

Lord's Prayer

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

A little girl did well praying the Lord's Prayer until she prayed, "lead us not into temptation and deliver us some e-mail."

Do we understand this petition any better than this little girl? What does this petition mean?

This is the 6th and final petition in the Lord's Prayer. Does it trouble you even a little bit that we're supposed to be praying, "Lord, don't lead me into temptation?" Doesn't this request imply the possibility that maybe God is going to trip us up, which is what a lot of people think is true.

You may think that can't be true because in James 1:13 the brother of Jesus says, "let no one say when he's tempted that he's tempted of God because God doesn't tempt anyone to evil."

Interestingly enough, however, in the same chapter in James the brother of Jesus Christ, makes this statement, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you experience various trials." This word translated in James as trials is the same identical Greek word that appears as temptation in the Lord's Prayer. So James is saying "count it joy when you experience temptations."

As James continues, he says the reason we should rejoice when we are tempted is that temptations can produce endurance, endurance can lead to completion, and we can then enjoy God's perfect work in our life.

So if we should rejoice when we experience temptation, I've got another question. If we explain what Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer on the basis of James 1:2, shouldn't we be praying, "Lord, lead me into temptation because I want to grow. I don't want to miss out on anything."

If temptation leads me to endurance, and if endurance leads me to completion, if completion brings me to the point where I'm lacking in nothing, shouldn't that be my prayer? God, bring it on. I want the trials. I want the temptations in my life because I don't want to miss out on any growth that might be available to me.

We can get a more complete picture of what Jesus might mean if we look at the experience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. What was Jesus' singular mission as he came to Earth? To die on the cross, that was his mission and that was his purpose. Yet, what did he pray in the garden of Gethsemane? He said, "Lord, let this cup pass from me."

Why would he pray that when he knew that his primary mission in coming to Earth was to die on the cross for the sins of mankind?

Yet Jesus, our Lord, as he was in the garden, said, "Lord, I would just as soon not go through this trial, thank you very much. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Similarly, the Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh. New Testament scholars struggle trying to determine what this thorn in the flesh was. Some are certain it was some sort of a physical infirmity that Paul had. But whether it was physical or spiritual or emotional, it was the kind of thing that Paul didn't want to have in his life and you wouldn't want to have in yours. So Paul, on three separate occasions asked God to take this thorn in the flesh away.

Instead, God informed him he needed to be strong in his weakness. He said to Paul, "My Grace is sufficient for you!" Again, I hope my logic isn't totally twisted here, but you can look at this and say, "if by virtue of thorns in my life, I get God's Grace, shouldn't I pray, God, give me some thorns because I want to experience your Grace."

What do we mean then when we say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one?" Perhaps

the best help we can get in understanding this is asking ourselves, what does this word translated as temptation really mean? If there was an English word that comes as close to the meaning of this word as any English word we have, it would be the word stress. The original word denotes experiencing pressure in your life. We all know that there can be some stress that we experience that might motivate us to get off the couch and to do something meaningful. A former professor of mine Gary Collins has written a book entitled *You Can Profit From Stress*. His thesis is pressure and stress are not necessarily bad things. Stress can become bad because there comes a point where we can be so overwhelmed by it that we become immobilized.

So what is Jesus saying in the Lord's Prayer? I think it is more like, "Please keep us from experiencing more stress today. But if there's stress in our lives, please deliver us from evil."

Thus, does God tempt us or allow us to experience trials and temptations? The answer is "yes." But does He tempt us to sin? The resounding

answer is "no!"

But oftentimes in life we have the mistaken notion that I believe that Job had. I know there are a lot of folks who look at the Book of Job and say that Job is the quintessential text on dealing with trial. We learn to cope with trial by looking at the example of Job. Depending on your perspective, I hope that's not true.

Job does start well. In Job chapter one, all of Job's material possessions were taken from him but he still remained perfect. He did not sin against God in word and speech or action. In Job chapter two his health is taken away, He loses his family, with the exception of his wife, who in the book tells him that he should curse God and die and later says, you got bad breath. Once again, Job did not curse God. He did not sin against God. He remained perfect and complete.

