

In the Crucible with Christ

The Birdcage

Lesson #3 for July 16, 2022

Scriptures: Exodus 14; 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Peter 1:6-9; Proverbs 3.

1. As Christians, are we treated by God like a bird in a cage?

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him. He learns a snatch of this, a trill of that, but never a separate and entire melody. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song he is to sing. In the dark [without distractions], he tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned, and he breaks forth in perfect melody. Then the bird is brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. Thus God deals with His children. He has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction we can sing it ever afterward.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 472.2; *Help in Daily Living** 10.3.†

2. Does God ever actively carry us into trying situations?
3. We believe that Satan will tempt us in every way possible. However, does God have anything to do with that?
4. Think of some examples from the Bible where God appears to have led someone into temptation.
5. How do you understand the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness? Matthew 4:1 seems to suggest that Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. Compare Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-2. **God did not lead Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted by the Devil. Jesus went into the wilderness to spend time with His Father in preparation for His life work. At the end of that time, the Devil was allowed to tempt Him.**

[EGW:] **When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted, He was led by the Spirit of God. He did not invite temptation. He went to the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate His mission and work. By fasting and prayer He was to brace Himself for the bloodstained path He must travel. But Satan knew that the Saviour had gone into the wilderness, and he thought this the best time to approach Him.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 114.2.† [What did Jesus and His Father discuss during those days Jesus was in the wilderness?][†]

However, later, in the same book, Ellen White wrote:

[EGW:] Often when placed in a trying situation we doubt that the Spirit of God has been leading us. **But it was the Spirit's leading that brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When God brings us into trial, He has a purpose to accomplish for our good.** Jesus did not presume on God's promises by going unbidden into temptation, neither did He give up to despondency when temptation came upon Him. Nor should we.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 126.3-129.0.†

6. God certainly allowed Job to be tempted by the Devil, and the Devil was working through Job's three friends! (See Job chapters 1&2 and Job chapter 42.)
7. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was placed in the Garden of Eden, not to be a temptation to Adam and Eve, but to be a protection for them in the ongoing conflict between God and Satan—that conflict which we call *the great controversy* or *the cosmic conflict*. **That tree was not primarily a test of obedience; it was there to protect them. Satan was limited to that one tree. Otherwise, Satan would have followed them wherever they went in the garden**, popping out from behind every bush, flower, or tree, trying to tempt them. If Satan had been free to tempt them whenever and wherever he wanted, wouldn't he have gone to the tree of life? Furthermore, Satan knew that our first parents had been told not to go to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Why do you think God told them not to go to that one particular tree?

Satan was not to follow them with continual temptations; he could have access to them only at the forbidden tree. Should they attempt to investigate its nature, they would be exposed to his wiles. They were admonished to give careful heed to the warning which God had sent them and to be content with the instruction which He had seen fit to impart.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 53.3.†

8. How do you understand the experience when the children of Israel were guided down a narrow ravine with mountains on both sides and the Red Sea in front of them? Soon they looked back and saw the Egyptian military coming to attack them. Why would God allow such a situation? Why did He lead them down to the edge of the water? Then, God delivered them. Exodus 14 clearly explains that after the miracle of parting the sea, the **“Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.”** (Exodus 14:4, *GNB**†) And, finally:

Exodus 14:31: When the Israelites saw the great power with which the LORD had defeated the Egyptians, they stood in awe of the LORD; and they had faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Exodus 14:31). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].†‡

9. Knowing what we know about the story, we recognize that the children of Israel were not led down to the edge of the water to a dead end; that was where they needed to go to escape Egyptian sovereignty by miraculously passing through the Red Sea.
10. When we find ourselves in a difficult position, how can we know for sure if God has led us there?
11. We must be very careful about deceiving ourselves!
Jeremiah 17:9: “Who can understand the human heart?
There is nothing else so deceitful;
it is too sick to be healed.”—*Good News Bible*.*

12. After those incredible experiences watching the ten plagues fall on the Egyptians and then being led to cross on the dry land through the Red Sea, amazingly, the Israelites were still not ready to trust God completely for their needs when trouble came.

