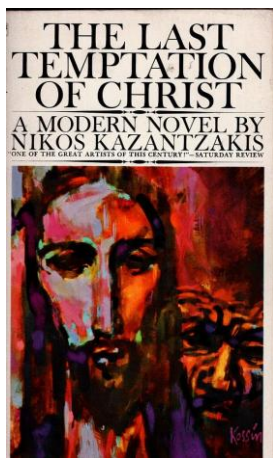


2026 08 30/James 1:13-14, 1 Peter 5:8-9
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Lead Us Not into Temptation



There is a scene near the end of Nikos Kazantzakis's novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, that has haunted readers — and offended not a few — since it was first published. Jesus is on the cross. He is dying. And in that final agony, an angel (Satan), appears to him and tells him that his suffering is over. God does not require the cross after all. He can come down. He can live. And a vision follows; something far more unsettling: an ordinary life. Jesus marries. He has children. He grows a business. In the cool of the evening with grandchildren at his feet, he lives a peaceful, comfortable, unremarkable life and it is good. And Kazantzakis wants us to feel — even for a moment — how beautiful that temptation is. Not grotesque. Beautiful. Not a red devil with a pitchfork poking at us in the dark, but something dressed like a blessing. Of course, in the novel, Jesus recognizes it for what it is. He cries out, He refuses the illusion, and He finds himself back on the cross, where He speaks His final word: “It is finished.” The ease was the temptation. The cross was the calling.

This kind of similar moment happens to us too. In a moment, we are taken into a moment of thoughts or imagination that an evil spirit drops; our minds are taken to thoughts or evil thoughts simply by a hostile environment, such as social media, the internet, movies, etc. Is it right? It is almost automatic. Sometimes you are surprised, ‘Why am I thinking this bad thought?’ Have you experienced that? If you recognize this say, “Devil, get behind me!”, and choose again the opposite right thoughts and let yourself be wrapped by the Holy Spirit.

What Is Temptation? Temptation usually carries connotations of something that crosses a moral line – tempted to steal, lust, envy, or lie, greed, anger, for example. It is far more than that. Something delightful that we should not eat. Something we should not do because it violates the moral code of the Kingdom.

Regarding this theme, here is one of the strange difficulties of reading the Bible in English: one single English word is being asked to do the work of two very different ideas. We pray daily, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). However, would our good God ever lead us into temptation in the first place? James is explicit about this: “No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil and He himself tempts no one” (James 1:13). So, what exactly are we praying?

The answer lies behind the English, in the Greek word underneath both “temptation” and “testing” — the word *peirasmos*. And here is the key: *peirasmos* is a wide word. It can mean “trial.” It can mean “test.” It can mean “temptation” in the sense we usually mean — an enticement toward sin. Same root word, very different intentions behind it, depending on who is doing the “testing” and why.

When God tests — and scripture is clear that God does test His people — the purpose is always to strengthen, reveal, mature, and shape us more fully into the image of Christ. God’s testing is never designed to make us fall. It’s designed to reveal what’s already there, and then to refine it. But when Satan tempts — and scripture is equally clear that the tempter is real — the purpose is the opposite. Not to strengthen, but to ruin. Not to reveal faith, but to destroy it. Same word, *peirasmos*, wielded by two very different hands with two very different aims.

How do we protect ourselves from the temptation of the evil spirits? We can win in the frontline of the battle by protecting our eyes and ears. They are the first channel through which evil spirits attack. However, once you see a bad picture, you must exert 60 times more effort to remove the influence of the bad one. It is best if you restore yourself as soon as possible. If you leave it alone, the evil influence grows in you. It enters deeply into you with time. If the front line of the battlefield is broken, then you start to think about it. The same thoughts come repeatedly, and the ideas will become action. If it develops this far, then it will become a complex and hard battle inside of you.

So, we need to prepare to protect ourselves against temptation. **Through prayer,** we begin the process of seeking to avoid it and, in doing so, we become a means to God answering our prayer. God not only often keeps us from temptation because of our prayers, but in the very act of praying, we fortify our souls against sin. We resolve, by the Spirit, to hold onto the truth and not to choose deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). We remind our hearts that the pleasures of sin are shallow and fleeting (Hebrews 11:25), while pleasure in God is completely incomparable, far exceeding the shallow pleasure; it is very deep and enduring.

Praying against temptation leads us, then, **to plan against temptation** in tangible ways. **Knowing our patterns of sins and proclivities to particular sins, we avoid unwise environments to “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14).** We heed the wisdom of a loving father to his son (Proverbs 5:1) about the “forbidden woman” (Proverbs 5:3): not just to stay out of her bed but to “keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house” (Proverbs 5:8). Hold the identity as a child of God deeply in your heart. It will empower you.

Ex) I know a pastor who was a pastor of a big church. The pastor had a relationship with a woman, and eventually, somebody opened it. The wife was devastated. He lost the respect and love of the children, the family was broken, the congregation lost faith, he also lost the title of pastor and is now living in a very lonely and helpless situation. It was because of a short moment of pleasure. The bait was pretty harmless. “Just see her! Nothing will happen.” When the temptation is so close, it is tough for our flesh to not get caught.

Prepare for Temptation Still

When they do come with the preparations, we can feel more clearheaded that God has lovingly allowed this test into my life. You know in your heart that you can win with the help of the Holy Spirit. And God has not left me without His promises for these very moments. **“God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13).** Like Joseph, it may mean running (Genesis 39:11–12). Like Jesus, it often will mean rehearsing the very words of God (Matthew 4:1–11). If you are not prepared, you lose. The devil is very powerful. 1 Peter 5:8-9 states, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”

Are you in the word? Are you holding the delightful presence in your heart? Are you abiding in Jesus? Resting in God in daily moments? It will give you victory over temptations. And the identity of who you are in the Lord will empower you. Ask yourself, who am I? Who does God want to be for me right now? If you are joined with Jesus, wrapped by the presence, instead of entering a panicked fight against negative thoughts or spiritual pressure, warfare can go toward victory. Otherwise, we lose.

Our model is Jesus. Jesus used the scripture in Deuteronomy when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. And it was also the last test of God for Jesus' Messianic capabilities. Whenever you are upgraded in your spiritual life, God gives us tests like a school. The answer to life's moments is the word of God. God's

word is living. God's word is powerful! Holding the miracle word means abiding in Jesus. It is good preparation for the unexpected battle of daily moments.

I want to add one thing more: some of the deepest temptations don't look evil at all. They look like exactly what we've been telling ourselves we deserve. I think this is what Kazantzakis understood so well. Learn to recognize when "ease" itself has become the temptation. If you abide in Jesus, you will get to learn this too.

Kept by God in the Test

"It is grace not only to be kept from sin but also from temptation." Pray against your specific besetting sins, and as you do, go a step further and pray against specific temptations as well. God will provide a way out and wisdom on how to avoid it. Identity also gives you empowerment to win the battle. Ask a question, "What is God revealing about my true identity right now?" It is an opportunity to practice living out Heaven's perspective and stepping into greater maturity.

The Passion Translation (1 Corinthians 10:13) renders part of this promise of protection with a particular warmth: God is "loyal and true to His promises and He will not allow you to be tempted or tested beyond your ability to endure it". Loyal. True. That is your God, and my God this morning. Not distant. Not indifferent to your struggle. Loyal to you in the wilderness, true to His word when the tempter comes dressed in comfortable clothing.