

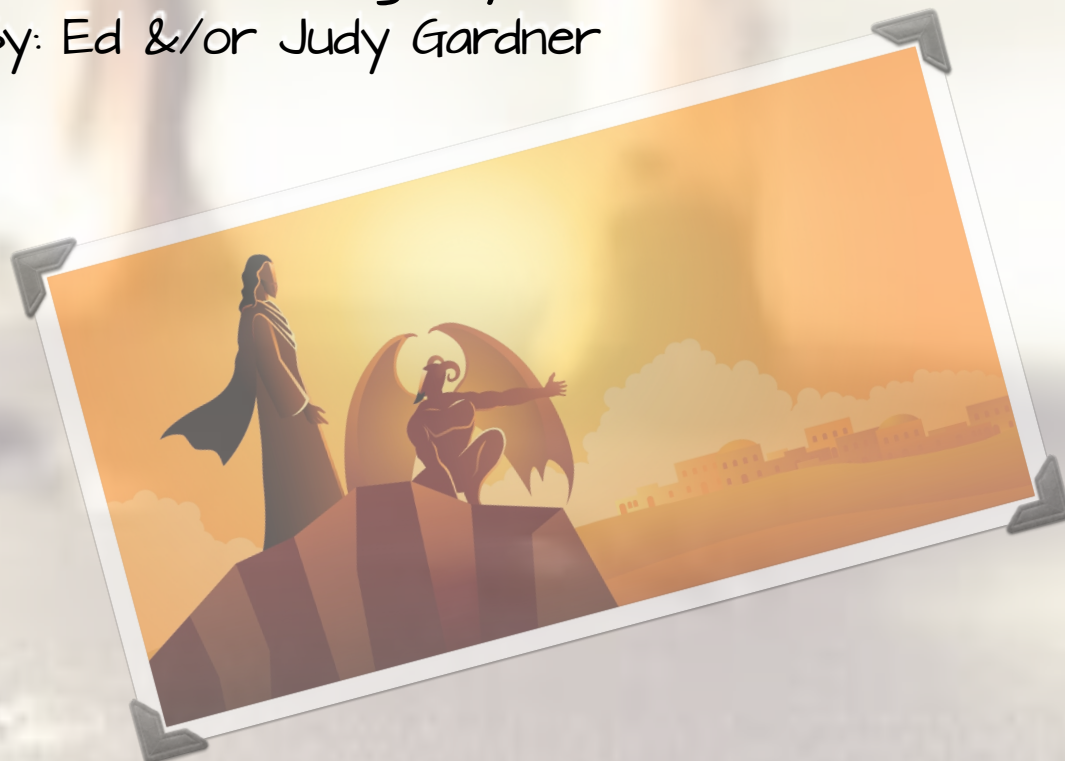
Feb. 28- March 4, 2022 Edition

# Following The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 9

## Jesus' Temptation/Testing By The Evil One

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we're going to finish doing a deep dive into the two stories that began Jesus' public ministry- we've looked at the baptism of Jesus for the last 2 weeks and today we'll begin looking at what happened immediately after His baptism:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil.  
Matthew 4:1 (NLT)

So immediately after one of the highlights of His earthly life Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He will be tested or tempted by the devil. So why don't we start off with why I keep saying that Jesus was tempted OR tested. The word in Greek that is translated as "tempted" in the version of the Bible I like is πειράζω. How are you doing? Got it? Are you sounding that word out in your mind? If not I'll give you the transliteration of that word- you pronounce it, "pay-rod-zo" (at least that's close enough for our purposes). And while it can (and is) be translated as "temptation" it is far more than that. The word is also often translated as "test". It carries both ideas in that one word. I'm not saying that the translators are wrong when they render pay-rod-zo as "temptation" but I will go out on a limb and say that's not the whole story when it comes to the meaning of that word.

Because equally important to understanding this word is the idea of a test or being tested. When it comes to pay-rod-zo every temptation is also a test and included in every test is a temptation. But these "tests" aren't so much about how much we know- rather these tests are designed to reveal who we truly are on the inside. And we see it throughout the Bible. Adam & Eve were given a test in the Garden of Eden. God wasn't "tempting" them to do something evil but He did have to see who they truly were inside. Abraham is given multiple "tests" to reveal who he was inside. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph- all tested. Moses too. And that brings us to the nation of Israel who were "tested" in the wilderness. Not long before his death Moses gathers the people of Israel and reminds them of what they've been through:

Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Deuteronomy 8:2 (NLT)

It sounds kind of cold hearted, doesn't it? Humbling them. Testing them. Why would God need to do that? To prove their character. To reveal what is really inside of them. And why was that so important to God? Have you read Exodus? For the most part the nation of Israel's character was a pile of hot garbage. Over and over they fail their tests in the wilderness which is why it took them 40 years for God to feel like they were ready to move forward.

