

Title: A Plea for Protection
Date: September 5, 2021
Subject: Christians should pray for God's protection
Scripture: Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4

A young woman in an Edmonton, Canada shopping mall was spotted wearing a statement sweatshirt: "Lead me not into temptation. I can find the way myself." Ain't that the truth? We have a partiality to temptation and even like it...a little, maybe more than a little. It gives us inner thrills. That's why we read certain books, watch certain TV shows and movies, do certain things, think certain thoughts...to get close without getting burned.

The petition from The Disciple's Prayer for this morning is the plea for protection. Matthew 6:13 contains both phrases connected to this. Luke 11:4 only contains the first one, at least in most versions accompanied by a footnote that some manuscripts add the second. READ Matthew 6:13.

Our minds quickly sprint to the arena of spiritual warfare. We face an enemy who isn't interested in retreating, a troop drawdown or surrender. He seeks to increase his activity because he knows his time is getting shorter. Certainly, the time isn't increasing before Christ returns and the devil is subjected to his eternal punishment. This means our situation is dangerous as we live in a world ruled by the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19). He is a fearsome foe who seeks to work us woe, whose craft and power are great and he's armed with cruel hate (A Mighty Fortress is Our God). He's a slanderous adversary. He's a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour.

Frances Grubbs writes of the devil's activity: "I have seen Satan stalk unsuspecting lives. He seeks to steal the moments, to plant in unguarded minds...evil... He seeks to ravage the potential, ruin the reputation, and thus to render the life inoperative for God" (Lord, Teach Us to Pray. p. 67).

"And lead us not into temptation." When we pray this, we're praying: "Father if the disposition to sin raises its ugly head so the inclination is present, then keep us from having the opportunity to sin. When we have the opportunity to sin, keep away the desire and disposition."

We need to understand and remind ourselves temptation and sin aren't the same thing. Temptation presents the offer to sin. It's not wrong to be tempted. Jesus was tempted in all the ways we are and yet was without sin. Therefore, he is able to help us in our times of need and temptation (Hebrew 4:15, 16).

Part of the problem in understanding this petition stems from the word translated *temptation*. It's also translated as test or testing. It can mean putting something to proof to be tested or putting something to proof through temptation. The first way is shown in James: "Consider it pure joy whenever we face trials because we know that the testing of our faith develops perseverance...Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial, because when he's stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:2, 3, 12). The second way is shown in Jesus being tempted by the devil (Luke 4:13).

One commentator combines the meanings this way: “*Temptation* means any testing situation. And includes far more than the mere seduction to sin; it covers every situation which is a challenge to and a test of a person's manhood and integrity and fidelity. We cannot escape it, but we can meet it with God” (William Barkley. *The Gospel of Luke*. p. 144).

The context helps determine whether testing or temptation is intended. It's best to understand the word in the model prayer as temptation. If we make the prayer about God not testing us, it would seem to go against the earlier petition for God's will to be done as testing is part of God's will. The Lord tested Abraham about giving his son.

God won't tempt people. “When tempted, no one should say ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:13 - 15). We could say the prayer is for God to lead us through temptation, get us to the other side.

Psalm 23 fits in with The Disciples' Prayer: God desires to lead us beside quiet waters where he can restore our souls. He wants to guide us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. He wants us to not fear evil because he is with us. His rod and staff comfort us. We acknowledge God is our shepherd, our guide and we're his followers who are inadequate in ourselves. We cry out for victory over our sin nature and temptation.

The second phrase “deliver us from the evil one” is sometimes translated “deliver us from evil.” We may hear people say, “There is so much evil in the world.” That's absolutely true. The presence of evil means there's someone behind it. It can be traced back to the source of evil which is evil one. Our struggle isn't against a force. It's against an actual person - the devil, Satan, the evil one.

The good thing is who's on our side: Jehovah Mefalti – God our deliverer. We pray for God to deliver us. The Bible tells us, and we believe, that ultimately, we will be delivered from the evil one. The devil won't be in heaven. He'll no longer bother us with his temptations and false promises (Psalm 121:7, 8).

That being said, we turn our attention to the here and now. Jesus prayed to the Father that he wouldn't take his followers “out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15). The evil one can't harm those who belong to God (1 John 5:18). This doesn't mean followers of Christ won't face temptation or evil. Through what comes, we claim the promise: “The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Jabez is known for his prayer (1 Chronicles 4:10). The most remembered part is for God to bless him and enlarge his territory. There's more to the prayer: “Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” Jabez had the desire for good to happen and for bad not to happen. He wanted God's hand to be with him and to be kept from harm, from bad things happening, from evil.

The story of Job is an enigma wrapped in a conundrum. We don't understand all that happened and why God allowed it. Satan had his eyes on Job and complained to God that the man only feared God because

God had put “a hedge around him and his household and everything he has.” God allowed Satan to inflict evil and harm on Job, but he wasn't to touch the man himself. Satan destroyed Job's wealth and annihilated his family. On a second visit with the Lord, Satan got permission to inflict harm on Job's physical being but still had to spare his life (Job 2:6). God set a limit on what the devil could do. God does the same for us.

