

Prone to Wander

Matthew 6:13

Pastor Zeke Pipher

(GA) Not too far from Richmond, Virginia, there is a rugged, beautiful waterfall that empties into a pool surrounded by rocks. It's called the Huntington River Gorge and it looks a little bit like Smith Falls, along the Niobrara... only a bit bigger and more powerful. And deadly.

A. In the last 40 years, 20 people have died in the gorge. Most of them were young people in their twenties and thirties. Hundreds more have been injured, but survived. The problem is that the water is so tempting, it looks so calm and refreshing, people can't resist. So they jump in... but just underneath the surface there are sharp rocks and deadly currents.

1. They held a town hall meeting to decide what to do about the dangerous gorge.

Afterwards, a blog was set up online to hear from people:

a. One person suggested blowing up the gorge with dynamite.

b. Another suggested a high fence around the entire area.

c. A third person suggested stocking the gorge with piranhas would do it.

2. Katie Zezima of The New York Times wrote an article about the Huntington River Gorge entitled, "An Enticing Gorge Poses A Deadly Problem." One paragraph states, "A debate rages as to what to do with this dangerous place. Some argue for more public information that can properly educate people of its risks. Others are pushing to ban anyone and everyone from visitation. All the while, swimmers continue to be attracted to the scene. One college student attending the University of Vermont – just 14 miles away from the gorge – said she had heard about the beauty of the location and had the desire to see it for herself."

a. She said, "We just go swimming in the shallow part. You can't change the water, and you can't stop people from going in."¹

B. Must be a gorgeous place, huh? It must be, because even though it's deadly, people just can't keep away...

(SN) Isn't it this way with every temptation?

A. Seriously, what lures us, or tempts us, are not the ugly things in life... not the base, or vile things... but the seemingly beautiful... the promisingly exhilarating things. Right?

1. If I put a huge plate of raw intestines & maggots up front and said to all the kids after church, "Listen, don't eat any of this." I don't think the kids would have a problem obeying.

a. But if I were to set a plate full of gumdrops and Oreo™ cookies up here... we'd have a different story after church, wouldn't we?

B. It's the beautiful things... the objects that promise excitement, or refreshment, or fun that tempt us.

1. Helmut Thielicke said, "The power of temptation is not in its appeal to our baser instincts; if that were the case, it would be natural to be repulsed by it. The power of temptation is in its appeal to our idealism."²

¹ Katie Zezima, "An Enticing Gorge Poses a Deadly Problem," [The New York Times](#) 16 July 2006: 1-15.

² Helmut Thielicke, [Our Heavenly Father](#) (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

- a. A man is tempted to the image of a *perfect* woman... who he imagines wants him in seemingly perfect ways...
- b. A woman is tempted to the image of a perfect body type...
 - i. ...or tempted by the idea of a man who understands her better than her husband...

C. Satan's not stupid. His allies aren't idiots. They know that if they come at us wearing ghoulish outfits – stained in blood – promising stress and pain and financial problems, we're probably going to take a pass. "No thanks!"

1. But if they come to us in beauty – touching our nerve of what's ideal – then no matter what our conscience says... no matter what God has said... they know they can get our attention.

- a. Sadly, we're not that complex as people... we're pretty easy for our enemy to figure out. And he has figured you out.

2. Have you ever thought about how well Satan and his friends know you. They're not like God – they're not omniscient... all knowing... they don't know you perfectly.

- a. But he's studied you since you were born. He knows your buttons... your triggers... the lies that you're inclined, perhaps even want, to believe... He knows you so well.

- i. And he uses this intimate knowledge of you to attack... tempt from any angle. He brings the fight to you, and there's nowhere to hide...

- b. Shelby Foote, the war historian, tells a story about a soldier who was wounded at the battle of Shiloh during the Civil War. His commanding officer ordered him to go to the rear to take cover... rest... avoid the battle...

- i. A few minutes later the wounded soldier returned to the commanding officer and said, "Captain, give me a gun! This fight ain't got any rear!"³

3. Your fight against the evil one ain't got any rear. No safe spots – no areas to flee or fall back to avoid temptation or attack.

- a. We pray all the time as Christians that God would "*bind* Satan from our lives... or so-and-so's life..." – But is that good theology?