Why was it so important to God that they be ready? Because it was imperative that they trust and love God with everything they had within them. The older generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt had a slavery mentality. God needed them to have a conquerors mentality. So He leaves them in the wilderness until that older generation has all passed away and what's left is a group that has been taught to trust and love God. Then they were ready. God tested them because if they had just blundered into the Promised Land without learning to trust and rely on God then Israel was doomed before they began. I mean heck, have you read how things go when Israel does inhabit the land? They fail over and over. Spectacularly so. Imagine how it would have gone had the older generation had been used to possess the land- it would have been a complete mess.

So God tested them. Not to be mean but to bring out the best in them. He does the same thing with me and you to this very day. He tests us to reveal what is inside of our hearts. Not because He doesn't know but because He needs us to know exactly how weak/strong we are.

He still has plans for each one of us and He will continue testing us throughout the rest of our lives to prove our character. It's not a punishment- it's an opportunity. He wants to use you and me to be a light to the world just like He did Israel but He needs us to decide how we're going to proceed- with Him or on our own.

**Tuesday Reflection:** So this week we're looking at the temptations/testing of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness immediately after His baptism. We saw yesterday that this was not a mistake- it was part of the plan. Jesus was led (gospel of Mark says He was "driven") into the wilderness by the Spirit for the express purpose of being tested by the devil. We will look at 4 things this story teaches us this week so let's start with the first thing this story teaches us which is Who Jesus is. In case you forgot this is what happened at His baptism:

*After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." Matthew 3:16-17 (NLT)*

So prior to His testing in the wilderness Jesus hits a spiritual high. He's baptized by John and the Heavens open up and He is anointed by the Spirit of God and then the voice from Heaven declares Him to be the "Son of God". But immediately after this mountain top type experience God has another experience in mind for Him:

*For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. Matthew 4:1 (NLT)*

Why? Why the wilderness right after the mountain top? Why the dry desert right after the waters of baptism? Why fast (going without eating) right after a spiritual meal that must have satisfied Him in ways food never could? Because God is preparing Him. There's something about fasting that brings power, focus and clarity to a person. The idea is to set aside something that we take for granted (food in this case but it could be a media fast or a spending fast or a junk food fast or...) and use the time and energy we would have spent on whatever activity we are "fasting" from to focus on God and our mission on this earth. That's what Jesus is doing. For 40 days. In the Judean wilderness. There are few places on this earth more desolate and foreboding.

When we were in Israel one of the days we were dropped off in the Judean wilderness where we spent a couple of hours all alone just contemplating what all we had seen and learned. I wish I could say I had a "religious" experience but I didn't. I did spend a lot of time thinking about what it would be like to stay out there alone for 40 days and nights. No thank you.

But Jesus did it. And at some point this happens:

*During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God..." Matthew 4:3 (NLT)*

We'll get to the actual temptations/tests (there are 3 of them) on Thursday but this is important and one of the devil's favorite tricks- he is always trying to get us to doubt the goodness of God. He does it in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3 (...did God really say you couldn't eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?) No. God didn't say that but now even though Eve stands up for God the seed of doubt has been planted. The devil tries that with Jesus but Jesus isn't having any of it as we'll see on Thursday. Why does the Satan decide to begin Jesus' temptation/test this way? I think he's trying to rattle Jesus. Remember Jesus just came from the Jordan River where in an incredibly public way God declared Jesus not just to be His Son but God also declared that He was well pleased with Jesus.

Now Jesus hears the devil say, "if you are the Son of God..." and how do you think it made Him feel? I hope He just smirked at the devil. Nice try but no, I'm not falling for that old

trick. And Jesus doesn't fall for any of the tests/temptations that will follow. He successfully passes each test that we humans failed early and often throughout the pages of the Bible (and human history as well right up to this very moment where both you and I can probably easily remember the last "test" we failed miserably at. Jesus goes through this time of testing to pass the tests that we humans had failed but also to show us the way to deal with the testing of the evil one. So when we fail, it's ok. Would He rather that we pass our tests? Sure and I'm guessing you'd rather that you pass at least some of the tests you face. But when we fail we can tell ourselves that it's all going to be ok because Jesus did what we could never have accomplished- He passed every test He faced. And not just for Himself- He passed them for you and me. Thank God.

