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The Lord's Prayer #8:
Lead Us Not into Temptation But Deliver Us from Evil
Matthew 6:5-15

I once heard a great sermon by Dr. John Piper on the subject of prayer and missions during the course of which he offered the following little rhyme that seems to fit perfectly the subject we are thinking about this morning.

Piper said, "You will not know what prayer is for, until you know that life is war." Isn't that helpful? You will not know what prayer is for, you won't feel its urgency, you won't see that prayer is not about our comforts and the maintenance of our ease, but about our spiritual *survival* and the frontline advancement of Christ's cause in our lives and the lives of others. We won't really appreciate *any of that* until we grasp what prayer is for. It is a tool that only works *in combat*. That is what our lives are. They are one long war zone. We are in the trenches every day. We are under siege. Fiery darts are flying all around. The enemy is everywhere. Until we grasp that, we will never understand prayer.

The final petition of the Lord's Prayer is a soldier's prayer. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." It recognizes that life is a constant spiritual battle with sin and Satan, with temptation and testing. Will we stand firm? How will we fight back? Can we make any advances in the deadly struggle with sin in which we are locked? I am under attack. Lord, deliver me! Help me!

That is the focus of this last petition of the Lord's Prayer. Until now, we have prayed, as Philip Ryken puts it, for food—give us our daily bread, and for forgiveness—forgive us our debts. Now we pray for our frailty—lead us not into temptation but deliver us. (Ryken, *When You Pray*, 146)

There are two obvious parts to this petition, if you will be so good as to look at it with me, please. It is really two petitions rolled into one. The first is *negative*—do *not* lead us into temptation, and the second positive, Father, *deliver* us.

Let's think about the negative prayer first. Here we are being taught to pray that the Father would not lead us into temptation.

And that is a shocking prayer when you stop to think of it. It presupposes, do you see, that at times the Father may, in fact, lead us into temptation. But that means that passages like James 1:13 seem to directly contradict Christ's teaching here, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when He is lured and enticed by His own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Now, do you see where the tension lies? Lead us not into temptation....God cannot be tempted and He Himself tempts no-one. Lead us not into temptation....God tempts no-one. Please don't tempt me: God never tempts.

How do those texts fit together?

Well, it helps to know that the word for temptation in the Lord's Prayer can mean testing. We are praying here about God not leading us into times of testing. That relieves some of the difficulty. But it is also important to understand that even when we are tempted to do evil, even then, though God is not the author of the temptation, He is sovereign over it, planned and purposed it, and governs it for His own glory, and, for us Christians for our eternal good. We might put it like this: God tests us. Satan tempts us. But even in Satan's temptations God is seated on His throne, governing and superintending them according to the good pleasure of His own will.

Let's just think about those two senses in which we should understand this prayer. First, we are to pray that God would not lead us into times of testing. J. I. Packer points out that every trainee needs testing. When they are and they pass the test, they are greatly encouraged. "In God's program for the spiritual education and growth of Christians, the same applies. God does and must test us regularly, to prove what is in us and show how far we have got. His purpose in this is wholly constructive, to strengthen us and help us forward." (J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 196) James 1:2-4 proves Packer's point: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

But if God’s intention in my testing is wholly positive and constructive, if we are to count it all joy when we endure those testing times, why on earth would I want to pray that He would not test me? Why, if testing is a good thing for me, would I want God to keep testing away?

The answer to that question is not hard to discover. Parents, ask your child if they agree that tests are helpful and important, and that they will help their education in the long run. I’m confident that for the most part they will agree. But ask them if they’d like a test right now, and they’ll soon demonstrate why we pray, “Father, lead us no into temptation.” Tests are hard. Tests hurt. Who *wants* to sit a test? Tests involve taking your son, your only son, the son whom you love, up on Mount Moriah to sacrifice him before the Lord. Tests are sore trials. It would *not* be a mark of real piety but of foolish pride *pretending* at piety to pray for such a testing time.

Secondly, we pray that the Lord would not test us because we fear our own sin and capacity to fail the test. We have a right and godly awareness of the frailty and folly of our own souls. We know that apart from sheer grace we could not make any progress as Christians. We look back—some of you can look back to particular dark spots in your memory this very week—and we can trace out the ways that we failed the tests that came our way. We have lived long enough as children of God to know that our remaining corruption often makes us stumble at the first hurdle, and we fail the tests that come to us in God’s providence. Growing out of the confession of sin foundational to the previous petition—Father, forgive us our debts—is a gospel-hearted humility that approaches the tests that God does from time to time send our way with trembling, and prays, “Father, if possible, no tests today!”

Thirdly, we pray that the Father would not lead us into temptations and testing times because that is what children ask of their fathers. It is an expression of love for a child to look to their father for relief from their trials. Fathers are supposed to step in to bring relief from those taxing and hard times. That’s what dads do in love for their children. This prayer is the cry of a child to Abba Father for such relief. But we must learn to pray it trusting that our Father knows when to test us and when to relieve us from those testing trials.

And finally we pray that our Father would not lead us into testing times because we know that God's providential tests in Satan's hands soon become opportunities for temptation. All too often the tests of a harsh or surprising providence are accompanied by a multitude of temptations. A loved one dies, and suddenly we are tempted to doubt the goodness of God. Work gets hard so you work harder, and suddenly you are tempted to locate your significance in your success or forsake family responsibility. You get sick and suddenly you are tempted to indulge in self pity. You have been single so long you constantly battle with growing discontentment. And so on and on. When our trials are sharp and sore and penetrating, we are tempted to make much of ourselves and less and less of God. We wrap our arms around ourselves. We retreat into our protective cocoons. We shut ourselves away from others. We retreat inside and slam the door. We have been tempted to make an idol of ourselves, trusting only ourselves as we lick our wounds instead of bowing before the wise providence of an all-loving God. Satan often seizes upon God's testing times to bring us tempting times. And so we must pray, Father, lead us not into those testing times.

But the second aspect of this first negative request is that God would not lead us into moral or theological or spiritual temptation.

Here we are confessing that God is King, and He is King even over evil, even over Satan. That is helpful to keep reminding ourselves, isn't it? Satan, as we saw a few months ago in the book of Job, cannot do anything without permission from the throne of God. And since God is King and He governs even the attacks of the enemy of our souls, we pray with boldness, "Father, so lead and guide us, so overrule the affairs of my day that I remain outside of the range of the devil's fiery darts."

God is able to lead you so that Satan's best strategies to bring you down will come nowhere near you. That is something to pray for, isn't it? When, time after time, we have fallen foul to one of his schemes, when we *still* hang our heads in shame at the ways we have been ensnared by his temptation-traps, when besetting sin is such a problem in our lives, tell me, Christian brother and sister, wouldn't you pray this prayer with urgency every day: "Father, lead me in such a way that temptation never gets a grip on me"?

So how ought we to deal with temptation when we do face it?

Jesus' words to His disciples in Matthew 26:41 show us the way, "Watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

Here are the two parts of our response to temptation. The first is to keep watch, that is, to stand guard, like a soldier, over ourselves. We are to be vigilant for those situations, places, people, times, and habits that give occasion to our common temptations. Packer quotes Luther, "You can't stop birds flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair!" and then he adds this wise counsel, "Find out what for you is fire, and don't play with it!" (*Growing in Christ*, 197) Most of us know what our fire is. That is not our problem. Our real problem is that we need to stop playing with that fire. Temptations will come. Birds will fly over head. But we can stop them nesting in our hair. We don't need to linger over our temptations.

As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." We need to take the way of escape!

Some of us need to switch off the TV. Some of us need to download and install Covenant Eyes and get accountable about the porn addiction we struggle with. Some of us need to give up alcohol because we simply cannot use it wisely or in moderation. Some of us need to cut up the credit cards. We need to get out of temptation's road. If you stand in front of a juggernaut cruising towards you at top speed, don't be surprised if it hits you! You have been warned. Get out of temptation's way.

