The truth is, temptation is a relentless, perplexing, frustrating reality in every believer’s life – it is the “norm”; none of us get an exemption from it (Rom 7:18-19, 24; 1 Cor 10:13; Jam 3:2; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:1, 12-13; 5:8-10; 1 Jn 1:10). This “goliath” frequently overwhelms us and wracks havoc upon our souls; and try though as we may, it often leaves us discouraged and defeated. Jesus tells us to pray to the Father that “He lead us not into temptation” (Mt 6:13). The thought that God would actually “lead us into temptation” is actually quite troubling to most believers – why on earth would Jesus ask us to pray that God not lead us into temptation? This injunction has disturbed many Christians down through the ages, and caused them to wonder what Jesus really meant by these words? To answer this question, we need to first “define” what the Greek term peirasmos (translated “temptation”) means.

The MEANING of peirasmos – This word is translated a number ways in English: temptation, test, trials, afflictions, tempting, testing and trying to name a few (Mt 4:1ff; 1 Cor 10:13; Jam 1:13-14; 1 Pet 4:12; Jam 1:2, 12). The “context” determines how one translates the term. This word could be rendered a “sore trial” in the passage before us — peirasmos comes the word peira, which means to “pierce through, as with a spear;” many Greek scholars use it in this way. The word not only implies violent assaults from Satan, but also sorely afflictive circumstances, none of which we have, as yet, the grace or fortitude to sufficiently endure. Trials and afflictions “test” our virtue; hence, it is possible that this is the meaning here (see Lk 22:42). Most scholars, however, translate this word “temptation,” because the context strongly points in that direction — since Jesus is referring here to the evil one or evil, and we are always tempted to do evil, this phrase is translated: “Lead us not into temptation.” It should be noted that “temptation accompanies every trial” – they are two sides of the same coin; with every trial there will be temptation. The psalmist David offered up a prayer similar to the one we find in the Lord’s Prayer: “O LORD, do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice deeds of wickedness with men who do iniquity” (Ps 141:4). Since God obviously does not tempt man to do evil (Jam 1:13), this injunction then must be used in the sense of “permitting” – “Lord, do not suffer or permit us to be tempted in such a way that we sin” – “Do not lead us into a trial that will present such a temptation to us that we will not be able to resist it.” It is a heartfelt appeal to God to protect us from sin. The good news is that God is able to “save us from the tempter’s power” if we will but call upon Him for help.

The SOURCES of temptation – It should be noted here that we are not being taught to “pray against temptation;” it is often needed and useful; rather, we are to pray that it not have the power over us, or that it destroy us. There are a num-ber of sources of temptation – there are the temptations of God, who may be said to tempt, not by infusing anything that is sinful, or by soliciting to sin, but by enjoining things hard and disagreeable to our nature, as in the case of Abraham… or by afflicting us either in body or estate, as was the case with Job… or by permitting and letting loose the reins to Satan, and a man’s own corruptions… or by withdrawing His presence and withholding the communications of His grace, that we may be humbled; that our faith and patience may be tried; that we may see our weaknesses and need of Christ; and that we may be stirred to prayer and watchfulness. In addition to the temptations of God, there are also three other sources of temptation: the temptations of Satan, which lie in soliciting to evil, suggesting hard and blasphemous thoughts of God, and filling our minds with doubts and fears…
the *temptations of the world*, which arise from poverty and riches, from the men of the world, from the lusts of it, and from both its frowns and its flatteries… and the *temptations of man’s own heart*. In the petition before us, the children of God are encouraged to pray that they be kept from every occasion and object of sinning; from those sins they are most inclined to; and that God would not leave them to Satan and their own corrupt hearts… but that in the issue besetting them they might experience “God’s way of escape” and be victorious (1 Cor 10:13; Jude 1:24).

The PROCESS of temptation – When tempted, writes James, “Let no one say that God is doing the tempting, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; rather, each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by *his own lust*” (Jam 1:13-14). As sinful humanity, we are always ready to “shift the blame” – if we cannot blame God for temptation, then we are inclined to blame others or our circumstances, but none of these are the cause of sin. Some believers actually go so far as to say that sin is a sickness not of their own making; but sin is not a sickness – it is a moral failure for which every individual will one day have to give an account. Sin comes from within us – it comes from dwelling on temptations rather than driving temptations from our minds. Genesis 3 describes the four-step process of temptation:

- **First**, temptation begins with a simple evil thought – and this is the stage you must shut it down!
- **Second**, there is the consideration of the thought – at this stage the devil gets you on his turf!
- **Third**, there is delight in entertaining the thought – at this stage you start selling yourself on it!
- **Fourth**, there is the consent of the will – at this stage lust is conceived and sin results (Jam 1:15); a man may be tempted without entering into the temptation (Mt 4:1ff); entering into it implies giving way to it and embracing it.

