

# Teach Us To Pray: Lead Us Not Into Temptation...

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During the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, the French built fortifications along its border with Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Luxemburg. They were allies with Belgium, and didn't build fortifications there—assuming the nation of Belgium would provide a sufficient buffer against any Nazi invasion. This system of defense was called the Maginot Line and was hailed, by French military experts, “as a work of genius” which would certainly keep France safe from invasion.<sup>1</sup>

You see, the French assumed they were prepared for war. The French military assumed it was protected and could withstand an attack. This is what they believed about themselves. They thought the Maginot Line could keep the French people safe. Until, of course, it couldn't, and it didn't. The Third Reich, you see, simply swept through Belgium—bypassing the French Line—and, within a month, the Germans were in control of Paris. In effect, the Maginot Line had given France a false sense of security. *A false belief (in its impenetrable defenses) was its downfall.*

Friends, what do you think of yourself? What do you think about your strength or fortitude? What do you believe about your ability to faithfully stay the course—to do good or to resist evil? How we answer these questions is important.

In this next movement of the Lord's Prayer, Christ Jesus tells us how to *pray* and *think* about ourselves, when it comes to sin and temptation and evil.

## **Matthew 6:9-13**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
    on earth as it is in heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  
<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
    as we also have forgiven our debtors.

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<sup>1</sup> You can read more about the Maginot Line's inauspicious history [here](#).

**<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.**

[For, yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

There are a ton of things which we could focus on in these two brief requests. But today, I want to focus on just three things we learn—(1<sup>st</sup>) We are a weak people; on our own, we are in trouble when facing temptation and sin. (2<sup>nd</sup>) We are not alone; we have allies in the battle against evil. And, (3<sup>rd</sup>) God is strong; God is a deliverer who leads us to victory over the evil one.

Let's follow this roadmap and see where God is taking us.

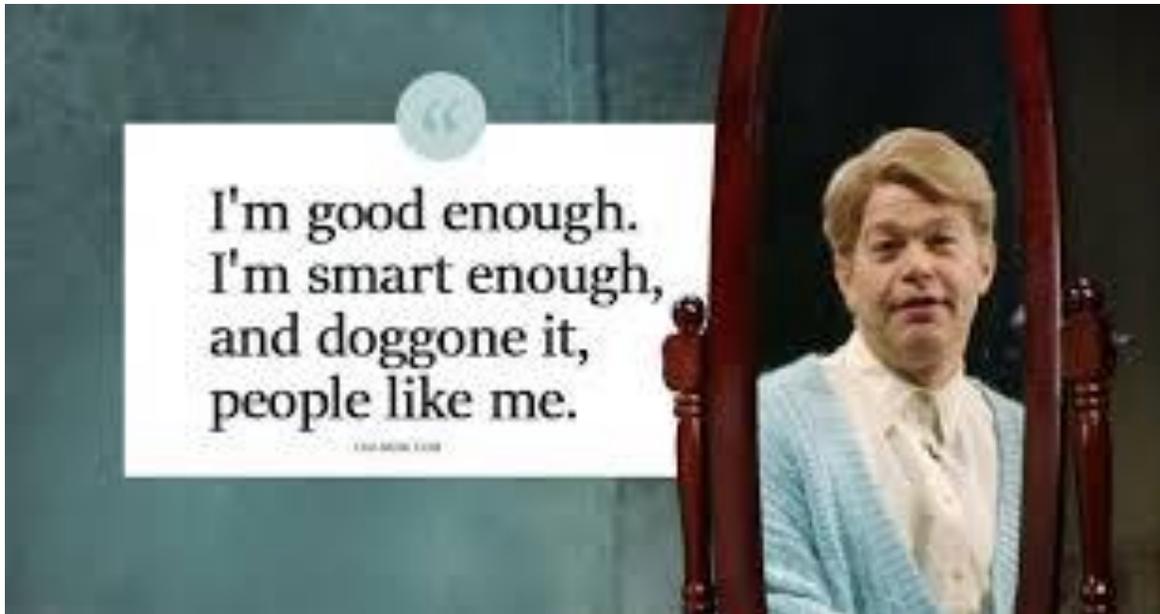
**1. We are weak.**

Back during his Saturday Night Live days, Al Franken had a recurring sketch where he was a pretty pathetic, self-help speaker named Stuart Smalley. I'm likely dating myself by using this as a sermon illustration. How many of you remember: *Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley*? Okay...show of hands if you remember it? I need my daily affirmation (that I'm not an old fogey) from you.

