

# (God-Centered Praying) 8. Freedom From Evil

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of deliverance from sin and the power of prayer in resisting temptation and seeking God's deliverance.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 4:15

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Resisting Temptation"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of seeking deliverance from the power of sin and evil through prayer, emphasizing the need for forgiveness to lead to a holy life. He highlights that true happiness comes from holiness and that God's power should be accompanied by a longing for holiness to avoid danger. Poonen explains how God uses Satan and temptation as tools for spiritual growth and the necessity of resisting temptation to maintain holiness.

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## Transcript

"Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil"

There are two sides to this petition - one, asking God to protect us, and the other, asking Him to deliver us.

Having prayed for deliverance from the guilt of sin in the previous petition, we now pray for deliverance from the power of sin. If we desire only forgiveness and not freedom from sin, it would indicate that our repentance has not been proper. Forgiveness of sins, is meant to be a gateway that leads on to a holy life, and not to a taking advantage of the grace of God.

Happiness and Power

All Christians seek to be happy. But Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." (Matt. 5:8). The word "blessed" also means happy. So what Jesus was saying was that true happiness flows from true holiness. If heaven is a place of infinite happiness, it's only because it's a place of perfect holiness as well.

Happiness without holiness is a counterfeit. We should actually pray that God would make us unhappy if we are unholy. For otherwise we would be deceived about our spiritual state.

Many Christians seek God for power in their lives. But again this should not be divorced from an equally great longing for holiness. Otherwise it can be dangerous. For God to give power into the hands of an unholy man can be more dangerous than a surgeon operating with an un-sterile instrument. That would

bring death instead of life.

That's why God cannot give too much of His power to many Christians. It would ruin and destroy them. We need to thank God that He hasn't given us all the supernatural gifts that we asked Him for! There are many cases of believers who have been destroyed by the gifts that they received, because they were not humble and holy enough to use them aright. We should long for holiness and power in the same measure. Only then are we safe.

#### How God Uses Satan

True holiness is the result of a battle. It doesn't come to the armchair Christian who wants to sit back and 'be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease.' It is only as we fight the battle against our lusts and against Satan that we become holy.

We may then ask the question, "If the devil is such a hindrance to our holiness, why doesn't God destroy him?"

The answer to that is that the devil is, in a sense, necessary for our spiritual growth just as a furnace is necessary to purify gold. It's only when our muscles are subjected to resistance, that they become strong. Otherwise, we would remain fat and flabby. It's exactly the same in the spiritual realm. We need resistance if we are to be strong spiritually. And this is why God permits Satan to tempt us.

The man who has an easy way through life, will be spiritually weak, flabby and impoverished. He won't be able to do all that God wants him to do. But the one who has gone through trials and testing successfully, will be strong and capable of doing all the will of God.

That's one reason at least, why God hasn't destroyed Satan.

Why did God place one forbidden tree in the garden of Eden? Some may feel that if God hadn't kept that tree there, Adam would never have sinned. But that tree was necessary for Adam to become holy. There can be no holiness for man without temptation. That's why God permitted Satan to enter the garden of Eden.

Adam was innocent - but innocence is not holiness. Adam would have remained innocent all his life and never become holy if he had not been tested. Innocence is a state of neutrality, and from that state of neutrality to become positively holy, Adam had to exercise a choice. He had to say 'No' to temptation and 'Yes' to God. Only then would he become holy. And so he had to be tempted. Unfortunately, he said 'No' to God and therefore became a sinner.

#### Temptation and Sin

Jesus too was tempted in all things as we are (Heb. 4:15). But the difference between Him and Adam was that He always said 'Yes' to God. In order to be a perfect man, the type of man that God wanted all men to be like, Jesus had to learn obedience from the things which He suffered. He faced temptation and overcame, and thereby, was "made perfect" (Heb. 5:8,9).