**Wednesday Reflection:** Yesterday we looked at how this story gives us some insight into Who Jesus is and what His mission was. Today we're going to look at the only other character in this story:

*After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said... Matthew 4:2-3 (NIV)*

Ok, so along comes this mysterious "tempter" or "tester". We looked on Monday at how those two English words are used to translate the same Bible word- pay-rod-zo. So which is this? Is this figure a tempter or a tester? Yes. Absolutely correct. He's both. As we've seen previously in every test you'll find a temptation and in every temptation you'll find a test. Now the Bible makes it clear that God never tempts anyone to do evil- that's this mysterious figure referred to in verse 3 as the tester/tempter. But God will regularly test us to see what's going on internally.

So what do we know about this tempter/tester? Well in this story this figure is referred to with three different titles- tester/tempter, the devil and the satan. Why did I choose to refer to this figure as "the" satan? Because "satan" is not this figure's name- it's a title. "Satan" means adversary. Devil means deceiver. These are titles and not personal names. In fact we don't know what this figure's personal name is. I know a lot of us think the name of the deceiver is Lucifer but that's incorrect. Where did we come up with that idea? Let's look:

*"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. Isaiah 14:12-13 (NKJV)*

Sure sounds like the satan he's talking about here, doesn't it? But he's actually referring to the King of Babylon. Could God be doing more than one thing at the same time? Sure He could. Is He? Who knows? But even if you believe God is using this passage to address both the King of Babylon AND the satan it still doesn't make Lucifer the personal name of this figure- Lucifer is another title. It means "Day Star" but we're not being told in this passage what the name of our adversary is.

In fact we know very little about this figure. The fact that we know so little about such an important figure is frustrating for us. We want to know where he came from and where did he go (he's sort of like Cotton Eyed Joe in that way [and now you have that song stuck in your head- you're welcome]) and when we find little to satisfy our desire for knowledge we often scan the scriptures looking for an origin story. Isaiah 14 is one place humans have gone to (supposedly) discover more about this figure. Another place where a possible origin story might be found is in the book of Ezekiel:

*"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardis, topaz, and*

diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. "By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, o covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Ezekiel 28:12-16 (NLT)

Boy that really sounds like this mysterious figure, doesn't it? And maybe it is but the immediate context in Ezekiel is that this is God speaking to the King of Tyre- a city north of Israel. Many have decided this is a passage that gives the origin story of the satan but there's no way to be sure. So what do we know about this mysterious figure?

Well most of what we think we know about the satan doesn't come from the Bible- it comes from ancient and medieval art and literature. Dante's Inferno, Milton's Paradise Lost and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress all take the tiny bit we know about the satan, demons, hell and even angels and tries to expand on that knowledge to answer the questions we all want the answers to. Problem is, most of what we think we know based on the work of Dante, Milton and Bunyan is plain wrong.

As we finish for today I'll give you a list of scriptures that tell us something (if not everything) we'd like to know about our deceiver, adversary and tester.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NLT)

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT)

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14 (NLT)

This great dragon-the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world-was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. Revelation 12:9 (NLT)

**Thursday Reflection:** Today we reach the main event- the battle royale between Jesus and the tester:

During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:3-4 (NLT)

I don't know about you but I always wondered why this was a temptation. I mean I get Jesus is hungry but the idea that Jesus is saying He's not hungry because He's been snacking (or even feasting) on the word of God is just ridiculous. That is not what He's saying. So then why is this a test? Because Jesus is playing a sort of reverse follow-the-leader. Jesus is walking the paths of God's people who went through these same tests and failed (over and over again and spectacularly so). He will pass the tests we failed to pass and in so doing become our representative or champion who will save us not by making us good enough but by being good enough Himself. The Bible is brutally clear- I'm not saved because of my goodness but because of Jesus' goodness. I'm not saved by my record of passing tests but by Jesus' perfect record of passing tests. And while we don't see any rule that would be broken by Jesus turning stones to bread what he's doing is going through the same test Israel went

through and failed. Jesus goes back to the words of Moses given in a speech to the Israelites not long before his death:

