



Lead Us Not Into Temptation by tutor Ron Julian

An excerpt from a talk in a series on Matthew, given August 28, 2016, at Reformation Fellowship. To hear the complete talk, go to the "Audio" section of our website, www.gutenberg.edu.

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives us a model prayer that has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer, and in verse 13, he says, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." I want to look at the phrase "do not lead us into temptation." What does it mean?

When I think about this phrase, I can't help wondering about this word translated "temptation." The Greek noun is *peirasmos*, which is sometimes translated "temptation" and sometimes translated "testing" or "test." The related verb is *peirazo*, which is sometimes translated "to tempt" and sometimes translated "to test." Sometimes the distinction is very important. For example, the Bible says that God *peirazoed* Abraham; He "tested" Abraham. It says that God *peirazoed* Israel in the wilderness; He "tested" Israel. The Bible says that God *peirazos* us, He tests our faith. And yet the book of James says that God does not *peirazo* anyone; He does not tempt anyone. So God does *peirazo* people, and yet he does not *peirazo* people. He tests them, but He does not tempt them.

The distinction in word meaning becomes important when we think about the motives of the one who is *peirazoing* someone. Satan tempts us: He confronts us with a difficult choice, and he wants us to fail. He wants us to do the wrong thing. He tempts us. God tests Abraham's faith, but He is not rooting for Abraham to fail. He presents Abraham with a difficult choice. But that choice is meant to test Abraham's heart. Does Abraham really believe God's promises? Does he trust

God? God is not trying to make Abraham fail. In fact, we know that He responds with warm approval when Abraham makes the right choice.

The distinction can be seen clearly if we think about Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Matthew tells us that the Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness. It was God's deliberate purpose that Jesus be there. God was testing the faith of Jesus in this difficult situation. Satan, on the other hand, was tempting Jesus. He was striving to make Jesus fall into sin. So in this situation, we can rightly say that both God and Satan were *peirazoing* Jesus. The Father wanted Jesus' faith to be tested. Satan wanted Jesus to fall into temptation.

So, then, is this distinction important for understanding what Jesus is saying in the Lord's Prayer? Is He talking about testing, or is He talking about temptation? Or is the distinction significant? In the example of Jesus in the wilderness, we could say he was both tested and tempted. The distinction is meaningful, but both things were happening in the same event. In any case, it may be helpful to keep the distinction in mind.

Let's start with one obvious way of interpreting the phrase "do not lead us into temptation." We could easily understand Jesus to be saying, "Do not lead us into situations that tempt us." We know that there are situations in life that tempt us to do wrong. In fact, there are situations in life that tempt us to abandon the faith altogether. We would be



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praying that God not lead us into situations that will tempt us like that.

In that way of looking at it, the distinction between "testing" and "tempting" becomes less significant because, as we have seen, the same event can both tempt us and test us. God tested Jesus; Satan tempted Jesus. And the same thing is true of us: God tests our faith; Satan tempts us to abandon our faith. The idea here would be that we are praying to be exempted from all of that: "God, do not lead us into situations that test us, that tempt us to do wrong and abandon our faith in you."

I have a hard time believing that this is what Jesus means because the fact is that God does lead us into situations that tempt us. If there is one thing we know from the Bible, it is God's intention to test the faith of His people. Situations that test us are situations that tempt us to turn away from God in some way. So can Jesus really be telling us to pray



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that God never allow our faith to be tested, never allow temptations to come our way?

In one way, I can understand this prayer. The testing of our faith is a hard and painful process. I can easily imagine just praying, “God, don’t ever take me through temptations, those painful trials that test my faith.”

The problem, of course, is that the Bible emphasizes the fact that God does in fact test people’s faith. He tested the faith of Israel in the wilderness. He tested the faith of Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac. He tested the faith of Jesus in the wilderness. As we said before, we can make a meaningful distinction. The Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness so that he might be tested, but Satan was trying to tempt Jesus. God wanted Jesus to succeed; Satan wanted Jesus to fail. God tested; Satan tempted. But God certainly led Jesus into a situation where He would be tempted so that His faith could be tested.