- i. Friends, according to Scripture, God doesn't *bind* Satan until *Revelation 20*, during the millennium reign of Christ.

- a) Until then, he's called the god, or ruler, of this age and we're told that he's "prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (*I Peter 5:8b*)

4. I hate this about life right now – I mean I love God, I love walking in my salvation, I love spending time with my family, and friends, and enjoying a few things a few of the more sanctified things on earth... like coffee – but I'm so sick of watching Satan drag friends into the bushes and feast on them...

- a. I'm get so tired of battling temptations in my own heart... and occasionally losing the battle and feeding the enemy myself...

C. We have an enemy who knows us well, and uses the things that seem ideal – that seem beautiful and exhilarating to us – to try and lead us into death.

1. Don't you hate that? Well, what do we do?

- a. Are we just a chunk of raw meat left out on a hanging pole, waiting for the lion to come along and feast? Or is there something we can do?

(S) There is something we can do. Jesus tells us to pray. The last line of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray to God, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (*Matthew 6:13*)

³ *Daily Walk*, July 10, 1993.

A. Now, that can seem anti-climactic to some of you... you were hoping that I was going to suggest that we go on a lion hunt.

1. We take the battle to him. We put on our stalking boots, load our guns, and track that dog down like the dog he is!

a. Some of you were hoping that I'd suggest something other than, "Well... we should pray about it."

B. Friends, you've got to trust me – praying to God *is the way Satan is defeated in our lives*. Let's look at what Jesus is teaching us here:

1. The Greek word that we translate "lead us" – in "lead us not into temptation" – is the word used to describe the action of a shepherd leading his sheep or a sheep, down from someplace dangerous... a rocky cliff, or dangerous precipice... into safe pastures. We're to have the image of a shepherd when we hear this word, "lead us."

a. But there's more to it. This word carries a **reflective voice** – which means, it reads, "Do not let us..." or "Do not permit us to wander into temptation..."

i. Again, the image is one of the sheep being led by the shepherd, but before the journey begins, the sheep looks up at the shepherd and says, "Please don't let me wander into places that wouldn't be good for me." Or, "Do not permit me to do something stupid, and walk off a cliff or away from the pack where a wolf can get me."

2. Do you see what Jesus is teaching us to do in this prayer? He's teaching us to confess our weakness. He's encouraging us to admit, like Robinson, the great hymn writer who confessed, "I'm prone to wander, Lord I feel it... prone to leave the God I love."⁴

a. Jesus is teaching us to say to God, "Lord, left to myself... if you don't help me... there's a good chance I'm going believe the lies of my enemy and mess up. Please, Lord, don't let me mess up. Deliver me from the enemy... deliver me from my own foolishness..."

C. Friends, you can't track down, or hunt, or do battle with Satan through your pride and self-reliance. He loves it when we try. It's your pride and self-reliance that makes you a pile of meat on a hanging pole, out in the open, waiting for the lion to devour.

1. The only way we can resist temptation and walk in faithfulness – walk in the fullness of life that God has for us – is when we're humble and dependent upon God.

a. We are strong against temptation when we admit we're susceptible to sin – to self-destructive choices – and we ask God to keep us from harm.

D. Did you ever read Homer's *Odyssey*? There's a scene in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus is sailing his ship around the island of the Sirens. Odysseus had been warned about the Sirens – these ½ birds, ½ women creatures that could sing so beautifully they'd lure men and their ships closer and closer until the ships crashed on the rocks and the men plummeted into the sea to their deaths.

1. Odysseus knew he was in trouble. He knew that he was susceptible to the Siren's songs. So he had his men lash him to the mast, and he put beeswax in his men's ears. Even so, as he passed by and heard their songs, Odysseus struggled to get free... but his men bound him even tighter.⁵

a. Odysseus' willingness to admit to his susceptibility, and plead for help, is what saved his life.

E. That is what Jesus is teaching us to do in *Matthew 6:13* – Admit to our susceptibility and plead for help. Cry out to God, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil."

1. We're asking God to lash us to Him and keep us from wandering!

⁴ Robert Robinson, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing".

⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) bk.VII.