*Yes, he humbled you by... feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NLT)*

Did you catch what God was trying to teach the Israelites? That man does not live by bread alone. Notice Moses didn't say, "man does not live by calories". The test God was giving the Israelites was the trust test- will you trust Me even when it seems like you know better than Me how things should go? Adam & Eve failed that test. So did every other person in the Bible story. But Jesus doesn't fail the test. And He does battle with the satan by quoting scripture. He will not fail by doubting that God has His best in mind. He won't complain like the Israelites did. This is an important thing for us to learn as well. Because this same test/temptation will be thrown at us anytime our circumstances are less than ideal. The satan will come and whisper in our ears, if God really loved you then what are you doing in these circumstances? Surely God would want you to have (fill in the blank- the temptation is different for all of us) and if you don't have that then it must follow that God doesn't care about you. Ok so on to the next test:

*Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the Lord your God.'" Matthew 4:5-7 (NLT)*

What's going on here? The satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem and dares Him to jump. He even quotes scriptures that seem to say that no matter what Jesus does God won't let Him be harmed. It's sort of like the satan is saying, "I would totally believe you're the Son of God if you did this. And not just me either- look at all these important people at the Temple scurrying around and doing their thing- imagine if they saw you float down to the ground from up here- it would totally jump start your ministry. All these people would suddenly believe you are Who you claim to be. But Jesus passes the test Israel failed. Let's go back to Moses' speech from Deuteronomy:

*You must not test the Lord your God as you did when you complained at Massah. Deuteronomy 6:16 (NLT)*

The Israelites not only failed a test at Massah- they attempted to "test" God Himself there:

*Moses named the place Massah (which means "test") and Meribah (which means "arguing") because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord here with us or not?" Exodus 17:7 (NLT)*

The Israelites tried to do a switcheroo with God and turn the tables on Him- rather than patiently and humbly going through the testing that would reveal whether they trusted God enough to go into the Promised Land they decided to try their hand at testing God. Do you see what they were trying to say to God? They asked, "is the Lord here with us or not" (even though they had been witnesses of the 10 plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's armies, the pillars of fire leading them by night and the cloud leading them by day. But now they will try to use reverse psychology to get God to do things the way they want Him to do it. But God will not be tested. It's just another sign that this generation of Israelites is NOT ready for the blessing of the Promised Land. That's why they spend 40 years in the wilderness- God is training the younger generation to trust Him in

ways the older generation never did/would and He's waiting for the older generation to die off so the people of Israel will be as ready as they can be for the challenges and blessings of inhabiting the land.

So what's the lesson for us to learn? Never put conditions on God's love for you. The statement, "if God really cared and if He was really here with me then I wouldn't be going through this..." That statement is a carefully crafted one that when used should give you a very strong scent of sulfur because it was crafted in the pits of hell itself. Lesson number two is, don't put God to the test but learn to trust that He knows what He's doing even if things are pretty uncomfortable for you right now with what you're going through. Next test:

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus. Matthew 4:8-11 (NLT)

Ok final test for Jesus here in the wilderness. What's the temptation? To bow down and worship the satan in exchange for control of the Kingdoms of this world. What's the satan saying to Jesus? I think he's saying, "you don't have to go to all the trouble your Father has planned to become the conquering King of Israel (heck I'll even throw in the rest of the kingdoms of this world)- I'll make that happen and all it will cost you is a little worship. But Jesus responds (as He does every time with each temptation/test) with scripture and just like the other two times the scriptures seem to act as a weapon that wounds the satan by quoting once again from- you guessed it- Moses speech to the Israelites:

You must fear the Lord your God and serve only him. Deuteronomy 6:13 (NLT)

So what's the temptation for us? To take a shortcut to get around the tests God brings us to. We do it all the time. When we're dealing with a particularly difficult situation rather than meeting it head on and handling it we do things that will make us forget for a while. Substances, experiences, accomplishments can all be things we turn to so that we don't have to think about the test we're going through. That's the temptation within this particular test- will you dull your mind so you don't have to deal with this test or will you rely on God? Now there's nothing wrong with doing things to take our minds off our troubles for a short time but we humans have a tendency to stretch those times of taking our minds off our troubles into months and years.

Tomorrow we'll talk about how Jesus teaches us to overcome and pass the tests that come our way every single day.

