

ENJOYING GOD // Lead Us and Deliver Us

In the 1960s, a Stanford professor named Walter Mischel conducted a series of important psychological studies.

Mischel and his team tested hundreds of kids around four or five years old by bringing each child into a classroom, sitting them at a table, and placing a marshmallow right in front of them.

Then the researcher offered a deal to the child. They said, "I'm going to leave the room for 15 minutes, and if you don't eat the marshmallow while I'm gone, you can have 2 marshmallows. But if you eat the marshmallow while I'm gone, you don't get a second one."

The choice was simple: One treat now, or two treats later.

You can imagine what happened after the researcher left the room. Some kids immediately scarfed down the marshmallow as soon as the door closed. Other kids were bouncing up and down on the chair desperately trying to restrain themselves and eventually gave in. Other kids were sneaking little bites and trying to hide it. Only a few of the children managed to wait the entire time.

What's amazing about this study, is that Mischel and his team tracked these children for more than 40 years. The group that waited patiently for the 2nd marshmallow ended up having higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, lower levels of obesity, better responses to stress, healthier social skills, and better outcomes in a range of other aspects of life.

What they found was that the ability to not give in to temptation, the ability to delay gratification, was critical for success in life in a whole host of different ways.

The truth is we're all tempted in different ways by different things every day. Some temptations might be smaller, and seemingly inconsequential, and some temptations are much scarier and far more destructive.

Today, we get to a portion of the Lord's prayer that gives us a way to guard against something that will drastically hinder our relationship with and enjoyment of God.

Matthew 6:13, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Now, at first glance, it sounds like we're asking God not to tempt us. Jesus is teaching us to ask God not to lead us into temptation, which begs the question:

Q: Does God lead us into temptation?

God does not tempt.

James 1:13, "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."

So, if God is not the one doing the tempting, then who is?

James 1:14-15, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

So, when we pray, "lead us not into temptation," what we're saying is, "God, protect us from situations and circumstances where we'll be tempted to give in to sin."

Temptation and sin are not synonymous.

Q: How do we know?

Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Sin is when you give into the temptation. It's when you act on something you shouldn't do, or don't act on something that you should do. Sin of commission or sin of omission. What James tells us is if you give in over and over and over again, it brings forth death in your own soul, in your relationships with others, and in your life with God.

It's been said that "*sin takes you farther than you ever wanted to go and keeps you longer than you ever wanted to stay.*"

Temptation can also be translated as a "test" or "trial."

Q: What is the purpose of a test or trial? It's to reveal.

If you take an exam, it reveals how much you know. When you take your driver's test, it reveals how much you've practiced. If you've given into stealing your children's candy this last week, the scale might reveal something unpleasant... (purely hypothetical).

Tests reveal what is in you. And if you're failing all the little tests repeatedly, there's no way you'll pass the big tests of life.

So how do we pass the little tests of life? We're taught to pray that God would protect us from temptation and deliver us from evil, but how do you pass the tests of life? How do we overcome temptation, and how do we overcome evil.

1. Expect to be Tested.

Very simple. Very practical. Expected to be tested. Expect difficulties.

So much of the hardship we face in life is not because of the hardship but because **we're surprised by the hardship we face**. We're surprised by the testing we have to endure as followers of Christ.

Psalm 73:3-5, 12-14, "For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning."

Do you hear what he's saying? David is envious of the wicked people who are seemingly prosperous while he is working so hard to keep his heart pure, to be a person of character, to live in a way that's pleasing to God, and it's not paying off.

Some of you are in despair right now because somewhere along the way you believed that if you followed God closely enough, if you obeyed Him enough, that if you pleased Him enough, if you were moral enough, good enough, then life would be easy. That hardship wouldn't come your way. And that only the people who disobeyed God, who didn't love God, would face the really hard things in life.

And then when hardship or testing or trials broke into your life, you hardened your heart toward God. If that's you, you need to hear this today: It wasn't the hardship that drove you away from God, it was the expectation that you would never face hardship that drove you away from God.

So many of us use our disappointments with God to justify our disobedience to God, but most of our disappointments with God have nothing to do with God and everything to do with the fact that we expected life to be easy!

Do you realize, there is not a single place in the entirety of scripture that tells you that following Christ will make life easier, more comfortable, more pleasurable? That you won't ever face disappointments or hardships!?

