

Living on the Edge of Disaster

Luke 11:4c

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Do you have enough willpower to not be tempted? Of course not. How about resisting temptation, do you have enough strength to resist all the temptations to sin that come your way? Every believer knows that they do not. That's why, as Jesus continues giving us an example of how to pray, He reminds us that temptation is inevitable—it will come—and He reminds us that only through God's strength can we overcome.

According to news reports, around 12 tourists a year—on average—slip and fall to their death somewhere along the rim of the Grand Canyon.

Recently, a man hopped up on a low stone wall for his daughter to take a picture; he had noticed that there was a narrow ledge behind that low wall and after she snapped the picture, he hopped off backwards, pretending to fall to scare his daughter. But he slipped on that narrow ledge and fell 400 feet to his death.

Most tourists who fall off the rim are young men—confident young men—hopping from one rock to another or posing for pictures; they get too close to the edge.

I have read that Park rangers have one piece of advice, it's almost so simple it's easy to ignore; here it is: stick to the path.

One article reported that rangers often remind more than a million visitors a year, "Remember this is not an amusement park; this is dangerous, it's easier than you think to lose your balance in a moment and fall."

Sounds like the Christian life to me. In many ways, the Christian life does not rescue you from danger, it introduces you to it.

The false advertising of the average gospel narrative today is that when you come to Jesus, He leads you to an amusement park where it's fun and games for the rest of your life.

The truth is, following Jesus is more like hiking along the rim of the Grand Canyon, with steep cliffs and narrow paths. Jesus introduces you to a life where the enemy is constantly attempting to lead you off the path and over the edge.

“Living on the edge” is a very real motto for the disciples of Christ. We are literally walking along the edge of disaster.

If that sounds a little too dramatic, then you’ve got something to learn from the Apostle Paul who said that his fear, after having preached to others, would be to sin in such a way that he would be disqualified (**1 Corinthians 9:27**).

He wasn’t afraid of losing his salvation. He was afraid of losing his testimony before others. He didn’t want to discredit the gospel and discourage other believers and disappoint the Lord by wandering off the path into sin.

So, Paul lived then with awareness of:

- potential disaster.
- potential disqualification.
- potential discrediting of the gospel.
- fear of disappointing the Lord who loved him.
- and the discouragement to so many other believers.

In a very real way, Paul knew he was living on the edge of disaster.

And for the believer today, that happens to be the best way to live. **Take heed,**

Paul would write, ***be careful while you stand lest you fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)***

The proud believer is convinced he will never fall; the humble believer is convinced he will never stand apart from the leading and protection of God.



Have you ever felt “invincible” in your walk with God? When the fall finally came, how did God humble you and change your attitude toward your own abilities?

It should be no surprise to us that Jesus will teach us to pray with this perspective.

If you go back to **Luke’s Gospel account at chapter 11**, the Lord has been teaching His disciples to pray, and He now introduces a simple phrase that says it all. He doesn’t skirt the issue; He doesn’t play it down; He doesn’t sugar coat it; He calls it what it is.

We’re now at **verse 4**, the last phrase, and we’ll combine it with Matthew’s account as well, where Jesus teaches them to pray:

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Luke 11:4; Matthew 6:13

That's a good phrase to consider as well: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Or as one little girl who was being taught to pray this prayer came to this point and prayed, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Not bad.

Jesus is about to teach them—and us—how to face the danger of temptation and evil, and you face the danger not by ignoring it, not by downplaying it, but by recognizing it every single day.

You face temptation by recognizing that you are living on the edge of disaster; every morning when you get out of bed, you are moving into the realm of danger.

This is the final prayer request recorded in this pattern prayer. It began with delight in our Father in Heaven and it now ends with the danger of sin and evil on earth.

And the Christian, one author said, "lives in between those two truths."

So, this prayer ends, with nothing less than a cry for help from believers who want to stay safely on the path; who don't want to lose their spiritual balance; who don't want to fall off the edge of the canyon, so to speak, in their Christian experience.

And that's possible, as you pray this request.

This prayer makes us aware of four truths—four truths that will protect the believer in a world of danger:

Let me show you how:

This prayer leads you to realize that the danger of temptation will never go away.

"And lead us not into temptation."

Luke 11:4c

This is as daily as daily bread and daily confession.

Now you might initially be confused by this phrase because it sounds like God might tempt the believer to sin or lead the believer into tempting situations.

From other passages of Scripture, we know that God won't do that.

James writes in his letter:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

James 1:13

Some have tried to explain this by pointing out that the Greek word for temptation is the same word for testing. And that would be true.