Well, whether you remember it or not, the show's comedy hinged on the irony of having an insecure self-help instructor. While trying to encourage others to trust in their own ability and to be the best people they could possibly be, Stuart constantly doubted his own ability and questioned whether he was good enough. Consequently, he regularly needed to peer into a mirror, during his show, and reassure himself—"I'm good enough; I'm smart enough; and, doggone it...people like me."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> You can watch an episode [here](#) in which Michael Jordan is Smalley's guest. Enjoy!



You know, during his earthly ministry, Jesus walked around and put that idea to death; Jesus put self-help to death. Let me show you how, with a just a few taglines from his teaching. These are things he likely repeated often.

- Are we good enough? Jesus said no. He says we're "evil" (Matthew 7:11) and a "wicked generation" (Luke 11:29). He tells us, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people [love] darkness instead of light because their deeds [are] evil" (John 3:19).
- Are we smart enough? Jesus says that our hearts are constantly producing "evil thoughts" in us. We ponder "murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). When Jesus teaches this, he's echoing the words of his heavenly Father thru the prophet Jeremiah— "My people are fools.... They are senseless... they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil" (Jeremiah 4:22).

Friends, the witness of Scripture is that you and I really aren't good enough, and we really aren't smart enough; and, doggone it, we're really not all that likeable when we stop to think about it. Jesus and the rest of Scripture put self-help to death. *And, so does this movement in the Lord's Prayer!*

We are too weak to rescue ourselves from the evil one. Being an evil people, we cannot withstand evil's temptation. Being wicked ourselves, we can't turn-away

or escape from wickedness by our own effort. To believe we're capable of doing so would be to give ourselves a false sense of security.

*And, all our individualistic efforts—to deliver ourselves from the evil one—would simply be the construction of a spiritual Maginot Line!*

While contemplating a singularly human fight—against temptation and sin—Paul was inspired to write these words of utter desperation.

*Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me ...waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am (Romans 7:21, 23-24).*

Friends, as you pray this movement of the Prayer, as you consider temptation and sin, acknowledge first who these lines say that you are. You're a helpless sinner. You're not able to withstand temptation on your own. You need help.

And, this recognition should bring us to our second point.

## **2. We are not alone.**

I highlighted this during the first week of our series, and I'll highlight it now as well—this prayer is a corporate prayer; Jesus teaches us how to pray this together. We pray “lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us* from the evil one” to the Father; this isn't simply a me centered request. It has real ramifications. Here are two:

First, how can you honestly pray this without any real concern for your brother or sister in Christ, and his or her struggle against temptation and sin? You cannot! When you pray these lines, with any sincerity, you will very quickly come to realize that you are your brother's or sister's keeper (Genesis 4:9). You will quickly begin to realize that you are responsible to intervene and support and encourage and equip and even rebuke them, when they're running into some sin.

One of the great heresies in modern Christianity is the undervaluing of church. Fashioning it like a vendor of services—*when you find a better one down the street then you just shop there!* Looking at it like it's a social group—a *place to go Sundays and hangout and talk!* Believing, in an erroneous way, that, since you are the church, you don't need anyone else around—*just sitting at home reading your Bible is okay, just listening to your favorite preacher on podcast is enough!*

These are big fat lies. Jesus taught us to pray in the plural. We need others. We need deep, intimate relationships over time. We need mature Christians around who will be brave enough to confront our sins.

Friends, don't undervalue this fellowship! If you want to see sin put to death in your life, go deep and stick around awhile. Anything less is cheating yourself.

