

Rich Nathan
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Lord, Teach Us To Pray
Matthew 6:12

How To Handle Temptation

This evening [morning] I am going to be continuing in a series that I have been doing on prayer that I have titled, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” And we have been going through The Lord’s Prayer, what we might call “the children’s prayer.” It begins “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.”

Along the way, we have discovered that if we are going to pray well, we want to begin with God. And so we went through the first three petitions, which concern God’s name, God’s reign and God’s will. If you are going to pray, you want to get absorbed with God. You start off by becoming God-centered, lifting up your eyes away from yourself and your problems. And you may recall that I read to you from Colossians 3 and Gene Peterson’s paraphrase from the wonderful translation of the Bible called “The Message.” I want you to hear this again so that it becomes inscribed in your memories. Colossians 3:

So, if you are serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up and be alert to what is going on around Christ. That’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Don’t just shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with things right in front of you. If you want to pray well, just don’t get absorbed with your own problems, your own issues and your own pain. Rather, look up and be alert to what is going on around Christ.

Focus on Christ. His power, his kingdom, his goodness, his sympathy—that's where the action is!

And then we turn from God's kingdom to our daily bread. And we saw that Jesus outlines the whole of life by the last three petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The last three petitions read, "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." And in teaching us to pray this way, Jesus essentially says to pray about the whole of life. Pray about the body, that is your daily bread. Pray about your soul, that is your relationship with others and forgiveness. And pray about your spirit. That is your spiritual life: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Now tonight [today] I want to talk about praying against temptation. I would like to explore temptation by turning back a couple of chapters to Matthew 4 and the three temptations of Jesus. Matthew 4:1-11:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended to him.

As we read this text about Jesus' temptation, my goal is that you would become better equipped to handle temptation and pray against it. I have called today's talk, "How to Handle Temptation". Let's pray.

In handling temptation, we must first of all understand the different roles that God and Satan play in our temptation and our testing. It says in verse 1 of Matthew 4, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." One of the struggles that we have as believers when we are undergoing a time of trial or difficulty or when we are battling with a temptation toward sin and evil is the feeling that we have been abandoned by God. That I would not be undergoing this kind of stress or pressure, the battle wouldn't be as hot as it feels, I wouldn't be getting shot at if God was with me and if God had not left me alone. It is a tremendous encouragement for me to read Matthew 4:1 which says: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit [and underline that in your Bible: Led by the Spirit] into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

I think it is important that before we even talk about temptation and Satan's role and activity that we remember the sovereignty and control of God over all things including our trials and our pains, our pressures and our temptations. Now, in a moment, I will tell you flat out that God does not tempt us with sin. It is Satan who comes to tempt us with sin. But the great comfort to me and the great encouragement to you, right off the bat, is to remember that Satan would have no ability to tempt you unless God permitted it. Satan has great power. He is very subtle. He has a variety of devices and weapons in his arsenal. But we always must remember that Satan's power is a limited power. And despite all of his

awesome weapons and all that he controls through the world and government and persecution and accusation, through counterfeits and witchcraft, drugs and pornography, despite all that he manages and all that he controls, it is a great comfort and encouragement that the Lord reigns!

I like the way Martin Luther puts it: 'The devil is God's devil. The devil's power is a limited power.

You may remember that in the book of Job, Satan had to go to God to get permission to afflict Job. The supreme authority is always held by God.

Now, I don't pretend to understand the exact interaction of God and Satan in all things. This is a great mystery. And all of the purposes of God in permitting a certain limited freedom for Satan. I do know that God is doing everything for his glory and for our good. But it is very important to understand the even though Satan is a roaring lion and a great dragon, he is still under the thumb of God. And the fact that you are being tempted in no way should suggest to you that you are abandoned by God or rejected by God. Rather, you should say to yourself, "This too was permitted by sovereign God. He has a plan for me; something good can come out of this battle with temptation."

