

Pray Like This (Week 6) - Temptation and Evil **Sermon Summary**

Yesterday, we covered the last full sentence of the "Our Father" prayer. (The 2nd half of Matthew 6.13, "For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, amen," is probably not in the original text.)



1) Lead me not into a time of testing -

This is probably the hardest phrase in the Lord's Prayer to interpret, in large part because of its last word, which is "peirasmos" in Greek. That word is often rendered in English one of three different ways: "tempt," "test," or "time of trial."

We know from James 1.13-14 (read it [here](#)) that God Himself is never the source of our temptations, and that they only come from our own innate desires and impulses.

So God doesn't tempt us, what does this phrase in the Lord's Prayer mean?

The life of Jesus is helpful here (not surprising because The Lord's Prayer is a reflection of His own prayer life). Before He began His public ministry, He was led out into the wilderness for 40 days of testing to see if He was ready for all that He was to do and all He had to face (click [here](#) to read that story). Likewise, His life ends with another severe time of testing in Gethsemane as He faces His own pending arrest and death (click [here](#) for that). It is this very testing that makes Him sympathetic to us in our times of testing, so says the letter of Hebrews twice ([here](#) and [here](#)).

Does it surprise you that God tests His people? It shouldn't - it's all over the pages of the Old Testament, for example Deut. 8.2 reads, "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments."

Thus, a God who brings His people into a time of testing is a God who stretches, assesses, trains, and weighs His people. We can trust God – but can God trust us? God wants us to grow and mature, but we often would rather stand still and play it safe. He wants to see how far we've come, and how far we've yet to go; He wants us to see how far we've come, and how far we have not.

How does this square with a God who is love? Church historian Justo Gonzalez answers that as follows: "Thus, when God leads us into temptation, God is motivated by the same love that we may understand to be His motive behind all other blessings we receive in the Lord's Prayer. It is through meeting those tests that we are learning to be true children of God and that we are increasingly shaped into the divine image."

So, to pray "lead me not into a time of testing" is to confess our own inability to persist and stay true. It is asking God to see me through whatever present trial I am facing, because I can feel my resolve dwindling. It is me asking God to let the choice or decision I'm facing be a way for me to grow and draw nearer to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 10.13, Paul the apostles offers this assurance to us in a time of testing: 1) whatever we're facing is commonplace among human beings and isn't unique to us, 2) God is faithful and won't allow us to be tested beyond our limits, and 3) God will always provide us a way to bear the trial and come out the other side.

In that regard, the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta once quipped, "I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much.

2) But Deliver Us From Evil -

To "deliver" means to rescue, save, or snatch someone away from an assailant. In ancient Greek, it's not "evil," it's "the evil," which is meant to indicate, at the very least, the evil with which all of us are intimately familiar. And what kind of evil is that? Both what assails us within and what breaks and overwhelms us in our world. As Frederick Buechner puts it, "We are all vulnerable both to the storm without and to the storm within."

Thus, this is a plea for God to rescue you from that which you cannot extricate yourself. To cite Justo Gonzalez again: "We are...asking that we be liberated from a slavery to which we are subjected and from a wickedness that encages us...We are...asking that we be restored to a freedom we do not have."

And we pray this not only for ourselves, but also for those we know who seem bound by an oppressive evil, and for our community, country, and world that seems to have no desire to be loosed from its wickedness and brokenness.

3) Conclusion -

The common denominator between both halves of this sentence is humility. A Christian's resolve and strength is drawn directly from dependence and an admission of weakness. Or, as Paul says it in 2nd Corinthians 12.9-10: "God's power is made perfect in weakness...Whenever I am weak, then I am strong."

This last pair of phrases in the Our Father prayer is me getting real with myself and God:

- I am not capable of leading myself
- I cannot wisely and persistently navigate most tests that I face on my own
- I want to be more faithful to God than I actually am
- I cannot rescue myself from evil, the evil within me and the evil I see and encounter in the world every day

C. Clifton Black, a professor at Princeton Seminary, summarizes this last sentence in The Lord's Prayer as follows: "We are weak and in danger of collapsing, Father, bolster us and lead us away from forsaking You. The same Lord who has guaranteed our daily bread and forgiveness earlier in the Lord's Prayer stands behind this plea too...The help from above is stronger than any attack from below...When we pray to be redirected from a trial that would break us and to be rescued from evil so abominable that it could undo us, we are begging for the strength to oppose and resist it to the limits of human power and beyond them."

Praying This Week

1) We will include a full summary of all the prayer prompts for the entire series in this week's Midweek Minute on Thursday. Keep an eye out for that.

2) In case you'd like to use it this week, here's the paraphrase we used of the Lord's Prayer we used yesterday - from Rev. Rex A. E. Hunt (Australian pastor and ecologist):

"God, lover of us all, most holy one. Help us respond to You as readily as You respond to us. Do Your good work of renewal in us, across our world, and in the universe. Give us today enough for our needs. Forgive our weak and deliberate offenses, just as we must forgive others when they hurt us. Help us resist wickedness and do what is good; rescue us when we are overcome by temptation and evil. For we are Yours, and You are ours. You will reign forever, this is our joy and hope, amen."

3) Pray humbly this week - when you feel close to collapsing, on the verge of crumbling, or overwhelmed by worry, anger, or sadness, offer that up to God in prayer and ask Him to lead you through it.

4) When you are pained by evil - either your own thoughts, feelings, and indiscretions, or in the lives and world around you - pause to ask God to deliver you from it, because you - and we - can't rescue ourselves.

5) If you feel as if you're in a time of testing, lean heavily on God every day to lead you through, because you can't do it alone.

6) A simple prayer of dependence (from Re:Worship): "Lord, I need you in every hour of every day. I depend upon you in all ways and in all times. I pray in expectation and remain watchful for how you will be at work in my own heart and life. You are able to do above and beyond all that I can think to ask, amen."