Lead Us Not Into Temptation – 6pm

17.11.24

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
**2**    He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
**3**    he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
    for his name’s sake.
**4**Even though I walk
    through the darkest valley,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2023&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14240a)]
I will fear no evil,
    for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
    they comfort me.

**5**You prepare a table before me
    in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
    my cup overflows.
**6**Surely your goodness and love will follow me
    all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
    forever.

Introduction

Good morning! Welcome back into our bootcamp series. We had a bit of a break last week for Remembrance Sunday, (and we quickly dipped our toe into Christmas) but the previous week Will spoke to us about the battle in the spiritual realm. This week we are going to look at temptation. The title is ‘Lead us not into temptation’ which you may recognise as being from the Lord’s Prayer. Next week Will will speak on ‘Deliver us from Evil’ – see what we did there??!

I don’t know about you but I often wondered about the wording of ‘Lead us not into temptation’, but what we read in James helps to clarify it for us:

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. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.

So we know that God would never lead us into temptation but this phrase is more about asking God to protect us from temptation, it may well be better phrased ‘Protect us from being lead into temptation’.

Now I know when we talk about temptation, it’s often from the angle of ‘what temps us’, we talk about the common temptations such as alcohol, food, pornography etc etc.

Today, I would like to come at this from a different angle to the usual way we think about it. I’d like to take a step further into it and think about what temptations is about and why we are tempted by the things we are tempted by. I’d like to think about what’s behind it all, because it’s a constant battle for us all isn’t it. And because it’s a constant battle, it’s something that we should take seriously.

I’d like to look first at what temptation is – what’s the point of it?

Then to look at how we are tempted and who by.

Finally to think about how we can resist temptation.

**So What is tempatation??**

In order for us to think about what temptation is, we need to establish what direction is taking us in or, more importantly, what it’s directing us away from.

I’d like to get some foundation on this in the psalm we have heard read. It’s a beautiful psalm and is well known and often used. As with things we are very familiar with, we get so used to them that we don’t hear them anymore. We hear them but don’t really give any consideration to them.

I was recently on a course where we considered different reactions to this psalm and I found it interesting that some young students in one of the articles I read were incensed by the suggestion that we are stupid sheep that need guiding everywhere by a shepherd. They didn’t like the fact that the shepherd ‘makes’ us lie down and we need to be ‘led’, that we need ‘guiding’. Well I’m afraid I beg to differ! Firstly, I’m absolutely up for some rest in a green pasture. The chances are that if He doesn’t make me rest, I’ll just keep on going until I crash. Someone who tells you to rest is absolutely invested in your wellbeing. In this sense, we need that shepherd to make us do it!

How about being led by still waters to be refreshed? Sheep, given the freedom, will just head to the nearest water and possibly end up drowning because the weight of their wool pulls them into a fast flowing stream or river. This shepherd leads the sheep to still waters so they can drink in safety. Anyone else feeling sheep like here? I know that if I’m left to my own devices I’ll make some pretty dire choices. Done it many times! I’m completely up for being led by someone who knows better than me. I don’t always let myself be guided by God but I know I should and that it will always have a better outcome. Agreed?

OK, so now we have established that we, like sheep, need the guidance, leading and direction of the shepherd, God. He always knows best. If we don’t seek that, we find ourselves distanced from God, like sheep wandering from the safety of the shepherd. Who would want that for us? Whose greatest desire is to draw us away from God? Satan. Just like Will said in the last talk about being on safari . If you stay in the jeep and close to the guide you have protection. However, as soon as you get out of the vehicle and wander away from the guide you suddenly find yourself in grave danger and extremely vulnerable.

 This is the aim of temptation – to distance us from the God we so desperately need the guidance and protection of. This is where we link back to this battle in the spiritual realm that Will spoke of.

Lets think about verse 5 of the psalm:

5You prepare a table before me
    in the presence of my enemies.

So the Shepherd who is our guide and protector, our sovereign God, prepares a table for us.

Picture this: You’re invited to someone’s house for dinner. Anyone here been invited to someones house for dinner? and when you get there you smell wonderful aromas of food cooking, there are candles, a beautifully laid table, you’re welcomed, coat taken, glass in hand, nibbles (olives/crisps). Makes you all warm and fuzzy inside doesn’t it? Makes you feel special. We all like to feel special, valued, loved, do we not? Imagine that God has done this for us. The God who created the universe wants to sit and eat with us. Imagine that!

But unfortunately we are told this table that he has prepared for us is in the presence of our enemies.

Why do we have to have our enemies there?

