

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6.13)

The Lord's Prayer has been a great source of encouragement to Christians over the centuries. It is Jesus' alternatives to long, self-centred, hypocritical prayers he speaks about in his Sermon on the Mount. Like the Ten Commandments, each petition can be widely expanded, leading us into vibrant, living prayer time with our Father in heaven.

The last petition deals with the world as it is now, even after asking for it to be heaven-like in the opening of this prayer. It is a world where evil is present. It is a world where evil is active. It is a world where evil is close. It is a world where evil is even personal. Matthew seems to have decided to leave it ambiguous as to whether the word here is about evil as a concept (evil in things that happen, or people's intentions/motives) or it is about a person (the evil one, meaning Satan). My conclusion is both. The petition focuses on asking that from the Father: that we will be delivered in the end.

It seems clear that this evil is of a spiritual and moral nature. It causes harm, destruction, it makes us suffer and has no intention of generating anything good as an outcome. We know by implication and checking other Bible verses that the devil comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10.29). His intentions are well known since he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8.44). It's his nature. So it's no surprise when we hear him roaring like a lion prowling around seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5.8). His greatest weapon is seduction. Through insinuations, half-truths, working on our longings and desires, our insecurities and flaws, he tries to entice us to follow our heart (Jeremiah 17.9), giving up on God. Our declaration of independence from God turns out to be our enslavement.

The other way we might be caught by evil is when circumstances turn out to be at odds with us. Times of loss, tragedy and disaster can be overwhelming. Jesus was not spared from such cases. In the wilderness, in hunger, he was challenged three times to do things that would make him fail as the Son of God (Matthew 4.1-11). All the devil did was to question his identity and mission: if you are the Son of God, do this or do that. Some people today, unfortunately, become the voice of the devil when asking us about where God is in all of this, forgetting that the very Son of God endured the same things. On the cross, he once again was challenged by the crowd. 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'. Like them we find it hard to find purpose in suffering. But Jesus' life of suffering was far from being meaningless.

And now we turn to the first part of the petition. If being delivered from evil is an imperative, not being led into temptation is the expression of our desire. First it is wonderful that God allows us to bring our input in this conversation. He allows us to come in prayer to talk about our fears, our worries, our anxieties. Elsewhere in the bible we are actually asked to do that (Philippians 4.6-7; 1 Peter 5.7). The word for temptation here actually can mean either temptation or trial, testing. It all depends on who is doing it and with what purpose. Satan as an opportunist will try to twist things when we are under pressure in order to make us reject God (Job 2.9-10). Even Jesus prayed at Gethsemane: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26.39) That's the spirit with which we pray 'lead us not into temptation/testing'. In recognition of the greater good, Jesus accepted the cup, endured our pain and through his death saved us from condemnation in hell.

Do not lose heart if it is time for you to have your faith tested. Pray that you will be approved, that evil will be defeated, that your Father's kingdom will show its power in your life. James 1.2-4:

“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.”

If you are anxious today pray: lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Rest in Jesus' promises of final victory, trust that he has a purpose for all trials. 1 Peter 1.6-7 reads 'In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' And, 1 Peter 4.12-13: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

Prayer: Dear God and Father, sometimes we feel tired and lose focus on what really matters. We feel tempted by the devil and our own sinful nature. Help us in our hour of weakness. Deliver us from evil. We wish we didn't have to go through times of trials, but regardless of that, whatever we have to get through, please be with us all the way until we come to that day of rejoicing when Jesus' glory is revealed.

*In His name,
Amen.*

Suggestions for prayer:

1. Alberto and Ciarán as they prepare the Sunday services and the weekly devotions.
2. Our sister churches in Dundee as, like us, they work out new ways of “doing church”.
3. Those who live alone and those who feel lonely or isolated.
4. Missionaries who may be in remote places often separated from family and for those whose children are being educated in boarding school in another country.
5. Michael and Karen Stewart with Misha, Reuben, Aoife and Caleb in the Middle East and Iona who has been studying at Cambridge.