

Testing, Testing...1, 2, 3

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- [0 : 00] And please take out your Bible and you can find your way on over to Matthew chapter 6. As Ryan mentioned last week, one more sermon on this text, this Lord's Prayer that we have been looking at for the last several weeks.
- And then, Lord willing, starting next week, we will return to Hebrews chapter 11. We made our way about halfway through Hebrews chapter 11. We have a little bit of work to do there, like between here and Advent, worth several more stories to continue learning what is faith.
- And so we will pick that up next Sunday in the will of the Lord. Are you ready? Matthew chapter 6. Evelyn, would you please come and serve us this morning in reading?
- This is Matthew chapter 6, starting at verse 9 and down through verse number 15. Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
- Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- [1 : 09] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
- Good Father, we need your help by the power of the Holy Spirit as we continue in our time of worship.
- We need your help so that we listen to the preaching of your word discerningly and carefully. And we need your help.
- I need your help as I endeavor to serve your people in preaching this particular text this morning. Thank you for giving us the privilege of gathering and worshiping together.
- Thank you for the reminder from Psalm 100 that we gather and we make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Thank you for giving us that privilege. Thank you for calling us to worship you, and thank you for overflowing our hearts with worship.
- [2 : 17] Please help us, Holy Spirit, as we continue now in our worship. We want to hear those things that you have to say to us from your word. I want to be faithful to say those things that you want to say to us from your word.
- Lord, help us to hear and to listen and to believe and to obey. We ask all of this in the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
- We are not as strong as we think we are. We are not as strong as we think we are.
- Rich Mullins wrote that song for his album, Songs. Could have been a little more original, but his album, Songs, which released in 1996.
- And I think about that lyric often because it is a profound truth. We are not as strong as we think we are.
- [3 : 21] I wonder if you see your walk with Jesus as fairly linear, you know? Like you started out that moment that you were born again, and now you are just on the straight path to glory.

Maybe it is kind of how we think about traveling from here to, oh, I don't know, Louisville. And, you know, you get on the interstate, and though there are some turns along the way, maybe you will find a detour along the way.

Generally speaking, you're making your way there, and you are closing the distance between here and your destination. The path is fairly certain and fairly linear.

But really, following Jesus seems a lot more like a Candyland board. If you have forgotten, this is what a Candyland board looks like.

There are twists, and there are turns in this board. And every once in a while, you might have to miss a turn. Sometimes you take a big step forward, and then sometimes you get stuck, and you have to take some steps back.

[4 : 38] And if you're picking the double color cards, if you recall from your childhood, that's really great, because you're moving forward. And then sometimes as the game progresses, you might get one of those special wild cards and get to take a big leap forward.

And then guess what happens? If you're late in the game, and you get one of those very special cards, you suddenly are going all the way back to nearly the beginning.

I wonder if this is what following Jesus often feels more like for us. It's like a Candyland board.

We are not as strong as we think we are. I wonder if you have experienced a moment when the light of the gospel of Jesus breaks through.

And when the Holy Spirit gives you the grace of guilt. And when perhaps, perhaps, by conviction that comes from listening to a sermon or a podcast or maybe a faithful friend who gives you some accountability, conviction comes pressing down on your heart the way kids mash Play-Doh into the tabletop.

[5 : 59] And that conviction presses down on you and you realize, I have sinned. I am not saying what I should be saying.

I know better than to be doing what I am doing right now. I have not spoken what I ought to have spoken. I have not done what I should have done.

My attitude stinks. My heart is full of pride. I am not loving. Do you experience moments like that? We are not as strong as we think we are.

I am not as strong as I think I am. And so Jesus teaches us to pray. Verse number 13. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Two complications and two clarifications. Complication number one in understanding and interpreting this text. Complication number one.

[7 : 20] Why does Jesus teach us to pray that God not do something that James assures us God doesn't do?

Let me remind you of James chapter one and verse number 13. James writes this. No one undergoing a trial should say, I am being tempted by God.

Since God is not tempted by evil and he himself doesn't tempt anyone. Do you see why this is a bit of a complication with our text?

Here is why. There is one word that is used in the Greek language, in the original language.

It's the word trial here that's on the screen in James chapter one and verse 13. And it's the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 6, 13, except there it's translated temptation.