**Friday Reflection:** Ok one last reflection for this week on temptations/testing- how do we overcome? Remember Jesus used scripture in every test/temptation and when He did it acted like a weapon that seemed to wound the satan. We'd do well to learn this lesson because scripture is indeed a powerful weapon. Really it's the only offensive weapon at a Christian's disposal. In Ephesians Paul talks about something he calls the full-armor-of-God and every piece he mentions is defensive in nature with one exception:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can



extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:13-17 (NLT)

How can we use the scriptures as a weapon? Well you can pull out your Bible (analog paper version or digital app) whenever you feel a test/temptation coming on but can you imagine how much more powerful your scriptural attacks against the evil one would be if you had some scripture memorized and ready with one-in-the-chamber if you know what I mean. When I got serious about my faith when I was 20 years old the preacher who mentored me (a man named Steve Lloyd who helped guide me through a very confusing time in my life when I had no idea what following Jesus was supposed to look like) told me the best way to handle the tests/temptations that would be coming is to memorize scriptures. To take the words off the pages of the Bible and move them into my heart where they'd be ready for me to use at a moment's notice.

I know memorizing scripture may seem daunting so let's start off with a fairly easy one, shall we? And if I was going to suggest a passage of scripture to memorize that will help with all of these test/temptations that Jesus (and Israel) went through I think I'd recommend the Lord's prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Look at it and take a minute to think about how this prayer could help with the trust test (man does not live by bread alone), the patience test (you shall not put the Lord your God to the test) and the success test (you shall worship the Lord and serve only Him):

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation (testing), but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen. Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

I never noticed until this week how closely so much of the model prayer Jesus taught His disciples are a defense against the attacks of the satan. Let's start with the opening part of the prayer, "Our Father in heaven..." Remember how the satan started Jesus' test? "If you are the Son of God..." Remember how I said he will use the same attack against you and me essentially saying, "if you were a dearly loved daughter/son of God would He let you go through what you're going through?" Jesus showed us that's just not how reality works but that tactic continues to work to this day with the rest of us. So what's the solution? Pray the Lord's prayer- when we start off declaring who God is to us (Our Father) it reminds us of who we are to God- dearly loved sons/daughters no matter what situations we find ourselves in.

Next Jesus teaches us to pray, "hallowed be your name..." Hallow is the language of worship and honor and respect and reverence. When we're tempted to "worship" something or someone else by using that thing or person to get out of the test God has brought us to we are worshiping something other than God. The Bible talks about his with words like idolatry and greed but it's just worshiping something or someone that isn't God and it always leads straight to disaster. It might work in the short term but long term we'll end up like the older generation of Israelites in the wilderness.

Next Jesus teaches us to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." Remember that last temptation/test Jesus went through where the satan offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world? This was Jesus' response- I'm here to establish God's Kingdom- not my own and not yours you deceiver! When we are tempted to think



that having enough stuff or money or power or success or control will make things all better this prayer reminds us that our number one mission on this earth is to promote the Kingdom of God and not establish our own.

What comes next? "Give us today our daily bread". Remember the first test Jesus passed? Turn these stones to bread and everything will be just peachy. But Jesus wouldn't do it. Why not? Because He was here to pass the tests Israel had failed and one of those was doubting God's goodness if they were in any way inconvenienced. It happened over and over again. It must have been exhausting (for them and God- can God get exhausted? I don't know. Maybe metaphorically? Anyways I digress...) How can you and I deal with this test when it comes our way? By praying, "give us today our daily bread..." It's a prayer of reliance on God and will guide you into the life He created you to live.

And finally I want to skip down to one of the last parts of the model prayer, "And lead us not into temptation (testing), but deliver us from the evil one." I was talking to someone at church just last weekend about this line (I'm thinking it was James but maybe it was someone else...) and they were asking how God could "lead us into temptation"? Here's your answer in Matthew chapter 4 and the story of Jesus' temptations/testing- God leads us into tests and then we're tempted by the other guy. I wonder if maybe what Jesus is saying here is, "look, I was lead into my time of testing/temptations and I was delivered from the evil one and you can be too. But you should pray that you not be lead to a time of testing and temptation because believe Me, you do NOT want to go through that. But if you do then pray that God will deliver you from the evil one." How does God deliver us? By filling our minds with scriptures like the Lord's prayer and then giving us everything we need to pass the tests that come our way that are filled with temptations.

So go sharpen your sword of the Spirit (the word of God) and memorize some choice passages so you'll be ready the next time a test/temptation come your way.