That was why Jesus prayed for His disciples saying, "Father. I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from evil" (Jn. 17:15). Jesus knew that His disciples could never become holy if they were taken away from the pressures and trials and temptations that they would face in this world.

We need to distinguish between temptation and sin. If we are suddenly tempted by something that we see accidentally, that's not sin. But if we continue to look at what tempts us, or to think about it, then we sin. We can't avoid being tempted. But we can certainly choose to turn our eyes and our mind away from what tempts us. It's the way we exercise our will that determines whether we are holy or sinful.

God doesn't hold us guilty for being tempted. But He certainly wants us to resist temptation. As someone has said, "I can't prevent the birds from flying over my head, but I can prevent them from making a nest in my hair." You can't prevent temptation from coming to you but you can prevent it from settling down in your mind!

God's Word does not teach that we should face as many temptations as possible in order to show how strong we are. No. We are to run away from temptation. Paul tells Timothy to flee from the things that tempt him (2 Tim. 2:22). We must run away from the love of money, from flirtatious women and from anything that will lead us away from God.

Our attitude to temptation should be, "Let me keep myself as far away from it as possible". We are not to be like little children who try to find out how near the edge of a cliff they can go without falling down, or how close to the edge of the railway platform they can stand without the train knocking them over. That's not the advice any sensible parent will give his child. We tell our children to keep far away from such dangers. That's what God tells us too.

This petition really means, "Father, don't allow me to face temptation that is too strong for me." It is the cry of one who knows that his flesh is weak, and who realises that he can easily fall.

#### Being Prepared to Face Temptation

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, James and John, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt. 26:41). Jesus knew that there was temptation ahead of them and He sought to prepare them. But instead of praying, they went to sleep. As a result, when the temptation came, Peter chopped off a soldier's ear. He fell into sin, because he had not watched and prayed. Jesus however, conducted Himself in a pure and loving way because He had prayed.

God is always faithful to warn us in advance. All of us must have, at sometime or the other, heard the voice of the Spirit in our hearts saying, "Spend a few moments in prayer now." Did you recognize that as the voice of God seeking to prepare you for some temptation that lay ahead of you at that time?

What have you usually done at such times? Like the disciples you may have ignored that voice. And when the temptation came you fell. God had tried to prepare you for the temptation. But you had not listened.

#### Every Temptation Can be Overcome

God has given us a wonderful promise in His Word that He will never allow any trial or temptation to come to us that is too much for us to bear or overcome (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words, He will check each trial and temptation to see if we are capable of overcoming it. Only then will He permit it to come to us. A good teacher would never give a 9th-standard examination paper to a 2nd-standard student. He would only give a paper corresponding to the student's standard. So does God.

In the light of this verse, is it right then to feel that any temptation or trial that you face is too strong for you? No. It is obvious that God doesn't think so. Otherwise he wouldn't have allowed it to come to you.

The very fact that God has allowed a temptation to come to you is proof that you are strong enough to overcome it.

So we need to look at temptation like this: "God has allowed this temptation to come to me. So that is an indication of His confidence in me. He knows that I can overcome even this; and He will certainly give me the power of His Spirit to overcome it." If we look at temptation and trial like that, we can overcome everything that comes to us.

God has also promised to write His laws upon our hearts and in our minds (Heb. 8:10). He works in us through His Spirit both TO WILL and TO DO His perfect will (Phil. 2:13). So we need never be defeated.

#### Deliverance from Sin's Power

Leading on from this prayer, "Do not lead us into temptation (which is too strong for us)" is the petition, "Deliver us from evil."

The word 'deliver' could be paraphrased as, "Draw us to Thyself." So the prayer is "Draw us to Thyself from evil." God and evil are pulling in two different directions. And we are saying, "Father, I feel this pull towards evil in my flesh. But don't let me go that way. I don't want to yield to it. Please pull me over Your way." This longing and hungering to be drawn towards God is an essential requirement for a life of victory over sin.