[8 : 21] But it's the same root word. This is a challenge for us. It means that we have to look and explore the context. And we have to let those texts that are most clear give clarity to those texts that are less clear.

Well, what is very clear here is that James says God does not tempt anyone. That's very clear. So then, Jesus must be using that same word, but in a different sense.

And what is that sense? Well, it turns out that this word has two definitions. One is temptation, in the way we think of that word, and enticement to sin.

And the second definition is an assessment. An assessment of character or nature or the quality of something.

We might use the word a trial or maybe better, a test. This second definition, then, is how Jesus uses the word.

[9 : 31] Think back to taking tests in school. Now, some of us have to think back further than others. But think back to taking tests in school. Some of you are only thinking back just a few hours to Friday, perhaps.

When I was in school, I think maybe I was in somewhere between fourth and sixth grade. I had a very peculiar experience. I was taking a math test.

It was one of those tests where there's like 30 problems, and they're all roughly the same. And I don't know, fourth grade? What is that? Multiplication, maybe? Something like that. And so I'm taking this test, and I'm working my way through this test.

I don't know if I've ever shared this. I love math. I thought at one point maybe I would be a math teacher. That did not work out for me. But I loved math. But here's what happened. I'm taking my test, minding my own business.

I look over, and I see another student, and he is cheating off of my paper. Do you know what I did?

[10 : 34] I wrote in wrong answers. And then after he had completed his test, I corrected my answers. I don't know if I'm proud of that or not, but that is what I did.

So maybe it's a confession, I guess. That is what I did. Tests are helpful in that they assess the quality, the nature, the character of your learning.

Tests are helpful to gauge your progress. How am I doing? Good test questions won't mislead you. You know, those tests that are like multiple choice, but then there's the E, which is like none of the above.

Good test questions are not about trying to mislead you. They're not trying to fool you. A good teacher genuinely wants to assess your progress. Good tests. Good tests let you show the character and the nature and the quality of your learning.

If, if you are prepared. But what if you are not prepared? Then that same test that is intended to test your character, your nature, the quality of your learning, suddenly turns into a temptation to sin, doesn't it?

[12 : 03] You're tempted to cheat. Is that temptation to cheat your teacher or your professor's fault?

It is not your teacher or your professor's fault. They have given the same test to two students. And to one student, it is a genuine test of progress and the nature of their learning.

But to the other student who has not prepared and has not done the reading and has not done the homework assignments, has not participated in class, that same test has become a very real temptation to do the wrong thing, to sin.

James goes on in verse 14 and he says this, Each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own sin, his own evil desire.

And then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do you see what James says?

[13 : 13] It is not your teacher's fault. In the same way that is not God the Father's fault for bringing a test, a trial into your life.

He is not tempting you. The Father tests his children, but he does not tempt them. That temptation comes from within your own heart.

Oh sure, your friends may influence it. Culture may influence it. And the devil may take all of those things, bad influences, bad cultural influences, and use all of those things to turn a test into a temptation.

But listen, the temptation to sin is already inside of your heart. That's what James says. That's what the scripture says.

This complication number one that Jesus teaches us to pray, that God not do something that James assures us that God does not do is answered in this way.

[14 : 27] When we pray, do not bring us into temptation. This is not a request to eliminate all tests. This is a request to eliminate the kind of test that would overpower us and provoke our hearts to sin.

Complication number two. Why does Jesus teach us to pray for deliverance from something that Peter and James say is good for us?

Let me read here since we're in James chapter one and verse number two. Consider it great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials.

Same word. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

James says we should consider it joy when we encounter various trials. But Jesus says, don't lead me into those trials.

[15 : 43] What is going on here? Peter. Peter adds to what James has to say in this way. First Peter chapter one and verse six. You rejoice in this, in a future salvation, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials.

Same word. So that the proven character of your faith, more valuable than gold, which though perishable, is refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What does Peter say? Testing of your faith is good. Because it's like what happens when you put gold in the fire, and it comes out more pure than when you put it in.

And yet Jesus says that we should ask the Father not to lead us into testing. This is a complication that we should search for an answer for.

Why would Jesus teach us to pray for deliverance from something that Peter and James say is good for us? Well, the first reason is that testing is unpleasant.