Second, our fight against sin cannot be merely personal since its consequences are very rarely just personal. Sometimes we like to think our sins only really hurt us, but that's simply not the case. Our sins hurt us as well as others.

When I was called to pastor here, Steve Lapse purchased a number of books about Chicago for me. One is a history of the founding and development of the city during the 19<sup>th</sup> century called: *City of the Century*. It's a great read. I recommend it to you. It's always helpful to know a bit of history surrounding the city you live in. And, there's a ton to know about Chicago.

Of course, most people know something about the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, about Mrs. O'Leary's cow. However, what most don't know is that, in Wisconsin, on the same night, there was another fire which was far more devastating. The town of Peshtigo was almost completely wiped out—between 1,200 and 2,500 people died in that inferno. And, what's almost certain is that its destruction was set in motion by the greed surrounding the building boom in Chicago.

Lumber companies were using “slash and burn” techniques to harvest lumber throughout the forests of Wisconsin and Michigan so as to feed the insatiable hunger for cheap housing in Chicago. This made the area surrounding Peshtigo a tinderbox, which in the dry and windy summer of 1871 finally exploded with dire consequences for the people living nearby.

Friends, our sin is rarely simply personal. The greed festering around Chicago destroyed thousands of lives in Peshtigo.

So, God graciously gives us a community of believers to help us combat sin wherever it smolders—to extinguish it before it roars out of control. So, never forget that the battle against temptation and sin is not just a personal battle.

Yet, even the blessing of community, isn't enough when we're up against sin, and temptation and deliverance from the evil one. And, it's this reality that brings us to our final point.

### 3. God is strong.

I once met a fellow who shared how he'd had multiple encounters with ghosts around his home. And, of course, being a pastor, I'm taking this all very seriously—thinking that he likely has some type of demonic presence there. I mean I was ready to offer my service complete with holy water and crucifix. I was even getting excited because I still remembered the Greek verb used for casting out demons—ἐκβάλλω. I mean, I was ready to go. *Let's do this!*

But, as he continued to share, he kept on pausing to assure me that he believed in science—that whatever he was experiencing had to have a material explanation, like trapped energy or something. (I kept on thinking to myself that that explanation seemed harder to believe in than ghosts, like it took more faith to believe his science than in poltergeists. I kept on wanting to ask this new friend why a belief in science was mutually exclusive from a belief in the spiritual realm.)

This interaction reminded me of the movie *The Usual Suspects*—and the line which a thief in the film tells a detective while being questioned. The nervous thief waxes theological as he says the following—“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.”<sup>3</sup>

*Isn't that the trick being pulled on my friend?!*

This prayer, friends, says: *Don't be fooled*. The evil one exists; demons exist; spiritual warfare is real. Moreover, these two lines tells us—in no uncertain terms—that the devil is stronger than we are. *Even all of us together!* We all need deliverance from the evil one. The evil one is strong. **But**, here's the good news, God is stronger. There's no contest between the two. God always wins. When we trust the Lord God for deliverance from the evil one, deliverance is already ours.

Consider God's unfathomable power:

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<sup>3</sup> Watch Kevin Spacey deliver the line [here](#).

- *Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power / and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, / for everything in heaven and earth is yours. / Yours...is the kingdom; / you are exalted...head over all (1 Chronicles 29:11).*
- *Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power.... Nothing is too hard for you (Jeremiah 32:17).*
- *...I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).*

Friends, our Triune God is strong. He's so strong, in fact, that he became weak and endured the cross and took on our sins and died for us—and, even these things, were no threat to his sovereign power. He laid his life down for us and took it right-back-up again (John 10:18). The devil had (*and has!*) no power over him.

To believe otherwise is to believe in some kind of demonic Maginot Line—to give the devil a power he simply doesn't have over you, if you're in Christ Jesus. Don't give him power. Know your weakness; invite other believers into your battle against sin; and, trust in Jesus Christ—the *power of God* (1 Corinthians 1:24).