One reason why the promise in Romans 6:14 - "Sin shall not be master over you," is not fulfilled in the lives of many Christians is because deep down in their hearts there is not enough of a hunger for freedom from sin. They don't cry out, "Oh God, deliver me from sin at any cost." They are not thirsting for it. They would have cried out if they were seriously sick. But they don't feel that sinning is as bad as being sick! No wonder they remain defeated.

It says in Exodus 2:23-25, "The sons of Israel sighed because of their bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help rose up to God. So God heard their groaning...and God took notice of them." That's when God will begin to take notice of us too - when we begin to cry out in desperation for deliverance. God says, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13).

It is a principle in Scripture that for anything precious that we are to receive from God, we must hunger and thirst for it first. Only then do we learn to appreciate it sufficiently. And so God waits until we hunger and thirst; and then God gives us what we really long for.

The Christian life is a battle against Satan. And in this battle, Satan has one of his agents right inside us - our flesh. Since our flesh is on the enemy's side, it will do everything possible to prevent us from being effective in fighting Satan. Never forget that. That's why we need to long for total deliverance from the flesh, if we are to overcome Satan.

#### Deliverance From All Evil

There are many believers who pray, "Oh God, protect me from all the evil that the devil and other people are trying to do to me." But all the while they keep feeding their flesh (the enemy's agent) by giving it everything it wants. Then God cannot deliver them from all evil.

Let us long for deliverance from our fleshly lusts first. Then it will be an easy matter for us to overcome Satan. Then we will find that no evil from men or demons can touch us.

In Romans 7:14-25, we read of Paul's longing for total deliverance from the lusts in his flesh. After that we read in Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good." Notice the sequence. One follows on from the other. Romans 8:28 can be true in our lives only if we first long for deliverance from the enemy's agent - the flesh.

What a wonderful promise Romans 8:28 is, that no evil can ever come into our lives. Do you really believe that ALL things - not just some things, or many things, or most things, not even 99% of things, but ALL things - will work together for your good?

When you look at these "things" individually they may look horrible. But all of them TOGETHER will work for good if you love God and are called according to His purpose. And His purpose is that you should be totally free from sin and conformed to the likeness of Christ, as it says in the very next verse (Rom. 8:29). And so if you have a longing to be free from sin, God promises to make EVERY SINGLE THING that ever befalls you to work together for your good. Hallelujah!

Think of Joseph. He tried to live a godly life, and sought to be delivered from evil according to the light that he had. He sought to please God, and God blessed him. But how did he get treated by other people? His ten brothers were so jealous of him that they sold him into Egypt. That looked like an evil thing. But we finally see that that was part of God's plan to make Joseph the second ruler in Egypt. The evil that his brothers did to him turned out to be for his good.

When he got to Egypt, he was sold as a servant into the house of Potiphar. There Potiphar's wife tempted him, but he refused to yield to her. He ran away from the scene of temptation. He was falsely accused by her and put into jail. That looked like an evil thing too. But it was God Who had planned Joseph's route to the throne via the jail - for it was in that very jail that Joseph met Pharaoh's cup-bearer and thus got an introduction to Pharaoh later on (Gen.39 to 41).

The evil that other people tried to do to Joseph out of malice and hatred, God in His sovereignty, made them all work together to fulfil His plan for Joseph's life.

It can be like that for us too - all things working together to fulfil what God has planned for our lives - to conform us to the likeness of Christ. But we must believe it - for we can receive God's promise only in proportion to our faith.

In the book of Esther, we read of Haman preparing a gallows to hang Mordecai on. But in the end, Haman himself is hung on that gallows (Esth. 7:10). God turned the tables on the enemy of His people. God does the same with Satan too. He turns the tables on him in such a way that instead of our hanging on the gallows, the devil has to hang on the very same gallows that he prepared for us! Hallelujah!