[16 : 56] Anyone wake up and be like, I am so excited. I get to go take a test today. I had to take a silly training at work, and I was not excited about having to go to work and to take this training.

What if I don't do well? What if that gets reported to my boss on this training? Then what? Testing is not pleasant. Maybe you look forward to it in some sense of preparing for that test, but I don't think any of us put our driving test or our ACT or the CPA exam or a board exam or post-residency boards.

Nobody is putting these types of tests on the top of our bucket list. Testing is unpleasant. Why?

Because it's not fun. It's stressful. It's pressure. It's hard. J.I. Packer said this, temptation may be our lot, but only a fool will make it his preference.

I think that's pretty good wisdom right there. Testing is unpleasant. What's the second reason? Well, sinners have a losing record against temptation.

[18 : 23] Why does Jesus teach us to pray, lead us not into temptation, into testing? Why would Jesus pray that? Because testing is unpleasant.

And secondly, because we have a losing record against temptation. Say you take a test and you fail a test and your teacher says, look, we're going to have a retest because everybody did really poorly.

Do you look forward to the second test any more than the first one? No. Why? Because you already did poorly once and you think you just might do poorly again.

You could fail your boards. And I understand that you can retake those boards a couple of times, but the pressure is on now.

Why is it not less stressful? Why is there more pressure? And the answer is because you've already tried and failed. Now you know your own weaknesses. You know what is most likely to trip you up.

[19 : 32] Think about it in terms of our spiritual lives. You know your own weaknesses. You know those things that are most likely to entice your heart and overpower you.

You know the devil's skill in exploiting your vulnerability. You know your own history. Listen, when God tests our faith, few of us, maybe none of us, can ever say, this was my first rodeo.

You know, I just, that just came out of nowhere. We have a failing record, a losing record against temptation. And so Jesus teaches us to pray.

Do not lead us into temptation. There's a third reason, and we have hinted at it already. It is because the devil is active.

Why does Jesus teach us to pray, lead us not into temptation? Because the devil is active. By dying and rising from the dead, Jesus crushed the serpent's head.

[20 : 44] Jesus broke the power of sin and death. Because of Jesus and his death and resurrection, no follower of Jesus can ever say, the devil made me do it.

The devil did not make you do it. Temptation inside of your own heart rose up and responded to a test.

It is simply not true that the devil makes us do it. Not for followers of Jesus. The devil is defeated.

But he is still permitted. Peter talks about it this way in 1 Peter chapter 5. 1 Peter chapter 5.

Be sober-minded. Be alert. Your adversary, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for anyone he can devour.

[21 : 48] Do you see those words? Sober-minded. Alert. Adversary. Prowling.

Devouring. Why would Jesus teach us to pray, lead us not into temptation? Because he knows that though defeated, the devil is still permitted.

And he is active. But listen, our father is decisive. Our father decides in his wisdom and his mercy how and when to test your faith.

And so, Jesus teaches us to pray. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

since Jesus teaches us to pray this way, we should ask, what is at stake when the father tests our faith?

[23 : 12] What is at stake when the father tests our faith? when we fail a test, when we give in to temptation, your heart is a little more twisted and a little more corrupted.

And your potential for joy is stunted. And your satisfaction with Jesus decreases. And the devil, though defeated, steals a small victory from the jaws of defeat.

But, when by the Holy Spirit's power you pass a test and you resist temptation, your faith in Jesus grows and your joy in your salvation expands and you learn to treasure Jesus a little bit more and your capacity for the glory that you were made to enjoy with Jesus deepens.

Oh, dear friends, we are not as strong as we think we are. But Jesus wins when we don't give in. With every defeat from the world's perspective, grace appears less amazing.

The power of Jesus' death and resurrection seems more irrelevant. And the light of the gospel dims like turning a dimmer light switch on a bulb with every defeat.

[25 : 02] But with every victory, with every victory, the wonder of God's triumph over darkness and death and the devil becomes more real and more clear and more obvious to everyone in your circle of influence.

And interestingly enough, God's power is not made more clear, more obvious, more compelling through a direct display of his power, but through weak, hesitant, inconsistent, distracted people like us.

His strength is made perfect in our weakness. We are not impressed when we are working at the Perry Center and Corey successfully removes door hardware.

We're not impressed with that. Do you know why? Because Corey's good at that kind of thing. He knows how to do that. He knows the right tools. He knows the right way to turn the screwdriver.