F. Now, the illustration of Odysseus breaks down a bit in comparing it *Matthew 6:13* – because in the story, Odysseus *wanted to hear the Sirens...* he *didn't put wax in his ears...* and when we he got close, *he fought* against his own men to try and go to them.

1. It doesn't work this way with God. We've got to at least *want to want* to not sin when tempted. We can pray this prayer – as thousands, no millions have done on Sunday mornings together – but if your heart wants to wander, has already set its compass in the direction of sin – then simply praying this prayer doesn't do anything.

a. Do you remember what Jesus said before giving us the Lord's Prayer? He said, don't be like the Gentiles... or the religious hypocrites... don't be like the ones who learn the right things to say, and then think that by simply saying them, they'll receive what they're asking for...

2. Friends, if you want to sin, if your heart desires to explore some temptation, then mechanically speaking these words will not do anything for you, but incur judgment down the road someday...

a. The words don't do a thing, if the heart of a person isn't engaged.

b. But if does everything, if the heart is humble and desires to be rescued.

G. What makes this prayer the most powerful strategy for someone who faces temptation *and wants rescued...* is that it summons God to their side!

1. Have you ever noticed how the two best epic sagas ever written as parables for life with God involve horns?

a. Of course I'm referring to *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* – Fantastic stories that cause us to think about the greater story of Christ's victory over death and our enemies.

2. But have you ever noticed how in both these epic stories – *Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* – there's a horn, that when blown, summons immediate overpowering strength for good to the side of the horn-blower?

a. In *Narnia*, it's the Horn of Queen Susan. It was given to her by Father Christmas – and it was blown a few times throughout the book series... and it always called to the aid of those in trouble overpowering strength!

b. And in *The Lord of the Rings* series, Boromir carried the Horn of Gondor, as his fathers and forefathers had always done. This horn summoned immediate help from his foes.

H. Horns show up in both Tolkien's and CS Lewis' allegories of life with God, in the battle against the enemy. Have you ever thought about why?

1. I think it's because as people we are easily overpowered. We get ourselves in over our heads, so easily... either because of our cunning enemy, or our wandering hearts...

a. If we didn't have the ability to call in the big guns to rescue us... to defeat our enemies... to even protect us from ourselves, at times... none of us would last.

i. There's too many temptations on our path everyday toward materialism... or sexual lust... or greed... or egotism... or body-worship...

I. So, Tolkien and Lewis decided their heroes, their characters, needed a horn. And you know what... in *Matthew 6:13*, Jesus gives us a horn, too.

1. If you don't want rescued from sin... don't blow the horn.

a. In fact, if your heart isn't in it, saying the words of this prayer don't produce any noise at all from the rescue horn.

2. But if you desire godliness... long for God's kingdom and His righteousness... and want to avoid sin with all your heart, then Jesus is giving you a horn to blow in this prayer.

a. A horn that summons God, Himself, to your side to win the fight.

i. This is what *1 John 5:18* promises – It says, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

a) That line, “...he who was born of God” refers to Jesus.

3. A New Creation in Christ will not want to sin... he won't just plod along in life and sin and the ways of the world as he did before he met Jesus!

a. Now the world will still attack... the world will hate him... the world will bring full guns – Satan and his allies will use every intimate piece of knowledge they have about him to try to drag him down.

i. But the one who blows his horn – humbles himself before God and says, “I need your help, Father... I don't even trust myself to stay on course... please don't let me wander from your side.”

4. To that humble child of God, the promise is given: “he who was born of God [Jesus] protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

(VR) I challenge you this week to recognize your temptations and ask God for help.

A. Humble yourself. Be sincere. But ask God to help you walk in faithfulness. Much like a single, fragile, vulnerable little sheep would say to the shepherd, “This is a rough ol' life... I need you to lead me and protect me.”

1. “Without you guiding me, Father... I'm in big trouble.”

a. Kenneth Bailey, a biblical scholar who grew up in the Middle East, illustrates this idea well. He writes: **[Excerpt from pages 128-129]**.⁶

B. When we pray this prayer – “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” – we're calling on God's divine protection and care.

1. Sometimes, in the middle of a fierce temptation, it's more of a scream for help than a prayer... we're crying out to God for immediate help!

a. And we know God will hear. We know that God will honor his humble children when they blow their horn.

Benediction: I Cor. 10:13

⁶ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008) 128-129.