Many folks read chapters one and two, they conclude that Job handles his suffering perfectly. Then they assume if we suffer we should be just like Job. But if we draw our conclusion on how Job handles suffering based only

on chapters one and two, we will miss the entire point of the book.

That is apparent when we finally get to the end of the book. Job confesses sin. You say, "what sin did he commit?" In the middle of the book, on four separate occasions, Job calls God his enemy. You see Job concluded that God let him down. He continues to insist "I'm innocent. I know I haven't sinned." Job had one explanation for sin and pain and suffering. It's what theologians call retributive justice. Obey God and He will bless you. Disobey God and He will curse you. Today we call this theology "prosperity gospel."

Job knew his suffering wasn't his fault. So who's at fault? Well, that'd be God. So, through the bulk of the book, Job commits the sin that the evil one is trying to get you and me to commit. In our trial, we are likely to say, "if there's a God in heaven who cares at all about me, how can he let me experience this? I know God is omnipotent. He has all the power in the universe, so why doesn't he deliver me from this incredible trial that I'm facing?"

If God doesn't deliver, we draw the conclusion that atheists and skeptics draw, "maybe there isn't a God, or if there is a God, He may intervene for others but He's never going to do anything for me." Regularly, at 2Restored as we challenge people to believe God is never stuck, people tell us that maybe God's powerful, but not for me.

When we can draw the conclusion that "God isn't who he says he is. God has let me down," the tempter will whisper in our ear. "Isn't it obvious God is your enemy! These trials are

His fault. You have done nothing wrong!"

Maybe we can get a better understanding of what Jesus is asking us to think about in this prayer if we imagine I own a sunfish sailboat. My boat has a single sail and is less than 15 feet long. Imagine I got this crazy notion that I'm going to set sail from New York City and sail to London. Naturally, I will take with me my portable TV because I'd like to watch the Vikings in the playoffs. Also, I will take a little cooler along with some reading material.

Picture me then with my hand on the rudder in the back of my little sailboat. Imagine, as I leave New York harbor, the sun is shining and the waves are small. But if I were to be so foolish to attempt to sail to London in a tiny sail boat, some day on the trip the clouds will become dark and the waves are going to get large. When that happens, I'm going to lose sense of direction because all I am doing is trying to survive the next wave. I won't even care where I'm going anymore. I set sail with my Sexton in hand so I could plot the course. Now I don't even care about the Sexton. I don't even know where the Sexton is. I'm going around in circles because when we are trying to survive the waves of life that is what we do.

If you have experienced any real trial, you have experienced my story. Invariably some, well-meaning Christian that might come along as we're trying to survive the next wave and say, "Kenworthy, where are you going? What are you doing? London is that way. Don't you see? You're off course?"

The truth is, however, we don't care. We're just trying to survive here because we don't

know what else to do. Waves keep hitting us and the only thing we know how to pray is, "Lord, we don't need another wave. So Lord, don't lead me into more stress. We don't need any more pressure. But Lord, if there's going to be another wave, deliver us from the evil one because he's the one that can defeat me in the storm if I choose to listen to what he has to say."

If that's the basic meaning of what Jesus is saying, I've got four applications that I like to draw from this petition.

So then, if we are praying "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil" how will that change the way we pray?