Now, not only so, but we must remember that God and Satan have very different goals in mind. God is so wise. God is so powerful. So well planned that he can give permission to Satan to bring pressure and trials and difficulties and temptation and evil in your life and still work all of that for your good and his glory. God and Satan not only have different roles to play in testing and temptation, but they have different goals in mind. One of the verses that really expresses this well is Genesis 50:20, when Joseph is speaking to his brothers. He says to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." You guys intended to hurt

me and to bring me down and to ruin me. But God, reigning as he does, was able to use your evil goals to work good, not only for me, but to bring about the saving of many lives through me.

Why does Satan tempt us? He does so to weaken us, to ruin us. He understands that the more we yield, the weaker we will be.

Why does God allow Satan to tempt us? He does it to strengthen us, to help us. Temptation is like weights in weight lifting. God understands that the more we resist temptation, the stronger we will be. Satan wants us to yield to temptation so that we will hurt ourselves and bring hurt to others. God wants us to resist temptation so that we will help ourselves and bring healing to others.

Satan wants us to yield to temptation so we will feel dirty. Do you know that feeling where you just feel dirty? Ashamed? God wants us to resist temptation so that we will feel clean.

Satan's goal is to cause us to hide from God. And God's goal is to cause us to run toward God. Satan wants us to flee from God's presence and to become independent. And God allows temptation, pressure and pain to come into our lives to drive us to Him and to make us more dependent upon God. Satan loves it when through yielding to temptation, we are filled with fear. And God loves it when through resisting temptation, we are filled with confidence in God's strength in our lives and His working in our lives. Satan wants to ultimately bring about our spiritual death. And God's goal is that by strengthening us and perfecting us through the fire we will have spiritual life.

And you know, you need something to resist to get strong. I have been lifting weights for years. And the only way to strengthen muscle is to load on extra weight. You

simply cannot get stronger lifting the same weight for years. And so God allows Satan to load on the weights.

But God's intention is never to draw you into sin. James 1:13 says, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."

God's purpose in allowing and permitting Satan to tempt us is to cause us to resist and to grow in our ability to resist so that we would become confident, so that we would become free, so that we would have a greater zone in life of spiritual liberation, so that we would become dependent on him, so that we could help others who are struggling with temptation.

God and Satan have different roles in temptation. God and Satan have different goals in temptation. And God and Satan have different methods as it touches on temptation.

You know, Satan's method is always "buy now, pay later." It is always "you can get a thrill now with very little investment." Engage in illicit sex and WOW. Or get drunk or get high or involve yourself in some illicit scheme and, man, there is this initial rush with very little investment. You get the job by lying on your resume. You get the boyfriend by playing the game. Then, what Satan does is once you are hooked on this "no cost" scheme, he ups the ante and anyone who has ever studied the course of addictions understands this idea that over a period of time, your tolerance for someone, for something, grows and it takes more of that substance, that drug, that pornography, that relationship to produce the same level of high. Anyone who is in any kind of recovery group or anyone who has ever been addicted, or anyone who does therapy with recovering addicts understands this very fundamental

demonic principle of increased tolerance upon some substance. It could even be eye drops or aspirin or nose drops. I have seen people absolutely addicted to decongestants.

Satan not only ups the cost, but over a period of time, he lowers the return. And, initially we just have a mind-blowing experience from our first exposure to something addictive, but over a period of time, the return goes down and down and down until finally Satan's ultimate goal is that you would be completely addicted and completely dependent and derive no return at all.

God's methodology is exactly the reverse. God's methodology in training us is to often force us to press in and press in with very little return. We pray for the sick and see very little happen. We pray for the sick and see very little happen. We pray for the sick and see very little happen. And then all of a sudden we have a little blessing, a little bit of the kingdom come. God requires high front-end investments. He requires risk and self-denial and pursuit of him. But after a period of time, it feels like the cost goes down, the kingdom comes easier and easier and easier. And at the end of the day, what God wants us all to say is, "My goodness, it feels like it is all grace. The kingdom comes so easily to me. It is hard to remember that it was so difficult and so painful." Radically different methodologies.

In understanding the background to temptation, I not only want you to understand the different roles, different goals and different methods of God and Satan, but you must lay hold of the reality that Jesus was really tempted. Not by something internal in him that rose up to form agreement with Satan, but externally this temptation was real. The temptation was powerful. It was not simply hypothetical or theoretical. There is a real possibility that Jesus, in his humanity, could have sinned. In his divinity, no. God cannot sin nor be tempted with sin. But in Jesus' humanity, there was a real possibility of sin.

You say, “Why do I have to understand that? That Jesus was really tempted in order for me to handle temptation?”

Well, I think you need to understand that because it will enable you to distinguish between temptation to sin and sin, which is essential in handling temptation. One of Satan’s great battle plans against us is to cause us to become discouraged and despondent over our temptations.

“Look at you, you wretch. You are tempted to loose your temper again.”

“Look at you, you almost cursed again.”

“How can you call yourself a Christian when you are tempted to lust after the opposite sex and are tempted to turn your head.”

“Oh, you must not be a really good person, a really good Christian if you are involved in this tremendous battle. If you were just more holy and more devoted, you wouldn’t have this battle raging.”

Friends, do not give into the lie that because you are tempted, you have already sinned and you might as well go ahead and sin. Jesus was tempted. He felt the heat of the battle. But he never yielded to the temptation. Temptation is not sin, yielding to temptation is sin.

And it is okay for you to be encouraged and to strengthen yourself and to say, “Hey, being involved in a battle is just a normal part of life. In fact, if I wasn’t valuable, Satan would probably leave me alone.” If you didn’t have some usefulness to God and the kingdom of God, Satan would leave you alone and ignore you. The truth is, Christians often undergo the worse temptation. Far worse than non Christians. Many Christians are surprised, they think it strange. “Here I have given my life to Christ and things have fallen apart. Here I have repented and made a resolution and things are far more difficult for me.”

Have you ever felt that? Let me tell you something. The reason Satan is going after you so hard is because you are God's, not because you aren't God's. It is because you are pushing into holiness, not because you aren't pushing into holiness. If you were safe and in his house and locked up in one of his rooms, there is no battle. Never get discouraged over the battle. Never feel guilty because you are involved in a battle. Feel guilty if you yield. The fact is, if Satan came to Christ, he will come to you.

So, it is an encouraging thought that Jesus was tempted. That helps us to cut through the lie and the confusion that temptation equals sin. And it is an encouragement that Jesus, too, was tempted because as Hebrews 4:15 tells us,

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

If you are being tempted to despondency and depression, know that Jesus was tempted to despondency and depression. If you are tempted with self-pity, know that Jesus was tempted with self-pity. If you are tempted to disbelieve the promises of God because someone has betrayed you, know that Jesus was tempted to disbelieve the promise of God. If you are tempted to lust, know that Jesus was, likewise, tempted to lust.

We need a great amount of encouragement, the reason I am starting with these basic principles, is that I believe that we need a great amount of encouragement in handling temptation and pressures and pain. Let me put it this way to make my point more obvious. Who is it that you would want to talk to if you were going through major difficulties or the loss of a family member or a painful time in your life? Who would you want to talk with? Wouldn't you want to talk with a friend who was sympathetic? Someone who had gone through what you were going through? For example, someone who had also lost their

mother. Or also had to battle with temptation. You would want a friend who was sympathetic and who had gone through something like what you were going through. And who had overcome it. Who had battled successfully, so that you could draw strength from their success and their wisdom.

Is it not wonderful to know that you can flee to Jesus, run to him, knowing that he is your friend and that he sympathizes and that he understands exactly the pressure, the turmoil that is going on inside, how your flesh sometimes crawls and he has overcome and can give you some of his strength if you want it so that you don't have to yield to the temptation?

Again, for those of you who enjoy the background of a passage, Luke, in Luke's account of the temptations, I believe is attempting to portray Jesus as the last Adam who overcame where Adam fell. Luke runs his genealogy out to Adam to end chapter 3 and then to Jesus and immediately leads into the story of the temptation of Jesus in the beginning of Luke 4. Adam was tempted with food consumption. Jesus was tempted with food, but instead of succumbing to the temptation as Adam had, Jesus triumphed. And he really can serve as representative man because while Adam hadn't gone without food for any length of time, in fact, he could have eaten of any of the trees in the garden, Jesus was hungry and had fasted for 40 days. The test was stiffer. Adam suffered the temptation in paradise. Jesus, of course, undergoes a much more severe trial in the desert conquering Satan where Adam failed to conquer.

Now, Matthew doesn't necessarily draw the parallel with Adam, but rather with Israel. And Jesus, according to Matthew, is not the last Adam, but rather the true Israel. The true Son of God. Where Israel failed in the wilderness and in the desert, Jesus succeeds. Deuteronomy 8 speaks about God's testing of Israel in the desert saying, "You shall

remember all the ways that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” This is what occurred, of course, with the nation of Israel—they failed to meet the test. Jesus, the true Israel, succeeded.

Let’s look at the specific temptations that Christ faced. And you know, I believe that Jesus’ temptations really concerned very fundamental questions about life. What was posed to Jesus was some of the most basic questions that any human being can answer. And as you consider the questions that Jesus had to deal with in the desert, I am going to pose those same questions to you.

Matthew 4, we read in verse 2: “After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’”

Do you want to know the first question that Satan posed to Jesus? Who are you? Who are you? “If you are the Son of God...” Let me sow some doubt in your mind regarding your fundamental identity. You see, this temptation came on the heels of the Father speaking to Jesus about who he was. Just a verse earlier in Matthew 3:17 at Jesus’ baptism, the Father spoke a word of affirmation and identity to Christ and he said, “This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.” You are my Son, and I love you.

Satan comes along and attempts to sow doubt in the mind of Christ regarding who he is. Is the Father’s word to you really true, Jesus? Are you the Son of God?

You know, this is the starting point of so much temptation in our lives. We are attacked in the area of our identity. Who are you really? Because if you don’t know who you are, you may act in a way you are not. Satan has come along and said to the larger part of the human race, “You are not created by a loving God. There is no Father in heaven who

thinks about you. You are simply an accident of time and chance and evolution. Don't think of yourself as particularly special. You are no different than the animals. You have no particular value. You are just a mass of chemicals and hormones and urges swishing around in a blob of protoplasm." If you don't know who you are, you will probably act in a way that you are not.

Shortly after I came to Christ, or rather, he came to me, and I embraced new life in him, I was 18 and remember looking back on my high school experiences where I had taken a lot of drugs. I was in high school in the early 1970's. A lot of my classmates were into illegal drugs and so was I. I remember looking back and thinking about why I had taken so many drugs. It was really clear to me that it was because during high school I really did not value myself at all. I didn't think I was special to anyone. I didn't think that I really mattered and that my life really mattered. Or that it made any difference what I did to my body. And so I used to do the stupidest things. My friends and I used to leap from roof to roof over allies off of buildings in NY City. I used to take anything into my body that someone would hand me.

There are many people who are secular observers who see that a good part of the reason that teenagers and young people act so badly is because they don't have a sense of fundamental value. And so they are right in communicating that teens in order to act well need to have self-esteem. They are right.

They are wrong, however, terribly wrong in locating the source of self-esteem. The secular therapist believes that a person can gain self-esteem from themselves, that I can somehow, by speaking certain things about myself, make myself believe that I am valuable and lay hold of self-esteem. That is like trying to make water run up hill or lifting yourself off the ground by pulling your own hair.

I need a source higher than me to lift up my esteem. Teens and young people do need to know that they are valuable, that they are not just a mass of chemicals. That there is someone who thought of them, created them, cared for them and continues to care for them. That they are loved. But the source of real esteem must be God. It is never our self-constructed schemes of where we try to lift ourselves up as if by pulling on the top of my hair, I can pick myself up. No, I need someone above me to pick me up.

You say, “How does this apply to me?”

What I am driving at is, friends, identity precedes activity. That is the way it always is in the Bible. First, you must know who you are and be absolutely confident and clear about that before you can act in a responsible way. The pattern of all of Paul’s letters is “let me share with you who you are.” Identity. Identity. Identity. This is who you are, you are the righteousness of Christ. You are the forgiven of God. You are a saint. Having laid that as a foundation, therefore, you must act accordingly.

And here is what Satan does. He mixes us up and confuses us about our identity and gets us to believe that our identity is based on our most recent success or failure rather than on what the Word of God says regarding us. Or how the Word of God identifies us.

You say, “How does this apply to me?”

Well, who are you? Are you a sinner who occasionally does what is right? Or are you the righteousness of God who occasionally sins? How you answer the question, I am telling you, will determine the way you live. Are you a righteous person who occasionally sins and stumbles or are you fundamentally a sinner who occasionally does what is right? Are you the bride of Christ? If you believe that about yourself, then you will purify yourself and make yourself ready for him. But if you are just an unfaithful slave, an unrighteous addict, trapped in a prison, then you will act out of that identity. Much healing comes when

a person finally says, “I agree with what God says about me. I am a free person. I don’t have to sin. I am a righteous person. I am beloved of God. I am God’s friend.” Can you say those things about yourself? That is what the Word of God says regarding you.

Temptation #1 - Who are you Jesus?

Temptation #2: What does life consist of?

Satan says, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written man doesn’t live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Satan tried to confuse Jesus about what life was made up of. He tried to suggest to Jesus that real life was found in merely the material and the physical. Jesus said, “No. Real life, life that is worth living, is discovered in cultivating the spiritual side of things.” Man doesn’t live by bread alone, by simply being occupied with this world and what it could produce. But man lives off of every word that proceeds from God, in other words by cultivating the spiritual side of things.

Do you understand what Satan’s ultimate goal is in your life? It is not to try to get you to sacrifice your children to an idol. It is not simply to ruin your body with a sexually transmitted disease. Satan’s ultimate goal is simply to separate you from God. To create distance between you and God. And it doesn’t matter to Satan how that distance comes about as long as you become distant. So long as you are preoccupied with something other than God, so long as Satan has you buried in home decorating magazines and fixing up your house, moving from one project to another around the house. So long as Satan can move you from sport to sport to sport based on the season so that all of your free time is absorbed in athletics because you are fundamentally an athlete and not a Christian. So long as Satan can get you climbing the corporate ladder, taking all of your life and all of your time,

reaching up for another rung. So long as Satan can dominate your thoughts with the accumulation of money or dominate you with sex, or get you absorbed in cultivating your own body. Friends, it doesn't have to be a bad thing, as long as you take no time to nurture your spirit, Satan is happy. If it is all the body and all this world, and all horizontal and nothing vertical, no time to nurture the soul, he has won.

What does life consist of? Just this world? Just matter, energy and body and stuff? Or do you have a spirit that needs to be cultivated and nurtured? Must you feed it? If you do have a spirit, which the Bible says you do, then that spirit needs to be fed by the bread that proceeds from the mouth of God. Your spirit needs to be fed through prayer and the nurturance of spiritual activity.

These are basic questions: Who am I? What does life consist of? And the third basic question that Satan hit Jesus with was: Do you really want to be saved from sin?

“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Note the places of temptation here in this little story. The devil takes Jesus first of all to the holy city. They are talking about Jerusalem. Many of us think that we are safe from temptation so long as we are in an environment of holiness. Well, so long as I am surrounded by religion, I can't be tempted in the church, can I?

Oh, yes you can. You can't shut out temptation by high monastery walls. The monks in the middle ages found that out. Satan can penetrate whatever physical or religious wall you put up. In fact, religion can be a cloak for profound evil and wickedness. Some of the most wicked people I have ever met, were super spiritual. They weave out religious

words and we note here that Satan does the same. He quotes the Bible. Some of the most wicked people I have ever met have had a cloak and a mask of spirituality.

The church is not a defense, not a complete defense, against temptation. We find much sin in churches, don't we?

You know, this also has application to those of you who are second generation Christians. There are lots of folks who think that because I have been raised in a Christian home, or I go to a Christian school, I ought to be free from temptation and demonic assault. Demonic assault will absolutely work its way into a Christian family. Being a second generation Christian doesn't mean that you are going to be free from battling temptations. Just because your parents are Christians doesn't mean that you are not going to have to undergo the same types of trials, tasks and difficulties until you prove your faith.

Jesus is tempted in the holy place, in the holy city. And he is tempted in the high place. It says, "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple." The devil had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

You know, many people think that if they are lifted up, that is a point of safety. "Well, I wouldn't be experiencing all this blessing and all this favor if I wasn't secure and safe." One of the most dangerous places in the world is the high place. Satan lifts people up to bring them down. The Lord drives us down to lift us up.

You know, the moment you raise your head from the fox hole and decide, "OK, I am going to press into Christian leadership" that is the time that Satan takes note of you. I have watched this over and over again and have seen it in my own life. As people make commitments to sign up for leadership in the church, a lot of times they come under attack and it really surprises them. "How could this be? I am going through all of this difficulty

when I have just undertaken to lead a discipleship group or a small group or women's group or to get involved in a ministry. Things should be going well."

You don't understand spiritual warfare. Once you pop out of the fox hole, that is when you get shot at. And it is very plain from the scripture that leadership and eldership is a particularly dangerous place. The apostle Paul says that you shouldn't make novices, young Christians, into leaders in the church because they will fall into the snare of the devil. And I would ask you please, understanding this principle, please pray for me and pray for the leaders of this church, that we would be protected from the evil one.

Temptation comes in the holy place, temptation comes in the high place and temptation comes in the haughty place, the presumptuous place. The devil takes him onto the temple and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down for it is written that he will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

The devil here is quoting scripture, Psalm 91. It is interesting that a person can be full of the scriptures and yet be totally against God. The issue is always the heart. Is your heart oriented toward God? Some of the meanest people in the world are full of Bible knowledge. Some of the people who are wounding others and hurting others are full of Bible knowledge. It always has to do with your heart. Is your heart oriented toward God or away from God? The devil quotes the Bible and so do many people whose hearts are not right toward God.

But you know, the devil quotes the Bible inaccurately. Psalm 91 says this:

"If you make the Most High your dwelling, the Lord your refuge, then no harm will befall you."

The devil leaves out that little phrase “If you make the Lord your refuge.” Protection is not offered no matter how you live. Protection is offered if you abide in Christ. You don’t get protection if you do your own thing and function independently of God and his will. You get protection if you walk in God’s ways.

You say, “What is a haughty way, Rich? When am I being presumptuous?”

I am being presumptuous when I see how close I can get to the edge of the cliff without falling in. When I challenge God to protect me as I lean over the edge of a cliff, I am being haughty.

“Gee, I don’t understand why my boyfriend and I had sex. It goes against everything I believe. I feel so guilty.”

How near to the edge of the cliff were you leaning when you fell off?

“Well, we were sitting around in my apartment alone and it was 12:00 midnight and we were snuggling next to each other on the sofa.”

“I can’t understand how I had this affair.”

Well, how near to the cliff were you leaning before you fell off?

“Well, we were sharing intimate details of our lives together. We were spending lots of time together. We were cultivating a friendship. I was involved in lots of fantasy regarding this other person.”

The haughty place is the place of presumption where we think that we can take 15 steps and run all of the links of the chain of behavior out without necessarily taking the 16th step or get to the last link of the chain, the one in which I fall into sin.

Nelson has written a piece titled *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters*. I want you to listen to this. Here is the way it reads.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters:

Chapter One:

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the side walk.

I fall in.

I am lost...

I am helpless.

It isn't my fault.

It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter Two:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I pretend I don't see it.

I fall in again.

I can't believe I am in the same place, but it isn't my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter Three:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it is there.

I still fall in, it is a habit.

My eyes are open.

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

Chapter Four:

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

Chapter Five:

I walk down another street.

The haughty place. To deliberately walk down a street which will inevitably lead to the same hole. To believe that God will protect us no matter how close to the edge of the cliff we walk.

And you know, it is also haughty of us to use the scripture as Satan does. To twist it so that it becomes a cloak or mask for sin. Many of us do that, don't we? We use the forgiveness of sins as a cover for us to continue to sin. We say, "Well, Jesus came to be the Savior and so I can continue to sin and Jesus will continue to save."

The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:16 says this: That Paul's letters contain things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction. Many people twist the scripture and make it a cover for sin. Jesus did not come to save you in your sin. He came to save you from your sin.