If temptations are not just God testing us, then why are we tempted? Is it God's fault, or our own?

But nowhere is the believer told to ask God to keep him from being tested. In fact, James also says in chapter 1 that **testing produces endurance**. God definitely leads us into times of testing, in order to strengthen our faith and walk with Him.

The context determines the meaning of this word. Testing is intended to develop us. Temptation is intended to destroy us, and God never has that intention.

The context in Luke 11 is destruction, sin, and evil.

“Protect us from the [destructive] tempting power of sin.”

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan 2011), p. 419

“Lead us not into temptation” could be understood to mean, as Chuck Swindoll paraphrased it in his commentary, “Cause us not to yield to temptation.”

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 291

By the way, Jesus prayed to the Father (in John 17) and used this same terminology when he prayed: ***I do not ask that you take [my disciples] out of the world, but that you keep them from evil (John 17:15).***

Jesus knows the danger you’re facing today!

Satan, the original tempter, working in concert with our fallen flesh, constantly advertises to us through a fallen world to sin, fall off the path, and destroy our integrity and our testimony. And he never lets up.

If you’re 35 years old, his network of fallen angels has had 35 years to study your fallen nature, to watch you, to take notes on your propensities and weaknesses.

If you’re 55 years old, all that means is they have had 20 more years to figure you out.

In the Bible Satan is called among other names:

- the tempter (***Matthew 4:3***).
- the serpent (***2 Corinthians 11:3***).
- the dragon (***Revelation 12:13***).
- a lion seeking someone to devour (***1 Peter 5:8***).

He can’t steal your soul from heaven, but he’ll try to destroy your life on earth. Peter says he’s always hungry.

You don’t play around with a hungry lion. You don’t have a conversation with a hungry lion; you avoid him.

I remember being in east Africa for a series of meetings, and one afternoon my host took me in his jeep out on a day safari. At one point we came to a large tree where a pride was lying in the shade—several lionesses and cubs. My host stopped the jeep and sat there looking.

One of the lionesses got up and came over toward us to my side of the jeep. She came all the way over and just looked in the window at me. Her back was tall enough to reach the bottom portion of my window—which I had rolled

up. As she stood there looking at me, no doubt having heard that I don't like cats, her purring was so loud it sounded like a small engine. I wasn't about to roll my window down and pat her on the head and say, "Nice kitty cat." For one thing, there's no such thing—doesn't matter what size they are, even the little ones will kill you and eat you if they can get away with it. Why do you think they're staring at you all the time?

I was never going to get out of that jeep and have a conversation.

Peter evidently had seen them too because he compared Satan to a hungry one prowling around seeking someone to devour.

Jesus wants to remind us in this prayer that temptation is a dangerous and daily threat.

Adapted from R. Albert Mohler, Jr. [The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down](#) (Nelson Books, 2018), p. 146

And it isn't going to go away until that day when we are glorified in complete holiness in the presence of Christ.

So, here's the first truth to understand about this prayer request: it leads you to verbalize the danger of temptation that will never go away.

Secondly:

This prayer leads you to recognize that your sinful heart gladly gets in the way.

The reason temptation is tempting is because it's something you're interested in.

One man wrote, tongue in cheek, "Why would I resist temptation—it might go away!"

Temptation is dangerous because something is tempting to our sinful heart.

We're too quick to blame the devil and the world for what we're capable of doing all by ourselves.

J.I. Packer quotes the Anglican Prayer Book in his commentary on this text, which describes the sin we battle in our own hearts and minds: Deliver us from "Sin ... from all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice ... from fornication, and all other deadly sin; from hardness of heart, and contempt of Thy Word and commandments—Good Lord, deliver us!"

J.I. Packer, [Praying the Lord's Prayer](#) (Crossway, 2007), p. 93

This prayer is an admission that our hearts are like little manufacturing plants where temptation is invited to apply for work and then given a private office.

Deliver us from temptation is an admission that we need delivering from *ourselves*.

Jesus told His disciples, ***Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation (Matthew 26:41).***

The word for ***watch*** is a word for a soldier on guard.

Adapted from Packer, 88

And you're on guard, not because you don't expect it to show up, but because you do. So, stay on guard!

- It might knock on your door—lock it.
- It might call you—change your number.
- It might entice you—delete it.
- It might be around the corner—avoid that corner!

One author wrote, “Find out what for you is fire, and then don't play with it.”

Ibid

You can't decide to get rid of temptation, but you can decide not to listen to it, to hide it, to plan for it, to make room for it.



How do you decide what you will do when it comes to temptation? Do you try to find the willpower in the moment, or have you planned out in advance the way you will respond to temptation?