1. We have a need that we dare not forget

The need should be obvious enough. You can start a journey in your sunfish sailboat. Everything is dry, everything's calm, and it's looking good. But you know, in this life, there are going to be trials along the way. The storm is going to come eventually,

so you also need to prepare yourself for the storm. What you dare not forget is your desperate need to have on board the captain of the ship, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

You say, "how do we do that?" David Bryant suggests that you pray resistance prayers. The evil one knows your weakness better than you do. You probably have a pretty good idea where you have stumbled in the past. So, as you get up in the morning knowing where you have been tempted in the past, you ask God to protect you in these areas. Or perhaps even a better suggestion is you purchase Erwin Lutzer's outstanding book, *How To Say No To A Stubborn Habit*. In his book, Lutzer addresses how we can overcome trials and temptations in our life. Lutzer notes many of us, when we are being tempted focus on whatever it is that is tempting us. We say to ourselves, I want to get rid of this devil in my life. This devil is defeating me. I got to get rid of it." Lutzer, however, reminds us that there is a principle of Scripture that we tend to see in our life experience. When we focus on a

demon that we want to exorcise, there very well, may be seven demons worse than the first to come in and take his place.

So, what do you do? Erwin Lutzer recommends we use the principle of replacement. That is to say, part of the reason we are struggling with these demons is that we don't have strength in our life to be able to defeat them. Invariably, when people are in the midst of a trial, they tell me, "I can't pray anymore. I can't read the Bible anymore because I'd feel like such a hypocrite." Obviously, those thoughts come from the devil and are very self-defeating.

So, before we allow ourselves to get to that point we need to ask "what positive habits do I need to build in my life? Is it accountability? A friend who can support me and encourage me. There are some principles we all need to build into our life so that you can resist the temptation. For more on this I highly recommend how Erwin Lutzer's book. It's truly outstanding.

2. We have a promise we need to claim

1 Corinthians 10:13

We also have a promise we need to claim. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 the Apostle Paul makes this statement, "there's no temptation given among men whereby God does not provide the way of escape." We can say, either that's true or that's not true. If it's true, we stand upon that promise and say, I don't care how difficult the trial is or the storm or the difficulty that I face, God has promised me there's going to be a way of escape.

If I may add a little pastoral observation here. I have noted over the years that as we get older and more experienced, sometimes the trials get tougher. I don't know if it's because God thinks you can take it because you're a mature Christian. Whatever the reason still, the promise is the promise. In every trial you face God will provide a way of escape. Thank God we're not involved in some sort of cosmic dualism. We're not reliving Star Wars where there's a good side of the force and the bad side of the force. In the end God always wins so we need to continue to convince ourselves that that's true.

3. We have an adversary that we cannot deny.

Thirdly, there is an adversary we cannot deny. This was Job's problem. Job wasn't aware of the thinking of his adversary. In the midst of his trial, he concluded that God was his enemy because he had no clue what the devil was doing behind the scenes. He failed to understand that when we face a trial, the

enemy of our soul hasn't had to change his strategy from the beginning of mankind. When we're in a trial, he knows that we're as vulnerable as we're ever going to be. So in the middle of the trial, he will use his fool proof strategy of stating the same lie to every one of us. He will attempt to get us to think like Job and say, "I'm not really sure if there's a God up there who loves me, because if he loves me, how could I be in this trial? Because isn't there only one explanation for suffering? Obey God and He will bless you. Disobey God, and He will curse you. I've been pretty obedient, so I don't know why God is judging me."

What is wrong with this thinking is that there are six other reasons for suffering.

1. Retributive suffering
2. Disciplinary or educational suffering (James 1:2)
3. Probationary or evidential (Suffering knowing help is on the way- Psalm 42, 43)
4. Revelational suffering (Hosea or Jeremiah's suffering illustrated their prophetic message)
5. Sacrificial suffering (The suffering of Jesus)
6. Eschatological suffering (Daniel, Matthew 24, Revelation)
7. Suffering for the glory of God. (Job, the blind man of John 9)

Retributive justice isn't the only reason for suffering for the Christian, but we've diluted ourselves into thinking that it is. It's our only explanation. Our enemy knows that our thinking is diluted. He wants to dishearten me. He even uses the people closest to me, the people in the Church, the people in my family, to discourage me. When I know that's what he's going to do, I'm not going to be surprised

when I see this happening. There's an enemy that I can't deny.

