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. It is inside you, out of a person's heart come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, the desire to kill people, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceitfulness, lust, envy, slander, arrogance, and foolishness. All these vile things come from not outside, but inside."*

So I must guard my heart. The Bible says this *"Do not give the devil a foothold."* How do you give the devil a foothold? What is a foothold? It's a mental state. It is a negative emotion. Any time you hold a negative emotion in your life for an extended period of time whether it's anger or worry or fear or bitterness or envy or jealousy or all of these other things. The longer you hold that you are allowing the evil one to get a stronghold in your life, in your brain.

So you've got to guard your heart.

4. The fourth thing you need to do is you need to pray for deliverance.

What I mean by that is just ask for God's help. The Bible tells us that God is ready to help. He says we're to pray *"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."* That is the prayer of deliverance. You ask God for help.

The Prayer of Deliverance is often just one word: *help!* It doesn't have to be, "Our gracious heavenly Father..." No. You don't have to have a long conversation. You can just say, "Help! Mayday! Mayday! SOS! God, I'm facing something now that my will power is not strong enough to handle. God, I need to pray the prayer of deliverance."

What can you expect when you pray the Prayer of Deliverance? You can expect God's help. Why? Because God has promised it. Psalm 50:15, "*Call upon me in your day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will honor me.*"

God is sympathetic to your situation. He knows everything that's going on in your life. He knows the things that tempt you. In fact, listen to this verse. "*Jesus understands our weakness for he faced all the same temptations we do yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to our gracious God and then we will receive his mercy and grace to help us when we need it.*"

So I pray for deliverance.

Then number five, this is a real key on the path of escape.

5. I turn my attention elsewhere.

I change the direction of my thoughts. I refocus on something else. I shift my attention. If you're watching something on TV that you don't like, you don't sit there and go, "I'm not going to listen... I'm not going to listen... I'm not going to listen... I am *not* going to listen..." No. You just flip the channel. That's all you need to do.

Here's the secret to temptation: don't fight it. Just refocus. Don't resist, refocus. Whatever you have in your life that you resist you're just nailing it harder into your life. Whatever you resist persists. "I'm not going to have another cigarette... I'm not going to take another drink..." Whatever you resist persists. Did you know in the Bible not once are you told to resist temptation? We are told to resist the devil and that's a whole different issue. That's another sermon. But in temptation, the key to overcoming temptation is not push back. It's just change my focus. All of a sudden I'm not interested in that any more. When I get a new focus, when I refocus, all of a sudden that which had my attention I forget about. That principle works in every single area of life.

If you focus on good things in life, godly things in life, true things in life, it's going to pull you that direction. If you focus on the stuff that's at the movies and the stuff that's in the magazines it's going to pull you that direction. Whatever you focus on gets your attention. Whatever gets your attention is going to get you.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness and the devil said, "Turn these stones to bread," he didn't say, "Oh, no I'm not hungry." He was hungry. He'd been fasting forty days. He just turned his mind to something else. He quoted Scripture. That's the key. Fill your mind with truth, good thoughts, good things and it pushes out all of the junk in your mind.

So here are the steps. Identify what makes me vulnerable. I know why I get tempted. Then I plan to avoid those places. Just stay away from those things. Guard your heart. Don't allow the devil a foothold. Pray for God's help. Ask God to give you deliverance. Pray the prayer of deliverance. Then turn my attention elsewhere.

Following Christ does not exempt you from temptation.

What I'm telling you is, on this earth you're never going to be sinless. But it is possible but it is possible to sin *less*. You're never going to be sinless. But it is possible to sin *less*.

*Recap of series: The Lord's Prayer is a series of 5 prayers. The Prayer of:*

*Connection – "Our Father..."*

*Surrender – "Thy will be done..."*

*Dependence – "Give us ... our daily bread."*

*Release – "Forgive us our debts ..."*

*Deliverance – "Lead us not into temptation..."*

Pray the Lord's Prayer: