

“Lead us not into temptation.”

Matthew 6:13a

September 13, 2015

Keep Your Eyes On The Road

(Part 7 of *Lord's Prayer* Sermon Series)

We all know how dangerous drinking and driving is but did you know that texting and driving is even riskier? *Car & Driver* magazine found that it took an impaired driver traveling 110 km an hour, 5 meters longer to stop than when he was sober. Five meters is more than a car length. When they ran the same test while the driver was sober but texting, how far do you suppose it took him to stop? It took him almost 100 meters farther to stop than when he wasn't texting! (caranddriver.com) I have one thing to say to you phone users: put those phones away and keep your eyes on the road, otherwise the distraction is going to kill you and others!

“Keep your eyes on the road,” is the same kind of advice that Jesus gives in the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation.” Temptation describes anything that would take our eyes off the goal of believing and living for Jesus. This distractedness can lead to loss of faith and therefore eternal salvation. So stop thinking about what you're going to make for lunch today or what you'll do this afternoon and focus your attention here as we discuss the importance of keeping our eyes on the road to heaven.

The Sixth Petition has always puzzled Christians. Why do we need to ask our heavenly Father NOT to lead us into temptation? Is he like one of those fathers who uses his kids as drug runners and pickpockets? Do we need to beg that he wouldn't do this to us? Of course not! James 1:13, 14 is clear: “***When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.***” With the Sixth Petition we're not asking God to stop leading us into temptation because he never does so in the first place. On the other hand, neither are we asking God to keep all temptation away from us since he often allows temptation as a way to exercise our faith and refine it. What we're asking with the Sixth Petition is that we don't succumb to temptation when it comes.

Consider how Jesus told his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. Jesus wasn't asking that they pray for temptation to stay away, for if it had, Judas and the soldiers never would have arrived to arrest Jesus and usher in the events of Good Friday. But Jesus didn't want the disciples to fall into sin while this was happening. He didn't want them to take matters into their own hands and try and fight the soldiers, nor did Jesus want his disciples to abandon him out of fear for their own lives. As it turned out, the disciples did both.

Likewise when we pray: “**Lead us not into temptation,**” we're not asking God to take away everything that may lead us to sin. If that was the case, God should never grant us success in sports, music, school, or business because that might lead to the sin of pride. Praying, “**Lead us not into temptation,**” is like asking your piano teacher to give you a piece of music that's not too challenging so that you despair and can't make progress on it, but neither do you want music that's too easy because then you won't grow as a musician either.

But doesn't God often seem like a music teacher or a coach who thinks we can really do more than we can? It must have felt that way for a member of one of our WELS congregations I read about recently who had been diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. This woman had two children, one in high school and the other a third or fourth grader. Her husband is not a Christian. Apparently just a couple of years earlier she had survived cancer. Now this! Lord, isn't this too much for her and her family to handle? Won't this lead her to doubt your love for her? Won't it cause her children to turn away from the faith if this is how you treat their mother? And what will her husband think of Christianity now? It's often a struggle for us to understand God's ways. But that's why Jesus taught us to pray: “**Lead us not into temptation.**” What we're saying is, “Lord, don't let this be an occasion for me to doubt your ongoing love for this individual and her family. Don't let her despair of your promises either, for you have said that you won't let us be “***tempted beyond what we can bear, and will give us the strength to stand up under testing***” (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Sixth Petition is a request that God would keep our eyes on the road, that is, on his promises and not on how frail we are and

how big the challenges seem. When we keep our eyes on the road we'll keep moving forward in faith no matter how steep the incline.

But you know that Satan is not going to give in so easily. He'll keep trying to pry our fingers off God's promises like a bully brother prying his little sister's fingers off her blanky. Little sister doesn't stand a chance against big brother but we can repel the devil. The Apostle James tells us as much. "***Resist the devil and he will flee from you***" (James 4:7). We have this kind of power because we are baptized. The waters of baptism shorted out the sinful nature's power over us. Oh it still sends out sparks in fitful spurts, but the sinful nature is no longer the engine that drives our actions. God is in charge now. When temptation comes we can deftly steer around it.

Therefore the Sixth Petition is not something we should pray only when we're in the midst of a challenge; it's a great petition with which to start the day. Like an athlete who scouts her opponent so that she can be ready for him, we Christians will want to think about and prepare for the coming challenges of the day that could cause us to sin. For example you know that you're going to be tired and hungry at the end of the school or work day. The temptation will be for you to snap at your family at the slightest irritation. So before you get home pray, "**Lead me not into temptation.**" Lord, help me laugh at Dad's corny jokes instead of rolling my eyes. Give me a servant's heart *and* hands instead of a sigh of exasperation when I see that the house needs tidying. I can do this Lord. With your help I can meet these challenges and not fall into temptation."

Likewise we can hardly pray: "**Lead us not into temptation,**" and then go out and buy two cases of beer to get us through the game. Nor should we keep sitting with that friend in class because whenever we do, we spend our time gossiping and ignoring the teacher. Keep your eyes on the road and avoid these temptations!

With the Sixth Petition we pray for damage prevention but it's obvious that we'll still need damage renovation because we keep getting distracted and we keep falling into sin. Thank God the Fifth Petition and the request for forgiveness cushions our fall. Like out of control drivers missing the hairpin turn on a mountain road, we would have plunged into hell long ago had Jesus not stood in the way. We sinners rammed straight into Jesus causing his death. But like a sturdy guardrail, Jesus absorbed the crash while keeping us on the road to heaven. As drivers who once teetered on the edge of the abyss why would we want to continue to be careless in our drive to heaven? We don't. And that's why we pray: "Lead us not into temptation." Help me keep my eyes on you, Jesus, for you are the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.