

The Lord's Prayer

Not Into Temptation

Part 10 - January 11, 2009

The Lord's Prayer is a perfect model of what we must strive for when we speak to God:

- A. We must address Him intimately: "Our Father"
- B. We must bow to His majesty: "Who art in Heaven"
- C. We must worship His holiness: "Hallowed be Thy name"
- D. We must spread His kingdom: "Thy kingdom come"
- E. We must submit to His desires: "Thy will be done"
- F. ... passionately and completely: "On earth as it is in Heaven"
- G. We must declare our dependence: "Give us this day our daily bread"
- H. We must receive His grace: "And forgive us our debts"
- I. We must offer it to others: "As we forgive our debtors"

So, having just focused on our *committed* sins ("forgive us our debts"), we now begin to pray for our *potential* sins: "And lead us not into temptation"

How many of you, this last week, were tempted by something? Those of you who didn't raise your hands, of course, were the tempters!

This is probably the most difficult line in the Lord's Prayer. Why would God lead us into temptation in the first place? James is clear that it is *not* God who tempts us to sin:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone ... - *James 1:13 NIV*

Q: But does God ever *lead us* to a place where we will be tempted?

A: Yes. He does exactly that:

Then Jesus was **led by the Spirit** into the desert **to be tempted by the devil**. - *Matthew 4:1 NIV*

Remember how Jesus was tempted at the end of His 40-day fast? So, are we supposed to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" as a way of *pleading* with God not to do to us what He did to Jesus? Is Jesus saying: "Wow, God got me good. I sure didn't see that one coming. If I were you, I'd start praying, 'Lead me not into temptation ... especially on an empty stomach!'"

No. We're to *trust* His leading, not fear it!



If I'm following God and I find myself in a place of temptation, I can *know* that it's a God-ordained opportunity for my good and my growth. God doesn't tempt, but He does allow the test. Temptation may be one of the devil's primary weapons to destroy us, but it's also one of God's primary tools to develop us. That's why James said ...

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. - *James 1:2-4 NIV*

If we were protected from every temptation and test of faith, our commitment to Christ would be anemic, feeble, and unproven. But, with each choice we make to do what's right in the face of trial and temptation, we demonstrate our love and trust.

That's why James also said:

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. - *James 1:12 NIV*



God uses times of testing to strengthen our spiritual muscle, enrich our discernment, and to ultimately produce Christ-like character in us. God allows the test in order to teach. Temptation is inescapable; no one is free of it, not even Jesus. It's an integral part of the Christian process.

So, if Jesus isn't telling us to pray for protection from *being* tempted ... what does "Lead us not into temptation" mean?! First, we have to get past a little cultural language barrier.

Jesus states this petition in the negative: "Lead us *not into* ..." In our language negative expressions imply the possibility of their opposite. That's why we don't use them.

You wouldn't say, "I bought you a *not-horrible* gift for your birthday." because it implies that I maybe would have ... or that it's barely better than horrible. Instead we use the positive: "I bought you a great gift!"

We don't infer the opposite when it's stated in the positive. So, though Jesus states this in the negative, He is not implying and His disciples are not inferring that God *might* tempt them. It's similar to negatively expressed statement we *do* use:

If you've ever hesitated to eat your vegetables, someone might have said to you, "Their *not* gonna kill ya." Even though it's stated in the negative, you probably didn't think of it as a threat that they maybe could have, if they weren't prepared correctly. We understand this particular negative to mean there's *no chance* they will.

Jesus' disciples knew there was *no chance* God would harm them. But still, it's easier for us to comprehend what Jesus meant if we simply change the statement from the negative to the positive.

Q: What's the positive (or opposite) way of saying, "Not into"?

A: "Out of" or, "Away from".

"And lead us [out of] temptation."

"And lead us [away from] temptation."



This is *not* a request for God to keep temptation from touching us (which denies the world we live in), but for his leadership in dealing with it. We pray not to be spared but to be strengthened. This prayer is a call for God's help so that I will be alert and ready, and will not yield to sin when I am tested by temptation.

It's the same basic prayer Jesus gave to Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane the night He was betrayed:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. - *Matthew 26:41 NIV*

The word "watch" suggests a soldier on his guard, alert for the first signs of the enemy's attack. And the word "pray" references the kind of prayer Jesus had just been making, for strength to carry out God's will in spite of His own inward reluctance.

Do you watch and pray so that you won't be sucked into the lure of temptation when it comes to daily to test your faith? To have a watch-and-pray attitude means four things:



1. [It means] We know that it's coming. The Lord can lead me *not into* temptation only when I know myself – my patterns, my weaknesses, my fondness for particular sins, and adjust myself accordingly.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. - *1 Peter 5:8 NIV*

I must learn to avoid the path the lion is most likely to prowl! We tread with caution when, where and with whom we are most susceptible and vulnerable to sin.



2. [It means] We know the way of escape. The Lord has some simple instructions when He leads us *not into* temptation: "Turn and run!"

Turn my eyes away from worthless things ... - *Psalm 119:37a NIV*

Flee the evil desires of youth ... - *2 Timothy 2:22a NIV*

You can neutralize just about any temptation simply by quickly turning your attention *away* from it and onto something else.



3. [It means] We know who's got our back. Some temptations are too overwhelming, and we can only be led *not into* them with the help of others.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. - *James 5:16 NIV*

Have you shared your fondness for a particular sin with a godly friend (or a support group) who'll understand and help? Do you have a specific-sin "speed-dial" set on your phone? (Number one for the lust of the flesh; number two for the lust of the eyes; and number three for the boastful pride of life.)



4. [It means] We know His Word by heart. That doesn't just mean we memorize it, it means we embrace it, and wear it, and guide our steps by it.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. - *Psalms 119:105 NIV*

Every line of the Lord's Prayer to this point both reveals and prepares us to battle the greatest and gravest of temptations. This is the temptation that drives all the rest, the temptation to usurp God's authority and to place ourselves on *His* throne. And every line of the Lord's Prayer prepares us for this battle.

This becomes obvious if we simply invert the prayer:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, honor and exalt *my* name;
My kingdom come, *my* will be done, so on earth I'll be as a god!
I'll take, this day, *my* every desire;
And will feed *my* lust and greed and vanity,
As I crush those who stand in *my* way.

So, how does God lead us *not* to *not* triumph over temptation? By teaching us to hallow *His* name, to put *His* kingdom first and *His* will above *my* own, to depend on *His* provision, and to seek *His* pardon, and to offer *His* grace to others.

Phrase by phrase the Lord's Prayer guides us, corrects us, and overthrows our sin-born desire to be little gods. Each line reminds us, reorients us, and sets us in order again. It's a brilliant roadmap to victory over the wooing of sin.

So, when we say, "Lead us *not into* temptation." We are saying: Lead us in the path of truth, peace, joy, and harmony! Grant us the wisdom to discern the good from the bad. And give us the courage to change what needs to be changed.