The idea that God will test our faith is central to Jesus’ teaching. Take the parable which Jesus tells about a sower. The sower sows the seed, and it falls on different kinds of soil: the hard ground, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the ground with good soil. Jesus’ explanation of the parable basically amounts to this: Jesus is the sower, proclaiming the gospel. Some people reject it and have no interest at all. Some have an initial interest, but persecution comes and they fall away. Others have an initial interest, but the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke out their faith. Finally, some have a genuine belief in the gospel that bears fruit. This is a classic picture of how life circumstances test our faith. Faith can bring things we don’t want, like persecution. Faith can compete with other things we do want, like worldly wealth. The way Jesus tells this parable is the way it always is with the gospel. A genuine faith will survive the pressures that life will inevitably bring. Jesus is not saying that believers do not succumb to sin at times, but our faith survives the pressures, the temptations, the testing. It sure doesn’t sound like Jesus thinks this is an optional process.

A genuine faith will survive the difficult trials of life. And this is further borne out by what the rest of the New Testament goes on to say. James urges us to rejoice when our

faith is tested. Peter says that having our faith shown to be genuine through testing is more precious than gold. For Jesus to tell us in the Lord’s Prayer to pray that God not test our faith would be strange. I understand that such times can be painful and unpleasant, but the Bible makes it clear that God is going to do it. He thinks it is good for us to go through the testing of our faith. And we should rejoice in the testing of our faith because having a tested faith is more precious than gold.

So, then, I don’t think that Jesus is telling us to pray like this: “God, don’t ever take me into situations where I am tempted, where I am tested.” Rather, Jesus is using the word “temptation” in a way that is different than we typically think of it in English.

Typically, we think of the word temptation in this way: Temptation is a situation that entices us to make the wrong choice. We are facing temptation and struggling with a choice: What are we going to do? We are tempted to do this evil thing: Are we going to do it or not? I am on a diet, and the cake is before me: What am I going to do? I am facing temptation. This typical understanding of the word “temptation” means that the choice is still before us; we have not made the choice yet. We are tempted to do the wrong thing, but we are still waiting to see what we will do.

There is, however, one English phrase where the word “temptation” means something a little different. I used it above when I said Satan wanted Jesus to “fall into temptation.” That phrase does not mean “fall into a situation where He will be tempted.” Rather it means “to give in, to succumb to temptation.” In that sense, to fall into temptation is to give in to the evil we are tempted to do.

I see the Greek word group *peirasmos/peirazo* being used in this way in the New Testament. For example, Paul says in I Thessalonians 3:5:

For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

Paul is not just fearing that the Thessalonians will be tempted to abandon the faith.

He is not just afraid that they will face a choice whether to continue believing. Of course they will face such a choice. No, Paul’s labor would be in vain if the Thessalonians *give in* to the temptation to abandon the faith. Paul fears that the tempter would tempt them; that is, he fears that the tempter will cause them to fall into temptation. Paul is not just afraid that they will face a choice; he is afraid that they will make the wrong choice.

Another example is very similar to our passage in the Lord’s Prayer. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus says to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” I don’t think Jesus can just mean “pray that you not enter into a situation that tempts you.” There is no way the disciples are going to avoid that: Jesus is going to be arrested, and the disciples are going to face the terrible temptation to abandon Him and run for their lives—which, in fact, is what they do. No, when Jesus says, “pray that you not enter into temptation,” He is saying, “pray that you don’t *fall* into temptation.” To enter into temptation is to do the evil thing you are tempted to do.

This, then, is what I think Jesus means in the Lord’s Prayer: “God, do not lead us into situations where we will succumb to temptation. Do not lead us into situations that are too much for us. Do not lead us into situations that tempt us to our destruction.” We are not praying to be preserved from temptations. We are praying to be preserved through them.

This is a prayer that truly makes sense to me. I know myself; I am a weak man. I could easily be overpowered by the desire to walk away from God. And I have never in my life met anyone who is any different. We are all trembling on the brink of abandoning the faith. We can be seduced by pleasure. We can be seduced by the fear that people will think badly of us. We can be seduced by self-righteousness and pride. To me, genuine faith feels like a soap bubble in a storm. It will be a miracle if it survives.

And so this is how I understand “do not lead us into temptation” in the Lord’s Prayer: “God, lead my life in such a way that my faith is not destroyed by temptation. Lead my life in such a way that I do not fall into temptation and perish.” May this be true of us all. Ω

Gutenberg Seats New Board

In August, Gutenberg College seated a new Board of Governors (pictured at right). All these individuals are enthusiastic about education and about helping Gutenberg succeed into the future. To learn more about them, visit our **2020.gutenberg.edu** website, which explains the transition that Gutenberg has undergone in the past year and shows the progress the college has made as it charts a course toward the year 2020.