All of those good things. We're not impressed when Corey takes off the door hardware. But when I manage to pull that off, we're like, we should probably have dessert or something. We should go out, celebrate this.

[26 : 37] Why? Because in the weakness, when there is success, we celebrate. Similarly, the more difficult the test follower of Jesus, the more difficult the test that the Father in his wisdom and mercy brings your way.

The more glory for Jesus when you pass that test. Bringing a test, a trial into your life.

This is a costly decision for your Father in Heaven. No doubt, it is a decision that he does not make lightly.

Why? Because sometimes you fail. And sometimes I do too. And when we fail, faith is damaged and credibility is tarnished and unbelieving friends and neighbors and colleagues say, I told you so.

And marriages are wrecked and families are ravaged and churches are destroyed. if this is a costly decision to bring a test into our lives, then why bring tests at all?

[28 : 24] Why not just put us on the fast straight track to Louisville? Why does life have to be more like the Candyland game?

Why does life have to be and the answer is that your father has high hopes and big plans for you, child of God.

Your father has high hopes and big plans for you. And opposite your adversary, the devil, God's goal in testing your faith is growth, maturity, growth in faith, growth in spiritual vitality, growth in our need for one another, growth in Christ's likeness, growth in awareness of our weakness and dependence on him.

Every time you pass a test, your relationship with your father deepens and the devil sulks away like the loser that he is.

and the gospel of Jesus shines more brightly and God is glorified.

[29 : 49] Your father has high hopes and big plans for you. Consider Jesus praying in the garden just hours before he is to be betrayed and arrested.

Maybe even minutes. Matthew 26 and verse 36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane and he told the disciples sit here while I go over there and pray.

Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee he began to be sorrowful and troubled and he said to them I am deeply grieved to the point of death remain here and stay awake with me and going a little farther he fell face down and prayed my father if it is possible let this cup pass from me.

what is he saying? Do not lead me into temptation. If it's possible take away this test.

But notice instead of saying deliver us from the evil one like Jesus teaches his disciples to pray the Lord Jesus says not as I will but as you will and to purchase the salvation of his people God permitted the devil to do his very worst God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us Jesus suffered and died so that sinners like you and me can be forgiven for all of the times that we have given in to temptation is Jesus your savior?

[32 : 10] Are you trusting in Jesus alone? Is he your only hope in this life and in the life to come? brothers and sisters we are not home yet we are not home yet and life is a spiritual minefield with twists and turns and tests and temptations and given this danger the threat to our faith and the threat to our witness as a follower of Jesus is so very real we dare not trust ourselves and so the scripture says 1 Corinthians 10 whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall and so we pray do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one and because

Jesus warns us about hypocrisy in our prayer we ought to ask ourselves what people what places what group of friends what situations what circumstances are most likely to stir up inside of me that sin that still dwells in there and cause me to be tempted we ought to consider those things very carefully we ought not to pray this hypocritically and then not be mindful of those things and put ourselves back into those situations again and again and again and again what are we doing what places what people what group of friends what circumstances unnecessarily expose me to testing that I may not yet be able to overcome in wisdom we choose to avoid those situations so that we do not fall into temptation we are not as strong as we think we are we have good days and we have bad days we pass some tests and we fail some tests sometimes we fail repeatedly and we need help and sometimes we fail secretly and we need to walk in the light sometimes we fail courageously we've tried really hard not to fail and we have still given in to temptation we need to be reminded in those moments that grace is sufficient and that mercy is more in spite of our weakness and our sin and our failure we believe what Paul writes to the

Thessalonians and what we had the privilege just a few weeks ago of thinking about the Lord is faithful he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one and so if you would please join me and when you pray pray like this our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil oh father yours is the kingdom and the glory and the power forever and ever and ever we join our voices with those already gathered around the throne and the angelic host proclaiming holy holy holy is the lord god almighty worthy is the lamb who was slain father son and holy spirit we give ourselves to you and ask that you would stir up inside of us fresh appreciation for all that you have done fresh faith fresh obedience renewed worship we ask this for your glory and for the spread of your name and your kingdom over all this earth and for our good as we seek to be faithful to you living through all of the twists and turns and ups and downs of this life we ask this in

Jesus name amen