4. We have a family that needs our understanding.

Finally, we have family that needs our understanding. I know this to be painfully true. Our oldest daughter's third child, Moyra, was born via a very difficult pregnancy. During the course of her pregnancy, there were two occasions when she fainted in the doctor's office. On one occasion, the doctor gave her blood pressure medication for an hour, he got her blood pressure back up to 60 over 30. Then he told my daughter "you have this rare condition in pregnancy where your blood pressure is really low. So you've got to keep active all day long. Don't sit. Don't watch TV. Don't read a book. You must keep moving all day long because you've got to keep the blood pressure up. The only time you need to worry is when you go to bed at night because you could die."

So, our daughter, every night for nine months, was afraid

she was going to die because of what the doctor told her.

So, when Moyra was born, Kathy didn't have postpartum depression, she was depressed from nine months of being afraid that every single night she was going to die. But then it got worse. A number of well-meaning Christians heard about Kathy's depression, and sent her emails. They reminded her that she's a missionary and a pastor's kid. Then they scolded her for being depressed. They said, "You shouldn't be depressed. Everything works out for the good, for those that love God. So get over it." Email after email had that same basic message. Kathy is not the first person who has told me that well-meaning Christians quoting Romans 8:28, did not help them when they were depressed.

Paul in Romans 8:28 declares a wonderful truth. But it is not likely to be helpful to go up to someone who is suffering and kind of nonchalantly saying, "your suffering is not so bad. Everything's going to work out for the good." When our suffering is acute we are just trying to survive the next wave. We are not ready for friends to advise us that we

are heading in the wrong direction. We will look at our compass and maps just as soon as the waves go down and the sun comes out.

A friend of mine said, when you're in this kind of experience, it's like second year algebra. In many math books, the answers to the problems are in the back of the book. In my algebra book, the answers to all the odd questions were in the back of the book. Math students today know you can come up with the answers but not know math. You prove you know math when you can go through the steps and end up with the answer in the back of the book.

For Christians experiencing trial, it's a lot like that. The answer in the back of the book is Romans 8:28. Everything works out for the good, but in the midst of the trial, there's a process that you have to go through that leads you to the point where you can say Romans 8:28 is true for me.

I had the privilege as Kathy's dad to counsel my daughter over a period of several months. She needed some help overcoming the kind of stinking thinking we hear

from Satan and even from some Christian friends. She needed some help understanding her own emotional pain and learning some biblical techniques to get her emotions under control. She needed an accountability partner who knew what to do to be helpful. She needed to start a consistent exercise routine.

I hope you have not been pushed to the brink by a fellow Christian, who has been insensitive to your pain. But if you have, please find someone who can help you with the steps I took Kathy through. God can help you. He understands your pain which is why Jesus says pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." And Paul said, "Be assured of this. There's no trial, no temptation that you can ever experience, whereby God will not provide a way of escape. It may not be through your Christian friends, sadly, but God will provide a way of escape."

What we need to do is to stand on the truthfulness of God's word and say, "I'm addressing my Father in heaven when I pray. And my father cares about me more than I care about myself. He's told me in the Bible that he's not going to give me a snake or a stone when I asked for something." So God is saying, trust that I care about you, trust that I know all about your trial, trust that my son Jesus experienced trials far worse than anything you've ever experienced. I will get you

through this."

Isn't that good news? Wouldn't it be great if the Church really knew that and believed that? Sadly, too few do. I was at a leadership meeting conducting a seminar on how we can pray for our pre Christian friends. After the session, one of the ladies came up and said, "George, I got a question. My stepdad is having significant marital problems. I asked him, "how can I pray for you?" He said to me, "I don't want you to pray. I know I'm going to heaven, but I don't think prayer works, so I don't bother praying."

What a sad commentary on Christianity. Clearly, we need more believers who have power stories and praise stories that are a direct result of their prayer life. We should not be surprised if some people around us draw the deluded conclusion in the midst of their trial that God is powerless to help us when we pray. But thankfully, we don't have to do that because if we pray like Jesus we will experience the power of God.

So when you pray say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into a trial, but if you do, deliver us from the evil one."