What it does tell you is that no matter what you do face in life, that God will be with you. That He won't abandon you. That His Spirit will strengthen you in your weakness and frailties. That if you bring your pain to Him, He'll heal your wounds and make you whole.

The word of God does not promise that God will prevent your heart from being broken, but it does tell you that you live in a broken world and that God is near to the broken hearted.

This is why Peter says,

1 Peter 4:12-14, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

What does he say? Expect difficulties! Expect testing! Expect trials and challenges.

Hardship hits everyone. But Jesus is the only One who bring goodness out of it. He's the only One who brings purpose out of our suffering. He's the only One that brings beauty out of the ashes of your life.

Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

If you're not following Jesus, you're just suffering. If you haven't received God's love for you and you don't love Him, all of your suffering is arbitrary. But only if you're connected to Jesus is your suffering is producing something eternal, something significant through you. Expect Testing. Don't be surprised when hardship comes into your life.

2. Prepare in Advance.

How many of you have ever given into a temptation and regretted it?

I think for the most part we give in to temptation because we're not expecting it, and because we're not expecting it, we're not prepared for it.

The phrase "deliver us from evil" tells us that we have an enemy!

1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

You have an enemy that wants to destroy anything and everything that matters to the heart of God. Do you know what matters to the heart of God? **You do!**

The devil is scheming, he's planning, he's preparing. See, if you're at war, and your enemy is preparing an assault, what you don't do is nothing.

2 Corinthians 2:9,11, "For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

If you wait until you're under attack, until the temptation shows up, it will be too late. That's why we need to prepare in advance.

How? Answer this question:

Q: If you were the devil, what would you do to take you out? What would your strategy be to destroy your life, your marriage, your children, your impact, your career, your ministry, your future?

If you're going to resist temptation, you have to prepare in advance. You have to think through how the devil would plan to take you out. How he would bring destruction into your soul, your life and pain into the lives of the people you love.

If you say, *not me, I'm strong enough. I don't need to prepare. I'll never do what that person did. I'll never fall into that sin, or that temptation...*

Paul warns you,

1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

We vastly overestimate their ability to resist temptation, so we need to prepare in advance.

Jesus didn't wait until He was led into the wilderness to get ready for being tempted by the devil. He didn't wait until the last minute.

He had the scripture in Him. He had the truth in Him. And the tests revealed it. But He prepared far in advance.

3. Predetermine your limits.

"Why resist tomorrow what you can eliminate today?"

- Craig Groeschel

Why resist a temptation you may have in the future if you can eliminate that potential for temptation today?

We're going, "how close to sin can I get, without it being sin?" and if you do that for long enough, you're going to cross that line, and the sin is going to grow, and grow and grow, and before you know it, you haven't been delivered from evil, but you've delivered yourself up to evil. And God is going, *"I have so much more for you."*

So, we have to predetermine our limits boundaries.

What is the boundary or limit you need to set? I'm not going to put myself in an environment where my ability to resist temptation and sin is hindered.

Sin brings forth death. The devil wants to destroy your life. And I love what King David says.

Psalm 16:6, "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance."

It's freeing to predetermine the boundaries and limits, and here's the reality...

Numbers 32:23, "...be sure your sin will find you out."

It will come out. Your sin, if you continue to entertain it, and make room for it, and give into it, it will be exposed. When it does, what will it cost you?

What if? What would happen if I gave into sin? You and I are always a few decisions away from completely destroying our lives. If that scares you, it should! You and I are not above being tempted! The number of people, and even pastors who think, "No that can never happen to me." And it the IT happened... is astronomical. It's heartbreaking! The level of destruction it brings to people's lives, to people's faith, to your family, your spouse, your children.

Where are you vulnerable? Where is your guard down? Maybe today, you recognize you need God to help you, to give you wisdom on what boundaries to set.

Maybe you've been unprepared for the attack, and you've fallen. James tells us to confess our sin to one another and pray for one another so that we may be healed.

Maybe today your heart has grown cold toward God because you thought life would be easy. You expected smooth sailing, and you've hit some really rough waters, you've been surprised by the attacks of your enemy, and you've used your disappointments with God to try justify your sin against God and against the people you love.

God wants to meet you this morning. Here's the beautiful reality: Jesus came, not for perfect people. But for broken people. For hurting people. For sinful people. And he offers not only forgiveness and freedom, but he offers hope and healing. Come to him today.