Martin Luther, the Reformer, once made this point; he originated this saying 500 years ago when he wrote: “You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”

Ibid

This prayer leads you to realize that the danger of temptation will never go away.

This prayer leads you to recognize that your sinful heart gladly gets in the way.

Thirdly:

This prayer leads you to admit you don't have the willpower to resist the *wrong way*.

You might notice here that Jesus does *not* teach us to pray, “Lord, give me more willpower to fight against temptation.” No, this is a prayer of desperation.

Adapted from Mohler, p. 147

Jesus isn't telling us to ask for more willpower; He's teaching us to admit we'll never have enough.

“Deliver us from evil” means we can't deliver ourselves. ***“Keep us from temptation”*** means we can't overcome it ourselves.

This is a prayer that will only be prayed by people who recognize they are powerless without their Father's guidance.

I remember when our twin sons were around 5 years old, we were praying at the breakfast table before school and, as was our custom, we took turns. It was

one of my son's turns and he just announced rather matter of fact that he wasn't going to pray that morning. I thought, well here it is; total spiritual rebellion in the pastor's home and he's only 5. I kept my cool and asked him, "Well why aren't you gonna pray this morning?" and he said, "Because I really don't need to." I don't need help today. In other words, I've got everything under control. I've got kindergarten figured out; I know where my colored pencils are; life's good.

The truth is, he verbalized what we might feel. We wouldn't necessarily say it out loud, but life is under control; we're not praying about temptation today because we don't think we need to.

This is *not* a new danger for the disciple.

This was Peter the disciple, in the upper room. The Lord is warning his disciples recorded in ***Matthew's Gospel at chapter 26*** that one of them would betray him. They began to say, ***Surely not I Lord?*** Surely that won't be me!

None of them said, "Lord, we'd better start a prayer meeting, because it could be me."

Then Jesus informed them that they were all going to deny him—flee from him.

Peter said in ***verse 33***, ***"Though they all fall away, ... I will never fall away."***

Remember, proud Christians don't think they can fall; humble Christians don't think they can stand apart from Christ.

Peter effectively says here, "I'm strong. I'm not going to fall off the edge into disaster; I can't fall." Jesus says to him in ***verse 34***. ***"Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."***

How specific can you get?? You're going to deny me three times and then a rooster is going to crow to remind you of this warning.

And Peter still didn't respond, "Lord, now that I know the specifics, I'm obviously going to face some temptation that I can't handle, so do you mind if I go somewhere and pray?"

"No, that isn't going to happen to me; there's no chicken coop around here; there's no rooster crowing in my future."

Many Bible students will focus on Peter's denial because of the pressure out there in the courtyard by that servant girl who cornered him as one of the Lord's disciples.

Peter didn't fall off the edge into the canyon of spiritual disaster in that courtyard, he started to free fall in the upper room—hours before he ended up at that campfire.

And the Lord had warned him: temptation was coming.

Jesus is teaching us to pray here, not because temptation might show up, but because it will; we're to pray, as it were, every single day, "Temptation is coming, and I can't handle it on my own."

And with that, we're ready for the fourth truth in this prayer request:

This prayer leads you to rest in the promise that God will guide you in the right way.

Having admitted our powerlessness, we are given the promise of His powerfulness.

He can guide us around it, and oftentimes, through it!

Deliver us from evil. Literally, don't permit evil to catch us in its net.

Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 172

Phillip Keller wrote in his book on the Lord's Prayer:

The Lord would not teach us to ask our heavenly Father for deliverance from evil if deliverance wasn't available.

He would not instruct us to pray to be delivered from temptation if our Father had no interest in doing so.

But He does . . . and He will. This is yet another measure of His grace and His love, for us, His children.

Phillip Keller

Phillip Keller, *A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 138

Temptation is always looking for something in our lives that is not under the management of God's Spirit, something we're keeping from His control. And it targets those areas that are not surrendered.



Is there any area in your life that you have not surrendered to God's Spirit yet? How can you do that today?

So, this prayer request is about more than temptation and sin; this is about trust and surrender.

Peter Forsyth put it this way, when he wrote 100 years ago, "The first duty of every soul, is not to find its freedom, but its Master."

Quoted in Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Baker Books, 2010), p. 117

"The first duty." What he means is the primary duty, the primary delight, I would add this is the primary: sin-crushing, temptation-overpowering, God-delighting duty of every soul—not to find its freedom, but its Master.

And when your Heavenly Father is your Master, He gives you the freedom:

- to avoid falling over the edge of disaster.
- the freedom to keep your balance.
- the freedom to stay on the path.

- the freedom to live a life worth living.
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