Exodus 17:1: The whole Israelite community left the desert of Sin, moving from one place to another at the command of the LORD. They made camp at Rephidim, **but there was no water there to drink.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

13. Surely, we must recognize that water is a necessity; it is not just a want or desire. That situation of being at a place where they needed water and there was none available was repeated later at least twice.

Exodus 15:22-27: ²²Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea into the desert of Shur. For three days they walked through the desert, but found no water. ²³Then they came to a place called Marah, but **the water there was so bitter that they could not drink it.** That is why it was named Marah. ²⁴The people complained to Moses and asked, “What are we going to drink?” ²⁵Moses prayed earnestly to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood, which he threw into the water; and the water became fit to drink.

There the LORD gave them laws to live by, and there he also tested them. ²⁶He said, “If you will obey me completely by doing what I consider right and by keeping my commands, I will not punish you with any of the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians. [What diseases were those?] **I am the LORD, the one who heals you.**”

²⁷ Next they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees; there they camped by the water.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Exodus 17:1-7: ¹The whole Israelite community left the desert of Sin, moving from one place to another at the command of the LORD. **They made camp at Rephidim, but there was no water there to drink.** ²They complained to Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses answered, “Why are you complaining? Why are you putting the LORD to the test?”

³ But the people were very thirsty and continued to complain to Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? To kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

⁴ Moses prayed earnestly to the LORD and said, “What can I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Take some of the leaders of Israel with you, and go on ahead of the people. Take along the stick with which you struck the Nile. ⁶I will stand before you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” Moses did so in the presence of the leaders of Israel.

⁷ **The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites complained and put the LORD to the test when they asked, “Is the LORD with us or not?”**—*Good News Bible*.*†

14. Have you ever been tempted to ask if the Lord is with you? Or, us? Have you asked that question personally? What about asking that question regarding your local church? Or, even the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole?
15. Is it true that God cannot be tempted by evil? Does He Himself tempt no one?

James 1:13: If people are tempted by such trials, **they must not say**, “This temptation comes from God.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.—*Good News Bible*.*†

16. **While God does not tempt us, He will test us.** That is what crucibles are all about. God already knows how we will do; however, **there are beings in an onlooking universe who need to see that God has done everything right.** Knowing what we do about the great controversy, we are certain that God has already won. Jesus answered the questions and accusations of Satan through His life and His death; we should not have any questions about that. So, no matter what our temptations may be—even if they could be life-threatening—we know that God has a final, wonderful home prepared for us; we can live forever in that perfect environment.

17. So, why did Peter suggest that God allows us to be tested?

1 Peter 1:6-7: ⁶ Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer. ⁷**Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine.** Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honour on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed.—*Good News Bible*.*†

18. Peter was writing to a group of people who lived in what is now western Turkey. Those churches were relatively new, and the number of Christians was very limited. The authorities were against them. Notice the reassuring words that Peter added.

1 Peter 1:8-9: ⁸You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, ⁹because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him.—*Good News Bible*.*

19. When we stop and think about it, even if we should lose our lives for the sake of Christianity, how big a price is that to pay for an eternity of bliss? Let us not lose our faith! Think of the story of the final crucifixion of Jesus. Would you be willing to die—even like that—if you knew for sure that in three days you would be taken to heaven?

20. Our Bible study guide tells a story of a young man who was into all kinds of trouble including drugs, violence, and even some time in jail. But, then his life turned around; and he was admitted to an Adventist college. At first, things went very well. Then, things seemed to start falling apart. His source of money started to dry up, and a close friend turned against him. He repeatedly got sick. He was still fighting his old temptations. He still felt sure that the Lord had guided him to that school. What was wrong? If that young man had come to you at that point in time, what would you say to him?

21. First of all, you should say that the Devil does not give up easily. Perhaps, you could use some of the following verses.

Proverbs 3:11-12: ¹¹When the LORD corrects you, my child, pay close attention and take it as a warning. ¹²The LORD corrects those he loves, as parents correct a child of whom they are proud.—*Good News Bible*.*

Jeremiah 29:13: [The LORD had said:] “You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart.”—*Good News Bible*.[†]

Romans 8:28: We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

2 Corinthians 12:9: But his answer was: “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.” I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ’s power over me.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Hebrews 13:5: Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

22. When we seem to be in the dark, we have been encouraged by Ellen White to look back to the last place where we saw the light. That can help us to see where we might have gotten off the path.