The PURPOSE of temptation – Though God does not bring temptation, He does allow it, according to His supreme wisdom and unsearchable providence (Deut 8:3; Job 1:1-12; Mt 4:1ff; 2 Cor 12; Eph 6:11; Jam 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8). Why? Scripture gives us at least four reasons: **First**, to show us how frail, sinful, and helpless we are, so that we will run daily to Christ for grace; without a strong sense of our sinfulness we would not pursue Christ (Ps 32:3-5; Rom 7:18, 24-25; Gal 3:24). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that “we have a high priest who can genuinely sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was tempted in every way that we are, yet did not sin;” as such we can “come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15-16). But why the necessity to pray? We need to be conscious of the fact that in and of ourselves we do not possess the ability to resist temptation – (none of us do!) – therefore we need to fully rely upon God to overcome it. The Apostle Peter denied the Lord Jesus after he failed to avail himself of the opportunity to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane; apparently he was tired and did not realize how critically important it was to pray. Jesus told His disciples, “Watch and pray that you not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41). If we desire to not perpetually be caught in the grip of sin, then we need to continually claim the promises of God in prayer that we not succumb to temptation – the message is clear, if we do not watch and pray we will succumb. Christians grossly underestimate the necessity of prayer in overcoming temptation. **Second**, to wean us from the corrupt, death-producing pleasures of this world; sin has bitter consequences; thank God we reap what we sow, or we would never desire to get out of the mud (Ps 32:3-5; 73:25; Prv 5:3-4; Ecc 7:26; Gal 5:19-21; 6:7; Phil 3:8; I Jn 2:15-17). **Third**, to make us more like Jesus; evoking within us a hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is never God’s desire for us to be “led into sin,” but He does allow us to be put into tempting situations for the purpose of strengthening our faith and character (Job 23:10; Ps 66:10; Mt 5:6; Rom 5:3-5; Heb 12:4-
11; Jam 1: 2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 5:12-13). And Fourth, to make us long for heaven and be rid of sin altogether; to be glorified (Rom 8:18, 23; 2 Pet 3:12-13; 1 Jn 3:2-3; Rev 22:17).

The RESPONSE to temptation – Jesus tells us in this prayer that a “healthy distrust of self” should characterize every child of God… that we should continually be conscious of our own weaknesses and the schemes of the one who seeks to destroy us. We are not to have any false assurance about our ability to do as well as Jesus did when He was “put to the test” by Satan in the wilderness – (read that statement again!) – instead, we are to recognize our inclination to be head-strong like Peter, thinking he was confident to handle any challenge that might come his way (Lk 22:31-34, 54-62). Though we as God’s children never have to give in to temptation – for God provides a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 2:9; Jude 1:24) – we must be extremely aware of our own personal lack of strength and vulnerability. Jesus therefore emphasized the need for “humble dependence on God.” He called us to recognize our human frailty and to acknowledge that, “on our own,” we are no match for our triple foes: the world, the devil, and the flesh. Therefore we are called to “trust the Lord” (not ourselves) for the strength to resist temptation before it becomes sin. Remember, it is not the temptation itself that leads us to sin, but the lack of resistance and trust in the Lord for deliverance. It is crucial that the believer understand the fact that he is not able to resist temptation without God’s grace. As Christians, we are in a constant fight with the desires born of our sinful natures, to either please ourselves or God (Gal 5:17). Therefore we must “put on the full armor of God to stand against Satan and the forces of evil… and pray in the Spirit at all times” (Eph 6:10-18; 1 Th 5:17). In prayer we humbly take all of our failings, weaknesses, evil tendencies and struggles to God… and express our gratitude to Him for His unending love and faithfulness to us… and acknowledge our total dependence on Him to walk in the light and be obedient to His will (Jn 15:5, 7, 16; 16:23; Rom 7:24-25; 8:31-37; 2 Cor 12:9; Eph 3:20; Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 7:25; 13:20-21; Jude 1:24). In closing, here’s a good exercise for you – place yourself in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus went to the cross… after hearing Jesus warn you to “watch and pray,” how would you pray? what would you say? Construct a prayer that incorporates the various elements that would make your prayer most efficacious.