Let me say that again. And by in so saying, I am only quoting Matthew 1:21 which the angels says to Joseph that Mary will give birth to a Son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. God does not offer forgiveness in our sins. It is when we turn from our sins and reach out to God that he says, "Ah, now you can receive my forgiveness."

It is haughty of us to believe that we can have more protection and more provision than what the Bible promises. The Bible does not promise that if we go as near to the edge

as we can, God will protect us from falling in the hole. Or if we twist the scripture and make forgiveness mean what it never was intended to mean, namely forgiveness while we continue to sin, that God will bless that.

Here is the last temptation, the last question that the devil posed to Jesus: How will you succeed in life?

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of this world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan. For it is written, 'worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' Then the devil left him and the angels came and attended to him.

How will you succeed in life? Now I believe that Jesus was shown the kingdom of this earth by way of a supernatural vision that Satan gave him. Satan can give visions as much as God. And I don't think that Satan took him on top of Mt. Everest or something—even from there you couldn't see all the kingdoms of the world. I think he saw it all on top of a mountain with a supernatural vision because high mountains in the Bible were often the scene of supernatural visions. You see that in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 40:2 says that God took Ezekiel up to a very high mountain where he got some vision.

But after showing him the kingdom, Satan says, "All this I will give you if you bow down and worship me." How will I succeed in life? Well, a part of the question is, who holds the keys to success? Who do I have to go to and bow down before in order to get the keys to the kingdom? Who controls the goodies?

I think people have badly interpreted this text to say that Satan has a right to give the kingdoms of the world because somehow he controls them and they wrongly quote Ephesians 2:2 out of context which says that Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the Spirit at work in the sons of disobedience. I believe that Satan is at work through

governments and through powers and corporations, through authorities. But Satan has no right to dispose of the kingdoms of the world.

The kingdoms of this earth are controlled and owned by God. And God promised the nations as Jesus' inheritance. Psalms 2: "Ask of me, the Lord says, and I will give you the nations."

How do you succeed in life? The question in part comes down to to whom do you have to bow down to to get the keys to the kingdom? Who really controls the goodies? And we get confused about this. We say, "Well my boss controls the keys to the kingdom and so I will just bow the knee to Satan on the job and say, 'Yes, Satan, I bow down to you, Satan' and then I will get the goodies."

We say, "Well, my boyfriend controls the keys to the kingdom and so I will compromise with my boyfriend and give him what he wants and is demanding. I will say, 'Yes, Satan. I will bow down to you.'"

We say, "Well, my parents and their acceptance holds the keys to the kingdom and so I will compromise my faith and I won't draw the line. Yes, Satan, a little bending of the knee..."

A co-worker, a client, a fellow student controls the keys to the kingdom and so I will hide my Christianity under a basket and I won't let anyone know that I am a Christian and I won't verbally share my faith. Yes, Satan. Compromise, compromise, compromise.

How should I succeed in life? Well, it depends on who holds the keys to the kingdom. Worship the Lord your God and him only, the Bible says.

You know the deal that Satan was offering Jesus, don't you? It was a crown without the cross. It was a kingdom without suffering.

Hasn't Satan offered you that deal? Look at you. God has practically starved you to death. He hasn't really protected you. You have been going through a really difficult time. Let me tell you what I can do for you, friend. Have I got a deal for you. You can have the kingdom, you can have all the goodies and you can have it without price, without pain, without suffering. Yup, you can have great children and not really have to invest in them at all. It is easy. It will be quick. Great kids without pain.

You can have a great marriage and you don't even have to spend time together or greet each other with a kiss or spend time listening to each other or forgive each other.

You can have a great body and not have to exercise.

You can lose weight while sitting on the sofa.

You can succeed in school without studying. You can goof-off, fool around and you don't have to turn your assignments in; you'll do okay.

That is Satan's deal all the time. The crown without the cross. Payoff without price.

But Jesus was to face that his whole life. He faced it from Peter when Peter said, "Don't go the way of the cross." He faced it from the crowds, "Don't go the way of the cross." He faced it from Judas, "Don't go the way of the cross." He faced it from mockers as he hung on the cross, "Get down from the cross. You can have the kingdom without a cross."