#### We Need One Another

Notice too in this petition, that our prayer is, not "Deliver ME" but "Deliver US." It is, "Deliver my brother and me from evil. Deliver my sister and me from evil. Deliver us, Father."

We need each other. We need fellowship with one another to be delivered from evil. "Two are better than one..... for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when

there is not another to lift him up." (Eccl. 4:9,10).

That's why the devil tries to separate believers and to bring division between them. That's why he tries to divide a husband and a wife too. Satan is the one who brings little misunderstandings. He makes one person believe one thing and the other person something else; and without anything serious having happened, the devil separates them.

Satan knows that once he has separated believers from each other, it is easier for him to knock them down individually. As long as they are united he can't do that. So he divides them. And once he has succeeded in getting each believer to live for himself, without caring for the other, it won't be long before they have all lost their effectiveness for God.

We need to recognize that we have only ONE enemy - and that is Satan. Let's not fight each other then. Let's pray for one another.

#### Concern for a Fallen Brother

"Deliver US" also means that when I see my brother fall into sin, I don't rejoice over it. I don't scandalize him. On the contrary I feel grieved and pray for him and seek to restore him.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, there is a sharp contrast between the attitude of the priest and that of the Samaritan. The priest looked at the fallen man and probably said to himself, "Thank God I didn't fall like him," and walked on (Lk. 10:30-37). That's how some believers act when another believer has fallen into sin. They tell others, "See how he's fallen", indirectly implying, "See, how I haven't fallen!"

But what did the good Samaritan do? He didn't thank God for his own victory. He went down and lifted up that fallen man and carried him to where he could be healed. And Jesus says to us, "Go and do the same." (Lk. 10:37).

Is that your attitude to a brother in whom you see a weakness or perhaps who has fallen in some area? Do you lift him up in prayer and take him to Jesus for healing? That's a fairly good test of whether you are centred in God or not.

It's because of the self-centred desire to appear more spiritual than others, that we don't care when someone else falls into sin. It's an evil, Satanic spirit that urges us to show ourselves as superior to others. When we pray, "Father deliver US from evil," there can be no desire to show ourselves as more spiritual than another.

We are one body in Christ. If my left hand gets hurt, my right hand is ready at once to help in the healing of that injury. And not just my right hand, but my entire body-mechanism gets alerted to bring healing to that wound immediately. So must it be in the body of Christ.

#### The Two Greatest Commandments

Moses came down from Mount Sinai with two tablets of stone in his hand. On one were written the first four commandments that dealt with man's relationship with God. On the other were written the other six commandments that dealt with man's relationship with his fellow-men.

The Lord Jesus said that these two tablets could be summed up in two commandments. The first, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind;" and the

second, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39).

Jesus emphasised these two in the prayer that He taught as well. The first three petitions relate to the first commandment. And the next three petitions relate to the second commandment, as amplified by Jesus in the new commandment that He gave His disciples, when He said, "Love one another even as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34).

A true disciple of Jesus seeks to be perfectly centred in God in his conscious and unconscious being - with every desire of his, perfectly in tune with God; and with no desire, ambition or feeling outside the will of God for his life. At the same time he also seeks to love his brothers perfectly, as Jesus loved him.

He is however perpetually aware that his attitude is not as perfect as it should be in these two directions. But he keeps working towards that goal, always willing to pay any price in order to get there.

To love our brothers is to have a concern for them. We cannot have a concern for everybody in the world. Only God has that capacity. But according to our capacity, we should have a concern for our fellow-believers; and that capacity should keep increasing.

We don't start off like this. The first step is to love the members of our family at home as Jesus loved us. But we don't stop there. We move forward seeking to love our brothers and sisters in the family of God also as Jesus loved us.

Perfection is a goal to press on towards. But we should be determined to reach it. That's the direction in which Paul was going when he said, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14). The upward call of God is to become perfectly centred in God, to love God supremely and to love our fellow-believers as Jesus loved us and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

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