It’s because he wants to be with us now – in the middle of our messy lives. In the middle of this broken world. He is offering to sit and eat with us right now, when we have people around us who may be distracting us, giving us bad news, harming us. We may be struggling with a diagnosis, with our mental health, with our finances, with addiction. We are being pulled in many directions – away from this table. Basically temptation is all around us, trying to pull us away from that table. Our heavenly father wants to come and sit and eat with us in a world where Satan is prowling, looking for opportunities to draw us away from God and towards himself and the world. If Satan can’t tempt us away from that table, he’s going to try and come and sit with us!

Now you may think – no – He wouldn’t be brave enough to sit at the table with God. Wrong – just take a look Matthew, Mark and Luke – all give account of Jesus himself being tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

Lets go right back to the beginning, to where it all started:

Genesis 3

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

This is the point at which temptation began, ‘the fall’. This is the point at which everything changed. Enter the serpent. From this moment on, every person on this earth has suffered the torment of temptation – and it is torment isn’t it? It’s something we are constantly fighting against. From the moment the serpent came on the scene and Eve gave in to his manipulation, every person on this earth has suffered temptation and all but one has succumbed.

Temptation is a pull to do something that is going to have a negative impact on us. From a Christian perspective it is Satan’s strongest weapon that he uses to put distance between us and God.

Temptation is what entices us to sin. But temptation is not always an obvious thing. Remember – Satan is a liar and a master manipulator, and the stakes are high.

Now, we can all think of examples of being tempted to do something that we know is wrong. I don’t need to name things – we all know what they are. What about being tempted to do something that’s considered ok or even good for us but with a corrupted motivation.

Example: Exercise – We might take up exercise thinking that God says ‘our body is a temple’ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), but then when we start feeling really good, start getting lots of compliments, our ego starts to swell, the buzz we get gets bigger and all of a sudden the time we used to use to bible study, we are using to exercise. We are feeling superior to others who may be a little unfit or overweight. The way we look and feel is becoming more and more important to us. Then, our running club starts to meet on Sundays so we miss church as well as our private time with God. This thing that began as being a good thing following God’s instruction to look after our bodies has been corrupted and has now become something that is leading us into temptation.

I think this happened to the pharisees in the bible too. The Law was given by God to Moses as a guide for His people, to keep them close to Him, yet the pharisees became so caught up in the legality of it that it became their Idol, it ruled them. They used it against Jesus – it was corrupted.

So yes, temptation can be that we are drawn to do something that we know we shouldn’t, perhaps a thought saying ‘do it! It’s ok this once, you are good the rest of the time.’ ‘It’s ok to gossip about that person because they’re not very nice anyway.’ That kind of thing. But temptation can also be so subtle that we don’t see it happening.

**How are we tempted and who by?**

This is the bit we really need to be aware of. Satan is a master manipulator. He is subtle. He twists our relationships with things as with the exercise example earlier. He knows our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities and our secret desires and he is adept at using them against us.

In the CS Lewis book, The Screwtape Letters, we read from the perspective of Satan who has senior and junior demons that each have their own ‘human patient’ that they are ultimately trying to manipulate towards Satan and away from God. This manipulation is often based around the human’s weaknesses and vulnerabilities. But also very subtly using positive emotions and manipulating them.

The senior demon, Screwtape speaking to his nephew says:

“Your patient (human) has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is specially true of humility.”
― C.S. Lewis, [Screwtape Letters](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2920952)

So once we are aware of our humility it can become something that boosts our ego and suddenly we are no longer humble but quite the opposite. We are tempted by the subtle suggestion, the almost imperceptible whisper in the ear, saying well done, you’re so humble. Just a small comment like the one made by the serpent to Eve in the Garden of Eden can have a huge impact.

Satan can work using a similar method to some marshal arts that are incredibly powerful in combat because they use the momentum that the other person has created against them. He is a master at this. He is lazy and he does not create in the same that God does, rather he corrupts things that have already been created by God.

The way that he will often do this is by corrupting our motivation for doing something. Quite often we become susceptible to this after having success in a certain area, which Satan will then turn against us. The example used earlier about exercise illustrates this well, but to give an example close to home:

Take the church. It can happen there too. Say there was growth and the worship was great and more people were coming but it was the week for a difficult talk – perhaps about sin. That pride in the good attendance numbers and the desire to continue to be ‘the best’ the ‘most successful’ church might lead that church to water down it’s gospel message, to leave out the bits that don’t conform to society, that don’t fit with the ‘be whatever you want to be, do whatever you want to do, you can gave it all’ culture of today, the less palatable message that may not affirm all of our behaviours. Thankfully I don’t think we do that – perhaps evidenced by talks like this, but it can always be a temptation….

As well as using our strengths against us, Satan is also a master at using our weaknesses against us. He will latch on to our insecurities – we all have them. He will focus our mind on areas where we feel inadequate or not good enough, and use them for his purposes.