The second piece of counsel Jesus gives His disciples is that they should pray. It is exactly what He teaches us to do here in the Lord's Prayer. Is there any wonder that we fall to Satan's snares when we do not pray for the Father's gracious protection and sovereign leading and guiding from temptation's path? Pray, dear brothers and sisters. Pray for mercy and grace. Pray for pardon. Some of us need to pray for salvation. Pray alone. Pray in your families. Pray on the Lord's Day. Come to the Prayer Meeting on Wednesday nights. Make prayer you habitual,

instinctive response to the temptations and trials of your life. That is the call of the Lord's Prayer.

The second half of this prayer is positive. Look at it again. The first part is negative—lead us not into temptation. The second is positive—deliver us from evil.

Actually, commentators are divided over whether this request should end with deliver us from evil or deliver us from the evil one. Either way, it has reference to the situation—ensnared by evil, or to the ensnaring agent, Satan, the evil one. Actually, the meaning is not dramatically change either way. In this request we are praying for God alone to rescue and save us. It is a critically important prayer to make.

When I was a boy, my family used to take vacations at a place in north western England called Morcambe. Morcambe has a famous bay with a huge beach. The tide will retreat from shore several miles so that, standing at the beginning of the beach, you can't see the sea at all. When the tide is out like that, you can take a pony and cart ride across the bay to the other side. But it can be a dangerous crossing. There is quicksand all over Morcambe Bay. Crossing that bay without a guide would be very perilous indeed. Imagine you had stepped into the quicksand, and the suction soon got a hold on you. Slowly it begins to drag you down. It is up to your knees. Now it is past your waist. Now it is under your chin. You are about to go under completely when one of those horse and buggies come hurtling along. What do you do? Any moment you are about to disappear beneath the sand. What do you do?

You shout at the top of your voice with everything you've got—save me! Save me! I'm here! Rescue me! Help me!

That is our condition by nature, and that is our only appropriate prayer. Save me! I'm here. Rescue me! Deliver me from evil! I am sinking in the quicksand of my sins. Deliver me!

This prayer demands that we confess two things, and until we do, we cannot hope for any answer. The first is that we confess that God alone can save us. When quicksand begins to suck a person down, the natural instinct is to struggle and fight

to try to pull yourself out. But the more you move, the more you ease your passage downwards. So it is with us. Our natural instinct is to try to rescue ourselves from the snare of our sin. But the more we struggle to free ourselves, the worse our condition becomes. You cannot save yourself from sin or Satan, from evil or from the evil one.

You must confess that God alone saves. He alone stands in a position to rescue you. Are you ready to confess the end of yourself and trust yourself wholly into God's hands? That is what this prayer requires. It is what your predicament requires.

And of course, this prayer requires a confession of our own lostness. We are going down.

Listen one more time to J. I. Packer, who asks, "Can you see your own life in terms of being threatened and endangered by evil of all sorts, and so of needing God's deliverance every moment? If not, believe me, you cannot yet see what you are looking at! You are like a person wandering blindfolded and with ears plugged in the middle of a city street, with traffic coming both ways. Learn from the Lord's Prayer what is really going on in your life, and as you are increasingly enabled to discern the dangers, lean harder on the Great Deliverer." (Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 201)

The Great Deliverer Himself accomplished deliverance for sinners sinking in the miry bog of sin by means of the Cross of Jesus Christ. God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. God did not deliver Jesus.

He prayed, "Father, if it is Your will let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will but Yours be done," and the Father did not lead Him from the hour of testing but gave Him the cup of wrath to drink without mercy so that by faith in Christ alone sin and Satan might lose their grip on you.

Because Jesus Christ has "suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18) In Jesus "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw

near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Go to Jesus Christ. He is able to deliver you from sin and Satan, death and hell. Trusting in Christ you will be able to sing Psalm 40:1-2: “I waited patiently for the LORD, He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog and set my feet upon a rock.”

“On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.” Is that your confession today, or is the sinking sand almost over your head? There is time yet to cry out for deliverance. Look to Jesus now. Go to the throne of grace. There you will receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need.

Amen.