Gutenberg would like to thank the departing board members who served sacrificially for many years: Jeff Chase, Earle Craig, Curt McKinney, Rusty Rexius, Paul Rudinsky, Dave Smith, and Peter Wierenga.



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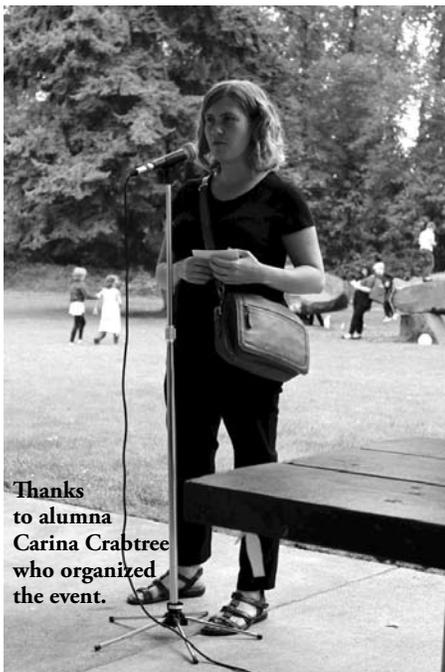
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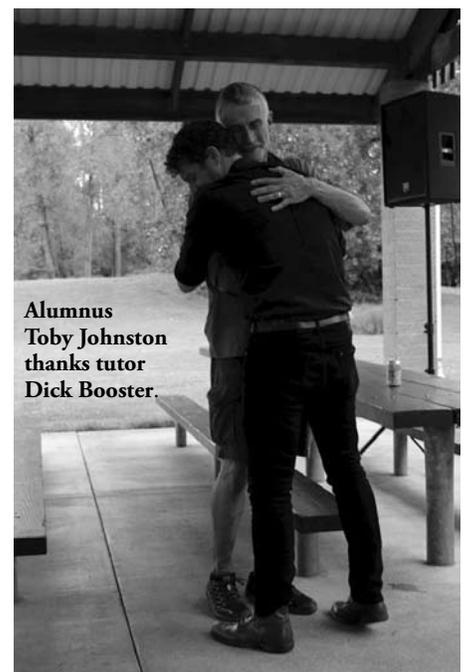
Andrew Robinson

Tutors Honored

In September, alumni and faculty gathered at a picnic to honor departing tutors Jack Crabtree, David Crabtree, and Dick Booster, all of whom had served Gutenberg since the college opened its doors in 1994. Three alumni delivered prepared talks to honor each tutor and presented him with a Greek New Testament signed by alumni, a photo book of 22 years of Gutenberg students, and the well wishes of alumni who could not attend. Afterwards, other alumni spoke about how much Gutenberg and these tutors in particular had contributed to their lives. We will miss these honorable men who contributed so much to the college. We wish them well.



Thanks to alumna Carina Crabtree who organized the event.



Alumnus Toby Johnston thanks tutor Dick Booster.



Gutenberg Welcomes New Faculty

John Wagner is teaching German at Gutenberg. He has a B.A. in German and an M.A. in linguistics, both from the University of Oregon. He has taught since 1990, most recently German at the University of Oregon. He lived in Germany twice—for a year each time—first as an exchange student in Tübingen and then as an exchange teacher in Saarland. He enjoys studying (theology, eschatology, and linguistics, among other subjects) and coaching and participating in sports.



Karen Zeller is teaching Classical Greek at Gutenberg. She studied Latin and Greek at Princeton, where she earned her A.B. in classics, language track, in 1982. She then studied for her M.Div. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and taught Koiné Greek I, II, and III at Vanguard College in Costa Mesa, California. She is currently working on a Ph.D. in educational measurement and assessment at the University of Oregon. Of all the things she has done, what she loves most, next to reading great books with her kids, is reading great books in Latin and Greek with her students.

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Gutenberg College

McKenzie Study Center • Art Project
1883 University Street
Eugene, OR 97403

TELEPHONE: 541-683-5141
541-485-4801 (MSC/AP)
FAX: 541-683-6997
EMAIL: office@gutenberg.edu
INTERNET: www.gutenberg.edu

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