

The Lord's Prayer 5

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Each of us have trials and temptations. Some of them seem minor and frivolous – the temptation to eat that extra cookie or nap instead of doing a task. It can seem like a trial to line up for groceries or do things on the computer that you are not used to. But these are not true trials or temptations, are they? When we pray, *lead us not into temptation* or *do not bring us to the time of trial*, I think something more significant is being addressed.

This petition brings us near the end of the Lord's Prayer. It is the third of a triad of petitions which encompass our basic needs as human beings: physical (daily bread), spiritual (forgiveness) and moral (resisting evil). The petition has two parts – *lead us not into temptation* – *deliver us from evil*. Some of the difficulties with this can be observed when we look at various translations: "Save us from the time of trial," "Deliver us from the evil one," "Don't let us yield to temptation," and so on. I like the version in our pew Bibles – the New Revised Standard Version – which translates the phrase as, *do not bring us to the time of trial*.

The very fact that we pray this petition acknowledges our awareness that we cannot deal with the trials and temptations of life by ourselves but that divine intervention is needed.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

This petition of the Lord's Prayer brings us face to face with the problem of evil in the world. Are we praying for God to not bring us to the test? Our world is full of tests and examinations. Are we asking here for an easy way out? Or is this a prayer for God to not tempt us to do evil things?

Surely God would never tempt us to do evil. It just does not fit with what we know of God or what the scripture tells us. The thought that God might deliberately lead us into temptation is perverse. God desires that we should be holy as God is holy. However, the pathway to holiness does not involve immunity from trials and temptations – in fact, it is often through exposure to such things that we grow in faith.

The passage from James is clear: *No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one*. I like the way Eugene Peterson puts it in, The Message: *Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil and puts evil in no one's way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust*.

These days we might all feel trials and temptations more keenly. The whole circumstance of pandemic seems like a trial and the temptations that accompany our current reality abound – too much time on face book, judging others (are they too close?), wanting to blame the World Health Organization or some racial group for the virus, dismissing the needs of others in favour of our own, anger at confinement and

economic strain – many, many temptations. In the context of Jesus' teaching there was an expectation of a great time of trial to come – a time when we shall find out what we're really capable of – maybe this is it! Jesus reminds us not to assume you know how much you're capable of. Pray that when the time of trial comes – when things get difficult – you will have the resources you need.

We know that temptation must come – that trials will come (and maybe are here), but we pray not to be abandoned – not to be delivered helpless into its power. We pray not to be exempt from trials and temptations, but that God's sacred presence will stand by us and give us help when the time comes.

What we are praying for here is that we will not collapse beneath the trials and travails of life. That we will not drown in an ocean of obscure existence. That we will not crumble under the weight of our daily burdens – that we will not be destroyed in the fiery crucible of living but will be purified and strengthened. *Do not bring us to the time of trial. Lead us not into temptation.*

But deliver us from evil.

This is our great human need – to be delivered from the brokenness and disappointments of life, and to make it successfully to the other side of the abyss.

In our post-modern thinking, we generally dismiss the notion of a personified evil as superstitious – as a remnant of an ancient worldview we no longer share. We should not restrict our understanding of the evil one to just a personal threat. Consider what Paul calls the "powers and principalities" – those organized, pervasive cultural forces – including "the economy", "nationhood" and "race" – that rage against God's desire. Most of us probably don't believe in the devil as an embodied force but view evil as a terrible energy to be reckoned with.

But no matter how you slice it, the Lord's Prayer acknowledges our human predicament: evil is present in our world. The idea that the principle or the power of evil can make the most of our weakness and our fear is very real. And we pray to be delivered from that. Our hope is for God to release us from its grip – for God to save us – for God to set us free from the fears – the sins, the selfish habits – that keep us prisoner and that make us unable to face the trials of life.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

Yes – and sometimes it seems that trouble is not just anywhere but everywhere.

Have we trials and temptations?

We do – lots of them and they come in every conceivable form. Right now, most of us feel overwhelmed by them. Don't be afraid – don't be discouraged – take your concerns to God in prayer. **Amen**