The Bible says, "No. No." The only way for us to get the kingdom is to embrace the cross. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and pick up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34. In other words, if you want what I have, there has to be a cross brought into your life. Where you deny yourself certain things that you want right now. Where you choose to serve, where you choose to be inconvenienced by another

person, where you put yourself out and put to death sins in your life, where you serve and put yourself in the lonely, humble place, that is the way of the cross and the crown.

How do I succeed in life? By recognizing that success comes only from the hand of God and by you embracing a cross. By refusing to listen to the lie that I can have it all without any investment of my life, my time, my service or my will.

Let me finish up with a few closing thoughts about how we actually do battle against temptation. The first thing I would say to you is that you have to know your role in the battle. It says here in Matthew 4:11, "Then the devil left him and angels came and attended him." The devil left Jesus after Jesus fought him and resisted him. The Bible says "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." He will not flee from you if you yield to him. He promises, "I will leave you alone if you just give in." No. No. He will leave you alone if you consistently resist. You have to know your role. And your role as a Christian, Friend, is to fight the devil. To fight. There is a popular Christian teaching that says, "Oh, that's your problem. You are fighting too much. You are struggling. You just have to hand it over to God. Let go and let God. God will do the fighting for you."

You resist the devil and he will flee from you. You have to be vigilant. You have to watch and pray. If you live after the flesh you will die, but if you through the Spirit puts to death the deeds of the body, you will live. You have to do it. You do it through the Spirit, but it is not done for you.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:12, "You fight the good fight of faith." He is exhorting Timothy here. Timothy has to fight.

All I am saying is in handling temptation, you have a role to play. You have to fight. You have to stir yourself. You have to repent. You have to pray. If you are waiting around

for God to do it for you, you have misunderstood the Bible. The Bible says that we have a role to play in doing battle against temptation. You have to know your role.

You have to know the stakes. If you consistently yield to temptation, you will be brought into bondage. You will get weaker. You will destroy your fellowship with God. You will have no peace. You will hurt other people. You will not be a blessing. Satan's goal is to ruin you. To destroy your joy. To make you miserable. The stakes are high. We are talking about enjoying the kingdom of God or living in death.

Know your role. Know the stakes. Know the Word of God.

Notice that Jesus battled Satan consistently using God's Word. He quotes the Word back to Satan. As the eternal Word of God, Jesus could have spoken out of his own heart, out of his own linkage with the mind of the Father. But I believe he quotes the written word as an example to us. That is part of our difficulty. We don't know the Word. We don't know it regarding our identity, that we really are the righteousness of God. That we are his beloved children. That we are saints. That his Word calls us to fight. That God's Word calls us to put to death the deeds of the body. That God's Word calls us to crucify the flesh. That God's Word says that he is the one who gives us the gifts of life. Know the Word.

And along this line, I will suggest to you friends, do not argue with the devil. Don't toy with temptation and debate it back and forth, occupying yourself with a downward cycle of thought that drives you into self pity or despondency, discouragement or lust. Stop it in the beginning. Confront it at the front door. Don't let it in the house. Leave it with God's Word, turn your heart to God. And I like Luther's advice: "If you aren't finding any help there, get with a friend." Luther says it a lot earthier than that. He says, "Shovel manure. Work in the fields. Get occupied with something, but don't argue with the devil."

And finally, know the Lord. We come back to the business of prayer. After telling us how to fight the devil and deal with temptation, the apostle Paul says, [and I will close with this verse, Ephesians 6:18] “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Know the Lord.

Do you want to know why you have to establish times during the day for prayer. Why you have to set aside some time for focused attention on the Lord? Paul says to pray at all times in the Spirit. You want to know why? Because at all times, the devil hates you. At all times you need to know the provision that God has. You need to tap into God’s holiness, his forgiveness. Through him we can forgive. Through God we can walk righteously. Through God we can believe for greater things for our lives.

This series is designed to create in you a hunger to pray. And if you need just this motivation to let it ring in your ears: You will not be able to handle temptation unless you pray. Let’s pray.