[EGW:] But of old the Lord led his people to Rephidim, [See Exodus 17:1-7 as in Item #13 above.] and he may choose to lead us there also, to test our loyalty. He does not always bring us to pleasant places. If he did, in our self-sufficiency we should forget that he is our helper. He longs to manifest himself to us, and to reveal the abundant supplies at our disposal, and **he permits trial and disappointment to come to us that we may realize our helplessness, and learn to call upon him for aid.** He can cause cooling streams to flow from the flinty rock. **We shall never know, until we are face to face with God, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, how many burdens he has borne for us, and how many burdens he would have been glad to bear, if, with childlike faith, we had brought them to him.**—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,^{*} April 7, 1903, par. 4.[†]

23. What methods has God used to try to purify your character and your faith? Do you know of others who have lost their faith from being tempted and tried? What could you do to help them?

24. Christian growth only happens when we experience God’s unconditional love and when we commit ourselves to loving Him back unreservedly.

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] In May-June of 2019, Pope Francis sparked a controversy by officially endorsing a change in the Lord’s Prayer. Instead of “lead us not into temptation,” the new Roman Catholic version of the Lord’s Prayer would read “do not let us fall into temptation.” The pope’s main argument was that the translation “lead us not into temptation” is wrong from theological and pastoral points of view, [Note that these are human perspectives.] as this phrase identifies God as the tempter instead of Satan. A father, claimed the pope, would not lead his son into temptation but, rather, help the son up when he falls. One may very well relate to this attempt to exculpate God from the status of tempter.

But changing the text of the Lord's Prayer is not justifiable. Numerous other biblical phrases, much as this one, pose difficulties. **The principles of biblical hermeneutics and the history of theology teach us that we must try to understand the text and its message rather than to change the biblical text or its translation to help resolve its mysteries in a way that a certain culture or person feels is more appropriate.**

A brief study of Matthew 6:13 and its key concepts in both the immediate and broader biblical contexts will help us better understand this phrase in the prayer. In the New Testament Greek, both Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 use exactly the same wording to render the phrase “ ‘ “lead us not into temptation” ’ ” (NIV). Thus, the phrase is correctly translated in most versions. Rather than trying to rearrange or reinterpret this verse, we need to understand its meaning. The key verb “lead” in Greek is the active aorist subjunctive form of the verb *eispheró*, which means “to carry inward,” “to bring in,” “to introduce” (see, e.g., Henry George Lindell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1996], p. 497). So, there is no mistake here, no way of reinterpretation: Jesus meant to say “Do not lead us,” not “Do not let us fall.” In Matthew 26:41 (see also *Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40, 46*), Jesus describes temptation as something one could “enter into” (NKJV) or “fall into” (NIV).

Those who argue in favor of changing the wording of this phrase in the Lord's Prayer focus on the word *temptation*, concluding that God cannot tempt us because He cannot be the source of temptation. But the Greek word for “temptation” (*peirasmos*) has two distinct meanings. **The first is “temptation” and is related to allurement or enticement to sin** (see, e.g., *Matt. 26:41, 1 Tim. 6:9*). In this sense, it is true that God is not, and cannot be, leading us into temptation, because He is not the tempter, as James 1:13, 14 clearly establishes. **The second meaning of temptation is “experiment,” “trial,” “probation,” or “test.”** In Galatians 4:14, Paul's illness was a trial to the Galatians, and in 1 Peter 4:12, Peter admonishes Christians not to be surprised by the trial or ordeal that befell them.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 39-40.†§ [Note that the brackets and the content in brackets relating to the reference above are in the Bible study guide; but, the other brackets are added.]‡

25. Notice how the Bible uses the expression *fall* or *fell into temptation*.

1 Timothy 6:9: But those who want to get rich **fall into temptation** and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull them down to ruin and destruction.—*Good News Bible*.*†

James 1:13-14: ¹³If people are tempted by such trials, they must not say, “This temptation comes from God.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴**But people are tempted when they are drawn away and trapped by their own evil desires.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