Perhaps we feel uneducated – he will whisper that there’s no point going to a connect group because you won’t understand what they’re studying and you’ll feel stupid.

Perhaps you’re self conscious – he’ll tell you that everyone will look at you at church and judge you so you’re better to watch online. The consequences of both outcomes is that you miss out on the support and fellowship of fellow Christians and it becomes easy to just drop away unnoticed.

Interestingly it can often be the temptation not of something specific but of distraction. Do you ever find yourself drawn away from your bible by a simple thought ? I do, I’ll be sat reading the bible or praying and I’ll suddenly think, ‘Oh the washing has finished, I must put it in the dryer before I forget’. And of course go off to do it and never come back to finish my reading because I get distracted by something else. I don’t believe these are random thoughts, I think they are subtle temptations to draw us away from God, from His word and from His protection.

Of course one of the greatest temptations we all face is that of believing the lie that we can do things in our own strength, that we don’t need God. Going back to the psalm – If we think as sheep we can we just head to that fast flowing stream to drink and don’t the guidance and protection of the shepherd, we are likely to drown. Often it’s not even a conscious thought – we just don’t think about God in our every day decisions never mind the big ones. What an opportunity for the enemy, just the quietest of whispers and we are off down that road of self reliance.

How can we resist temptation?

How can we avoid being drawn away from God, our protector and guide?

That table that God has laid for us is in the presence of our enemies remember? Satan is nearby! Remember that he’s going to try and drag up a chair and make himself at home. How can we make sure our enemy isn’t sat at that table with us? How can we make sure we don’t invite him to draw up a chair, pour him a drink and make him feel right at home?

Firstly – knowledge is power. If we are aware of our strengths and particularly weaknesses, then we can be aware of where Satan might try and get in. Are we aware of our weaknesses? Are we willing to acknowledge them or are we in denial? Remember that a weakness can be something that we desire so strongly that it becomes more important to us than our relationship with God. Are we prepared to examine ourselves honestly, even if it means facing some uncomfortable truths? Are we prepared to examine our motivations for what we do to make sure that it is drawing us closer to God rather than away from Him. If this all sounds too daunting and you don’t even know where to begin, remember that God will convict us. He is here to help and guide us and will highlight areas in our lives where we open ourselves up to being led into temptation. But we must be willing to hear what He is saying to us and then take steps to change.

God will guide us and lead us in this process, but this will take an investment of our time. Time spent in God’s presence, to listen to what he is saying and stay in relationship with Him. Satan will do all he can to disrupt and minimise the time we spend with God. We need to recognise where Satan is distracting us away from prayer or any doubts that he whispers about the need to pray. If he constantly places distractions in our path we will have little time to spend with God, or if he convinces us that our prayers are not being heard we will find we have no motivation to pray. So we must be intentional in making time. Create good habits. Get into a routine of spending time with God in prayer. In Ephesians 6 we are told to ‘Pray in the spirit on all occasions.’

Equally important is reading scripture because as Ephesians 6 says, having a good knowledge of scripture arms us with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Reading scripture is essential to learning about God’s character. The more that we know God, his promises and guidance, we will not only grow closer to Him but also learn to identify things that will tempt us away from Him.

A final thing we can do is to immerse ourselves into the family of the church. There are times when we will struggle with resisting temptation or even being aware that we are being drawn into it. This is where staying in community with other Christians and being accountable is so crucial. There is a wealth of wisdom and support available within our church community. If we allow ourselves to be isolated, we not only miss out on fellowship and support but we become very vulnerable to Satan’s schemes much like the sheep that strays from the flock. Stay in community. Read scripture with others and have discussions and conversations led by God – it’s amazing how He speaks and leads us through this. Join a connect group, find a prayer partner, volunteer at church and become part of the family. Together we are stronger.

Let’s keep our eyes locked into His as we sit across that table from Him and give the enemy no opportunity to take a seat.

In summary and a few points to take away:

* Temptation is a consequence of living in a fallen world and the aim of temptation is to separate us from God.
* All temptation comes from Satan. He knows us, our weakness and our vulnerabilities and this is what allows him to manipulate us so effectively. He will go straight to using our weaknesses against us and corrupting our motivations for doing good things.
* Thankfully God has given us a number of ways of protecting ourselves from being led into temptation. Prayer, reading scripture, fellowship and the prompting of the Spirit. He has also given us the spirit of self discipline to resist temptation and wisdom to identify when we are being tempted

Last, and most importantly of all, there is no need to fear. When we stay close to God we are in his protection, and even if the enemy is sat at our table, he won’t be able to do anything to hurt us while God is there too.

**Prayer**

Lord, we know that the trials and temptations of this world we face come from Satan. We pray that You give us Your armour and protection against him and all the temptations we face now. We ask that we stand firm in Your strength and not rely on ourselves. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen