

## How to Pray Part 7

### ***What Is the Biggest Risk to You and Those You Love?***

When Mary Jo and I got married, she was working as a sales representative for the biggest candy producer in the world. Just a month after going on our honeymoon, it was announced that her sales district won a national sales competition, and the prize was an all expenses paid week vacation in Rio de Janeiro. Rio was even better than I had heard and each day was packed with company events such as body surfing at the beach at Ipanema, going to a private island by sailboat and having a treasure hunt with real buried prizes, taking a tram to the top of Corcovado and standing at the foot of the world famous Christ the Redeemer Statue. One unexpected event was the entire sales group and spouses going to a dinner show. The food was fabulous. It was a dress-up affair, and we were having a great time. Everyone except Mary Jo and I was getting slightly drunk. Then the show began. A band played and showgirls in string bikinis danced on stage. I looked at Mary Jo and wondered if we should slip out and wait for it to end. I didn't want to embarrass Mary Jo though in front of her co-workers and I prayed that the show would be quickly over. It wasn't. Without warning, the dancing women came down among the dinner patrons and approached various men to do a lap dance. One picked me out and made eye contact with me and in a flash, I was up against it. What should I do?

It is amazing how quickly temptation comes upon you. Without warning you are facing a call to sin and it is up to you how you will respond. Sin is anything that goes up against God and His clear word. It can be something that operates only in your brain such as lust or an act on your part such as lying or cursing or not tithing. Our big idea for today comes from the conclusion of the model prayer. Pray to avoid all forms of temptation. Here is how the model prayer ends **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**' (Matthew 6: 13 NIV) There is some difference of opinion in the various translations of this. Is it a call to be kept out of reach of the devil or simply asking God to pull us away from evil? I tend to think the simplest answer is the best. "God, don't let me get near anything that would entice me to do evil of any sort, and that means the devil too." Now the term translated temptation is expansive. It literally means "testing" or "proving" or even "calamity". This later idea is quite interesting to me. When David went up on the roof of his palace and spotted Bathsheba bathing, this was temptation; it was also calamitous. **One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,** (2 Samuel 11: 2 NIV) His affair with her was disastrous and one could argue that not only did it wreck David, lead to the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah and ruin the very moral fabric of both Bathsheba and David, it resulted in the spiritual devastation of David's family and eventually the very nation itself. There is not time to describe the ripple effect of David's sin with Bathsheba, but it was calamitous. It is almost sickening to consider all the destruction that one sin brought to a family and a nation.

Let us take a deeper look at this prayer. You can almost translate it this way. Please, please, please God do not let me get into a spot where I am tempted. Consider this. Suppose there is a ferocious, grizzly bear prowling about on the other side of a fence. Would you knowingly open the gate and let yourself into the enclosure? Of course you would not. Now we have heard stories of lunatic Yellowstone Park visitors approaching grizzly bears in order to take selfies with them. You cannot logically explain that. But you, as a rational soul, would you freely walk up to the vicious grizzly bear and try to rub its back? Of course not. Have you lately considered parking your car on the railroad tracks as a freight train approached? Well no. Are you thinking of drinking battery acid to quench your thirst? I hope not. If temptation is much, much, much worse than all of these scenarios, as I believe it is, why would anyone be flippant about facing temptation?

David had a clear out when he came up against his temptation. He did not know who Bathsheba was. **and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"** (2 Samuel 11: 3 NIV) At this point, David was in the middle of temptation. He had not sinned but as we know, he did. Rather than begging God to get him away from temptation, David rushed headlong into his temptation, and it was calamitous for him. There are two disastrous approaches to temptation. Some people run headlong into it as Samson did when he met the pagan Canaanite woman and begged his father to arrange for him to marry her. **His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"** (Judges 14: 3a NIV) Despite the warning of his parents, Samson began a lifelong lust for pagan women which eventually led to his horrific end.

Others want to be able to sniff around evil, see what they find in it, explore it a bit. These are the ones who play with temptation and act as if it is not a very big matter for them. Eve is a classic example of this. Despite knowing full well that neither she nor Adam were to eat of the fruit from the tree which provided the knowledge of good and evil, she, at the instigation of Satan let the sight of it intoxicate her. Rather than getting as far away from the tree as she could, she hung around it until the desire for the fruit choked off her sensitivity to God. **When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.** (Genesis 3: 6 NIV) The Hebrew verb translated saw is an intense form of seeing. It points to someone who stares for a long time at something, seeing with real interest, a decisive focus on the object. Eve did not just glance over at the forbidden fruit, she gazed upon it again and again until its beauty captivated her. The prayer Jesus tells us to pray is one of violent pleading with God to get us away from the evil that is in front of us, begging the Lord to not let us stay where the temptation, the calamitous temptation confronts us

Eve had no idea how disastrous it would be for her to eat the fruit and by doing so push her husband into taking it too. It was not just her and Adam who died, they brought death into the entire universe and disaster, like a giant bolt of lightning struck every part of the physical realm. Samson did not know just what it would do to him if he, in violation of God's clear command, became infatuated with women who did not love the Lord. Do you believe David realized in the moment of lust what he was doing to himself, his family and the entire nation of Israel if he continued to hang around his temptation? Of course he didn't. Sin was just a little thing for all of them. God wouldn't care that much if Judas took those thirty pieces of gold and turned Jesus in to the Jewish leaders. Temptation is not a small matter that just may get us into a little trouble, it is the gaping mouth of hell.

Just this week several high profile pastors clearly did not pray for God to pull them away from evil and keep them from temptation as their sins led to them each resigning their posts as pastors. A pastor in our area split his church in half and became an embarrassment to the Christian community by having an affair with his secretary all because he stopped praying for God to keep him away from evil and tear him away from his temptation. Of course, for many people, adultery is not the most common temptation they face. Consider the odd case of Miriam, the sister of Moses. She was Moses' older sister who helped save him from Pharaoh's massacre of Hebrew babies. When Moses returned to Egypt eighty years later at the calling of the Lord to lead Israel out of slavery, Moses made his sister Miriam an important leader among the Hebrews. In fact, after God dramatically destroyed the Egyptian soldiers and Pharaoh himself when He drowned them in the Red Sea, it was Miriam who had the honor due to her influence to direct the women of Israel in a great song of praise. **Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."** (Exodus 15: 20-21 NIV) What a great moment that was and how critical a part Miriam played in bringing the minds of all to God. However, a calamity, a temptation came at Miriam. Envy. For reasons we haven't been given, it ate at Miriam that Moses her brother had all the acclaim and respect of the Israelites, and she was not valued enough. So, with her brother Aaron, she became bitter toward Moses and coveted his place of leadership. **Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this.** (Numbers 12:1-2 NIV)

Those are some ominous words when it comes to sin. **"And the Lord heard this."** God shut this mini rebellion down quickly. He struck Miriam with leprosy and her public humiliation at God's rejection of her wrecked her high standing in Israel. This essentially was the end of Miriam's leadership among the Hebrews and she died not long after. What if Miriam, instead of letting her envy simmer within, had called out to God and prayed for Him to remove from her the temptation assaulting her. That sin might never have broken her life. Jesus tells you to rather than face so many temptations and risk wrecking your life through sin, pray for the removal of temptations, for the Lord to take you out of temptations. What a wonderful life we could have if this was our diligent prayer! Lord get me away from the evil that tempts me. Build a wall of protection around me so I won't wreck my life or the lives of others by giving in to powerful forms of temptation. Life without sin is like a dream come true. Let us pursue that sort of life with a passion. Our big idea is simple. Pray to avoid all forms of temptation. If you want to live your best life, that is the way to go.