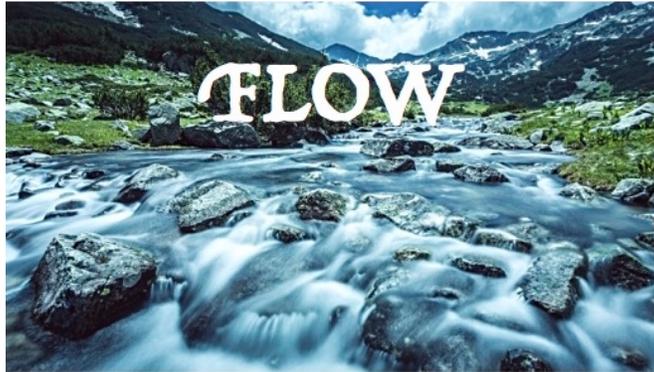


#13 March 17, 2017



*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

*(Matthew 4:1-11, NIV)*

## **Temptation**

### ***A Gospel Story***

Matt Hilgaertner

#### **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

**Question 106:** "What do we pray for in the sixth petition?"

**Answer:** "In the sixth petition, which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*, we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

In one of Billy Joel's songs, "She's Such a Temptation," he writes about temptation in response to physical lust. In the following words, I've slightly changed his song lyrics to make them more "general." The experience and subsequent feelings are often the same, regardless of what or where the temptation may be. If it helps, think of Adam & Eve gazing at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (from which they were forbidden to eat). Better yet, personalize it by consider anything in your life that tempts you to sin, and see if these words don't ring true...

*It's such a temptation; it's driving me crazy;  
And it's my fascination that's making me act this way.  
And I try to be rational and I try to be wise;  
But it all gets blown to pieces when [this temptation] catches my eye.  
I should be leaving but I can't cut loose;  
I have my reasons for resistance but I have no excuse.  
And I lose my composure; I could use some restraint;  
I never claimed to be a hero and I never said I was a saint.  
It's such a temptation; it's driving me crazy;  
And it's my fascination that's making me act this way.*

To my knowledge, Billy Joel is not a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. But if you listen to enough of his music, you'll find he's had some sort of experience (perhaps during his upbringing) with the Roman Catholic Church. While he may not be a theologian, his "theology" is in this case actually pretty good. Christians and non-Christians alike struggle with sin and temptation because it's the fallen human condition. The Apostle Paul describes it like this, in his letter to the Romans: *"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."* (Romans 7:18-19, NIV)

My point here is that while we are alive in the flesh, we will continue to experience temptation. There's no way around it. Even the Lord Jesus, God in the flesh, experienced temptation during his physical life on earth. At least one of those times was recorded in great detail in the scripture passage shown above, from Matthew 4. The big difference, of course, is that Jesus didn't give in to temptation. Notice one of his strategies – to quote scripture. All the more reason for us to bury the Word of God deep into our souls! We can learn from Jesus, but we will still struggle. Unlike Jesus, we will often respond and react the same way as Billy Joel does. I find it interesting to see Billy Joel's frustration build to the

point where he finally says, “I never said I was a saint.” It’s like he’s throwing in the towel, suggesting that there’s no use in trying to resist because he’s just going to give in again and again.

Though we will never be free from temptation in our earthly life, does that mean we should also just throw in the towel and give up? Even that idea itself is a temptation, isn’t it? However, like other temptations that lead us into sin and separate us from fellowship and peace with God, God wants and expects us to avoid sin, and to resist temptation. But that’s easier said than done, isn’t it? Left to ourselves, we will never be strong enough to live a sin-free life. So what can be done? What hope do we have? Later in the same passage from Romans 7, Paul writes: *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (vv. 24-25, NIV)

During the Church season of Lent, some Christians practice the spiritual discipline of “fasting” from something for a set period of time. Perhaps they go the full forty days of Lent, but really, it can be done for any length of time. (Of course, fasting can also be done any time of the year, not just during Lent.) When fasting, people “refrain from” or “deprive themselves of” one of their daily habits (usually bad habits, but it could even be a good habit for this exercise). The idea is that when you have a craving or desire for whatever it is you’ve given up, you will experience a type of “suffering” that helps you identify with the suffering Jesus went through on our behalf. During those times of suffering, PRAY and give thanks to God for Jesus Christ, and ask God to give you the strength to overcome your temptation, and be drawn closer to God.

Here’s a great Bible verse to memorize, if you haven’t done so already. It comes from 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV), where Paul says,

*“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”*

When we experience temptation, we have a choice – to give in, or to flee. Friends, God knows we will continue to stumble and fall. ut over time, as we grow closer to God in Christ and deeper in our faith, the desire to sin will diminish, and the strength to flee will increase. This is why spiritual disciplines are so important, because we’re training our souls to become fully devoted to God. However, we

will never become perfect, which is why God came to us in Christ – to be our perfection. So we must rely upon him, and not ourselves, to be the Redeemer.

I love what A.W. Tozer says about this very thing. He describes it like this: *“While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves – blessed riddance. The people who have struggled to purify themselves and have had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when they stop tinkering with their souls and look away to the perfect One. While they look at Christ, the very thing they have so long been trying to do will be getting done within them.”* That’s a beautiful image of the sanctifying (purifying, cleansing) process all believers go through during our earthly lives. It’s a process that transforms us more and more into the likeness of Christ as we travel through this life, and grow in his love and grace. The rate of that transformation is related to our willingness to trust and obey. But whether we are young or mature in our faith, believers are all equally forgiven, equally loved, and equally saved. Not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done. Thanks be to God.

**Video: “Lord, I Need You”** by Matt Maher  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e37m3I5eH8g>

**Puritan Prayer: “Grace in Trials”**

*Father of mercies, hear me for Jesus’ sake.  
I am sinful even in my closest walk with you;  
it is of your mercy I died not long ago.  
Your grace has given me faith in the cross  
by which you have reconciled yourself to me  
and me to you,  
drawing me by your great love,  
reckoning me as innocent in Christ though  
guilty in myself.  
Giver of all graces,  
I look to you for strength to maintain them in me,  
for it is hard to practice what I believe.  
Strengthen me against temptations.  
My heart is an unexhausted fountain of sin,  
a river of corruption since childhood days,*

*flowing on in every pattern of behavior.  
You have disarmed me of the means  
in which I trusted,  
and have no strength but in you.  
You alone can hold back my evil ways,  
but without your grace to sustain me I fall.  
Satan's darts quickly inflame me,  
And the shield that should quench them  
easily drops from my hand:  
Empower me against his wiles and assaults.  
Keep me sensible of my weakness,  
and of my dependence upon your strength.  
Let every trial teach me more of your peace,  
more of your love.  
Your Holy Spirit is given to increase your graces,  
and I cannot preserve or improve them  
unless He works continually in me.  
May your Spirit confirm my trust in your promised help,  
and let me walk humbly in dependence  
upon you,  
for Jesus' sake.  
Amen.*