

# Can God Actually Lead Us into Temptation?

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I was a precocious kid. When my mom would take my brother and me out shopping, I would take every opportunity to grab things I shouldn't or hide in the clothes racks where my mom couldn't find me. Now that I'm a parent, I'm sure it was embarrassing for her to yell out my name while my brother and I were buried behind blouses on clearance.

She must not have been too worried about embarrassment, though, because her solution was to put us on a leash. That's right. She found these harnesses that were designed to use in conjunction with old school seat belts in the back seat of the car. My mother tied a rope to the harnesses and took us out to various stores to run her errands. She never lost us in a store again, leading us around like little puppy dogs. Hey. It was the 70s. That's how we rolled, I guess.

The "Lord's Prayer" is one of the most famous passages of Scripture. At the end of the prayer in [Matthew 6](#), there is an interesting request. "Lead us not into temptation ..."

A question naturally follows. Does God actually lead us into temptation? That seems the opposite of a good God who cares about us. It makes us uncomfortable.

What does "lead us not into temptation" mean? As with most scripture, our first step is to consider the context.

**What Is the Context of [Matthew 6](#)?**

Jesus teaches on prayer in the middle of the famous Sermon on the Mount. There have been mountains of books written on that sermon, and for good reason, since those three chapters of [Matthew 5-7](#) are a comprehensive teaching of the culture of the Kingdom of God, what it is like, and what it means to live like Heaven on Earth.

The chapter begins with discussing how we do deeds of charity, not to be seen but with a singular heart to love others and to please Father. A theme develops because Jesus teaches something similar to [fasting](#) and prayer. When we fast, we shouldn't do it to be seen, moaning and groaning to get attention. That's not the point.

The teaching on prayer continues this theme. Jesus gives us a contrast of two ways to pray. One is like the "hypocrites," actors who make a show of their prayers. Since attention is their goal, their reward ends there, which is sad and temporary. For those who follow Jesus, he teaches, we are to pray in secret, and God will reward us openly.

Jesus warns against praying for a long time. Using more words doesn't impress God. The Father already knows everything you need, Jesus says.

Here are a few important notes on the Lord's Prayer. First, the prayer begins with addressing God as Father. This was new in Jewish teaching. In fact, they hesitated to say God's name at all, not wanting to break a commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain ([Exodus 20:7](#)). Here Jesus teaches that through the Son, we call Him Father.

Second, we acknowledge God's power and worship him. Third, our first request is that the Kingdom will be brought to Earth, that we see that perfect and complete world expressed here and now.

With the Kingdom in mind, now we begin with practical requests—provision, forgiveness, and deliverance. This is a literal prayer version of "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

One last note on the Lord's Prayer; we are taught to pray from a collective perspective. Our requests are with plural pronouns. *Our Father ... give us this day ... forgive us ... as we forgive ... lead us not ... deliver us.*

This is fascinating. Jesus teaches us to go into a closet alone and meet God ... and pray with the community around us in our thoughts. We are never alone. Our community is always with us, spiritually, in what matters.

Jesus teaches the greatest commandments—love God and love others ([Matthew 26:36-40](#)). Before His death, Jesus gives a new commandment that we are to love each other as he loved us ([John 13:34](#)).

My prayer for provision, therefore, can't be for myself alone. I must pray for my provision and the provision of my neighbor. Forgiveness isn't only for me but for all. God's deliverance isn't focused on me alone. God loved the *world so much* that he gave his Son. It's for everyone, and to pray like the Son, bringing Heaven to Earth, I must acknowledge that God's love is for every individual.

That includes our struggle with temptation.

## **Does This Mean That God Leads People into Temptation?**

The answer is yes.

And no.

The Spirit did lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil ([Matthew 4:1](#)). God led the nation of Israel to the point where they had the Red Sea on one side and the mightiest army in the world on the other ([Exodus 14](#)). It depends on the word you want to use, tempt or test. God does allow us to be placed in situations where we are tested (or tempted).

James deals with this complexity in the first chapter of his letter—we should rejoice that our [faith](#) is tested because it builds the character of Christ within us.

At the same time, James makes it clear that [God doesn't tempt us](#). James tells us what does tempt us—our own desires pull us away from the good path. Scripture calls that our “flesh,” our sinful nature. The Bible gives two other sources for temptation—the Devil and the World ([Ephesians 2:1-3](#)), the systems built by people with a sinful nature. We have to be careful with narrative, however, not to use it as absolute doctrine. Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted. He also didn't go to Jerusalem at one point because he knew the danger ([John 7:8-10](#)), essentially led away from a problem. When the Jews were angry and going to throw Jesus off a cliff, Jesus just walked through the crowd ([Luke 4:30](#)), escaping. Jesus also warns against giving truth to some people who will only use it to attack us ([Matthew 7:6](#)).