Galatians 4:14: But even though my physical condition was a great trial to you, you did not despise or reject me. Instead, you received me as you would an

angel from heaven; you received me as you would Christ Jesus.—*Good News Bible*.*

1 Peter 4:12: My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you.—*Good News Bible*.*

[BSG:] Perhaps James gives the most explicit explanation of the process of temptation, especially as he uses the two meanings of temptation together in the same passage. He affirms that Christians meet trials with joy and endurance (*James 1:2, 12*) and must not say that God tempts them, because God does not tempt anyone (*James 1:13*). **Rather, each person wanders away from God when enticed or tempted by their own desire (*James 1:14*).** Thus, in the New Testament, temptation means both seduction to sin and probation.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 40.†§

James 1:2,12-15: ² My brothers and sisters, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way,...

¹² Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him. [And reading again verses 13 and 14:] ¹³If people are tempted by such trials, they must not say, “This temptation comes from God.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But people are tempted when they are drawn away and trapped by their own evil desires. ¹⁵Then their evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.—*Good News Bible*.*†

26. God created us to live in a perfect environment in the Garden of Eden. But, He also placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil there to give Adam and Eve an opportunity to express their freedom and make a choice.

[BSG:] **Thus, the proposal to change the wording of the Lord’s Prayer is not only unjustifiable and unbiblical but also superficial, rendering an impoverished theological and pastoral content. Such revision also is dangerous for another reason: it sets yet another precedent for changing the Word of God because of human and cultural impulse.** Changing the wording in question in the Lord’s Prayer will involve changing many other biblical texts and concepts. **It is imperative to leave the text as it is and seek to understand it rather than to change it simply because it does not fit a particular theology or practical concern.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 42.††

27. Sometimes, God will use a troubling experience to bring a person to an inspiring new realization.

[BSG:] By the third decade of the eighteenth century, George Frederic Handel (1685–1759) could consider himself an accomplished composer, having written various genres of music. As he wrote mostly nonreligious music, many in the Church of England viewed him as a secular composer, which led to tensions with the church. However, Handel always thirsted for

God and for salvation. In April 1737, he suffered a stroke or some other psychological [*sic*] affliction. Although he recovered, he soon landed in a financial, relational, and spiritual crisis. In conflict with the church, in conflict with many at the court and with other musicians, Handel thought he would collapse. On April 8, 1741, he gave what he thought was his last concert and at the age of 56, retired from public life.

But Handel was looking for a new song! He soon found it. A friend, Charles Jennings, shared with Handel a libretto that focused on the life of Christ, containing three parts: (1) prophecies about the coming of the Messiah; (2) the first coming of the Messiah and His passions; and (3) the future glory of His second coming, the end of sin, and the eternal acclamation of the Messiah. Handel rediscovered the glorious image of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior and decided to dedicate to Him an oratorio. An invitation from Dublin for Handel to compose something for a charity concert served as the catalyst, and, thus, *Messiah*, the greatest oratorio of all time, was born.

Handel was so absorbed by the writing of his new work that he wrote all three parts on some 260 pages in 24 days. During those days, Handel did not leave his apartment at all, barely touching the food prepared for him. Sometimes, during the composition, he would sob or cry at the great biblical texts he included or at the glory he was seeing in Jesus the Messiah. When the “new song,” *Messiah*, was presented at the charity concert in Dublin, it collected 400 pounds, which resulted in freeing 142 men from debtor’s prison. But it also freed Handel from the spiritual, and multi-faceted, crucible he was in, and it has blessed numerous people around the globe since that time. Handel died on the morning of Good Friday, April 14, 1759, just eight days after having conducted his masterpiece, *Messiah*, for the last time, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The monument in the Abbey in his honor represents him holding the manuscript of *Messiah*, part 3, at the place where it reads, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 42.†§

28. Not every trial turns out well. Think of the story of John the Baptist. How do you think you would have done if you had been in the place of John the Baptist in prison?
29. Have you ever felt that you were in a place where you were being tested or tried? Or, even tempted beyond your ability to withstand?
30. This lesson has focused on the challenges that can come to us as Christians. We know that even worse challenges are coming in the future. Think of going through the time of trouble. But, God has a wonderful plan for us; and He is preparing the precious souls to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Will we be there?

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