The Apostle Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 10:12-13](#) that being tempted or tested is normal, and we should be careful not to fail, honest in our weakness. He continues with a promise that God will not test us beyond our ability and that there will be a way out. Looking at the phrase in [Matthew 6](#) one more time, the phrase “lead us not into temptation” is followed by a necessary request, “but deliver us from evil.”

There are a couple of interesting translations, too. The NLT expresses it this way, “Don't let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one.” The Message says this, “Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.”

What's the conclusion here? What is "lead us not into temptation" trying to say?

In asking Heaven to come to Earth, we are [begging God to save us from ourselves and the evil one out to get us.](#)

That salvation from temptation can take a number of different forms.

Taking into account the express teaching from James and 1 Corinthians, and the narratives from Scripture, God will lead us away from situations where we will be tempted or tested outside of His will, beyond the grace He has given us. He knows everything. He sees the end from the beginning when we don't, so we must trust Him in every detail.

And when we come across testing or temptation (and it is guaranteed we will be tempted and tested, that we will have trouble "in this world," [John 16:33](#)), we must trust his strength and look for the escape he has promised.

The Truth is we are weak and subject to temptation. As we "seek the Kingdom and God's righteousness," we are unable to overcome our desires on our own. We are easily led astray, and we must be humble enough to admit that God might need to keep us on a tight leash like my mom did my brother and me in the 70s. God gives grace (power, help) to the humble and resists the proud ([James 4:6-7](#)).

Living in the world and having those desires, we will come up against testing and temptation. There is an enemy behind all of this, and he is out to kill us, steal from us, and destroy anything pure and good ([John 10:10](#)). This isn't a religious game. Satan roams about like a lion ready to devour ([1 Peter 5:8](#)), and we desperately need to be rescued. Only God can rescue us.

None of us are alone in this struggle. This is a collective and normal struggle. US. WE. Every follower of Christ is together in this. "Heaven come to Earth" is a community where the righteous love each other with supernatural, Christ-like love. We were not born again to do it alone, not without God, and not without each other.

Yes, God leads us to temptations or times of testing. But also no, because he's not really leading us to those times but through them, using those situations to prove his power and strengthen our character.

### **How Can We Avoid Temptation?**

Some testing (temptation) is common and unavoidable. With our choices, however, we can either take the promised escape or make it worse.

If I have a problem with alcohol, I shouldn't drink. In fact, I should avoid situations where I could be tempted. I won't be able to avoid them all, but I can be proactive. There are numerous examples of this, and it takes the voice of God and a loving faith community to encourage and support us.

### [How do we deal with temptation?](#)

**Be aware the Devil is out to kill, steal, and destroy us.** I watched my mentor get angry or frustrated many times. He would stop and yell, "This is a test!", reminding himself of the spiritual reality beyond the current situation. We have to renew our minds that there are spiritual forces behind our temptations, that we are in a battle for our minds and hearts. We can't be ignorant of Satan's strategies ([2 Corinthians 2:11](#)).

**Be aware of our own weaknesses.** In prayer, be humble and honest with God. He will tell us where we are weak, and we can be intentional about where we go and what situations we place ourselves in. It is in our self-aware admission of our weakness that God reveals and shares his strength ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

**When tempted or tested, realize God has made a way of escape.** It is not hopeless. We don't have to give in. Again, this isn't in our own strength but God's promise and provision. Jesus was tempted "in every way and yet without sin" ([Hebrews 4:14](#)). Hebrews expresses this not to argue we'll never be tempted but to let us know we have a King who loves us and knows what we're going through. Our Lord is an expert in the escape and rescue.

**Be vulnerable about our weakness within a community.** Part of the lie of the enemy is to be ashamed of our temptation and keep it secret. But we are supposed to confess our flaws to each other to be healed ([James 5:16](#)). When we share our struggles with a trusted community, we find we aren't alone, and the Devil's lies are broken when the gathering of faith encourages one another to "love and good works" ([Hebrews 10:24](#)) in the Truth.

When we are humble and honest about our ability, we are able to walk in the Light, resting in His leadership, knowing that he helps us steer clear of the traps of the Devil and empowers us with strength if we do come against a test or temptation.  
Peace.