The Lord can use miraculous ways to not lead us into temptation and deliver us from evil. Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a powerful enemy (2 Kings 6:8 - 17). The servant was spooked and wanted to know what they were going to do. Elisha answered, “Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” He prayed the Lord would open the servant's eyes. The Lord did and the servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha and himself.

Sometimes the Lord will remove the temptation or attack of the evil one. Later, we'll think about the situation and we recall that it disappeared. Sometimes the Lord uses the Word we've hidden in our hearts and directly applies it to what we're facing. Sometimes it will be a general reminder that he's with us. Sometimes he'll remind us of the consequences if we give in to temptation or listen to the voice of the evil one.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

How do we do our part? Sometimes we make God's job harder. Our self-confident pride gets us into trouble when we think we can provide our own protection and deliverance. God gives an emphatic warning (1 Corinthians 10:12): “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” Timberrrrrr!!

Good old Peter, it's not that we like to pick on him, but he's so pickable. The apostle thought he had everything covered. He could withstand the severest test. He wouldn't give in to do what was wrong. No siree Bob or Matthew or Andrew. Prior to Jesus warning the disciples to watch and pray so they wouldn't fall into temptation, he'd told Peter he'd deny knowing him (Matthew 26:31 - 35; Luke 22:33). Peter flat out denied he'd ever deny Jesus. “Ain't gonna happen. No way. No how.” In proper Bible-ese: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” The Lord lovingly reached out to his friend. “Yes. You will...before the rooster crows.” Peter would have none of it. He remained steadfast in his insistence -- boldly, emphatically and probably loudly declaring so the others could hear, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” They in turn spouted his words and all of them succumbed to temptation and abandoned Jesus.

There are times when we deliberately search out temptation and open the doors to it. We may not want to sin, but we want to see how close we can get. We need to keep in mind if we think about what we might do if we had the opportunity, we've gone past being tempted.

It's like the story of an Old West stage line that was looking for new drivers. The manager took the candidates to a narrow mountain road that had a steep drop off. The first driver took off like a shot. He careened around the curves, coming within a foot of the edge. The second driver figured he had to do more to

impress the manager. He forced the horses to go faster and careened more wildly, getting within a few inches of the cliff. The third driver climbed onto the stage. He guided the horses as close to the mountain and as far away from the steep drop off as possible, to be as far from danger as possible. He got the job.

We aren't to see how close we can get to sin without actually sinning. We're told to flee from sexual immorality and the evil desires of youth while pursuing righteousness faith love and peace (1 Corinthians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:22). We aren't to dip our toe in the water, just kinda sorta seeing what it might feel like.

We are to fill our minds with biblical truth. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). "Seek those things which are above where Christ is...Set your mind on things above not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1, 2). "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:12). The focus is to be on and about Jesus.

The way to get grape juice out of a glass, well, one way is to tip it over. If we wanted a way that more directly applies, we'd put something in that would displace the grape juice. We could pour in molten gold, which is heavier and would push out the juice. Similarly, we are to fill our hearts, souls and minds with Jesus, his word, his plans, his purposes to push out the enemy's messages.

We're to lock out the lies of the devil. We should consider what he says and wants to be as dangerous as a raging wildfire or a poisonous snake. In those cases, we don't rationalize that they won't hurt us. We don't listen to anybody who tries to say they aren't dangerous. Similarly, we refuse to listen to Satan's lies about how giving in to temptation will make us more like God, will open our eyes or make us a more rounded person. We're to resist the devil and submit ourselves to God (James 4:7). "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" (Hebrews 12:1).

Obviously, prayer is part of the plan. Jesus said to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, and also a good idea for us, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:40). They were going to face a test and the temptation would be to act in a way not in accordance with God's plan. They didn't pray and Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant and they all ran like scared rabbits. It would be our sanctified speculation as to what might have been if they had prayed.

We're to pray that God would protect us -- not lead us into temptation and deliver us from the evil one. Us. We're to pray for all of us, all the saints (Ephesians 6:18). The world and its shiny baubles can be so alluring. We cry out for God's wisdom to know what is good and what is evil. We admit we're weak, like little babies who need his tender care and direction. We take his armor that he's provided to protect us. We declare our dependence on God and that we can't steer clear of temptation by ourselves. We need his protection. We want him to lead us into his ways of righteousness.

He's given us a conscience through which the Holy Spirit can speak but the conscience is only as good as the things in which it's saturated. It needs to be God's word. Otherwise, if it's been dominated by the world, we can confuse what is good and evil.

We need the family connection of other followers of Christ who can help us through their counsel and fellowship. The Christian who is alone is in greater danger of succumbing to temptation and evil. He's like the bison that has gotten separated from the herd and is an easier target for wolves. There's safety in the herd. It's not complete herd immunity because we're never promised we'll be completely immune from the attacks of the devil. However, the Lord promises to be with us.

One of the areas in which we might be tempted and where we need to be delivered is in the area of forgiveness - the previous petition in the prayer. Instead of forgiveness, we might seek revenge, because after all, we're told revenge is sweet and it's a dish best served cold. Hit 'em when they least expect it.

A story is told of a farmer who discovered somebody had dumped their trash – again – on a secluded part of his property. The farmer picked up the garbage and found an envelope with the offender's address. Light bulb. An opportunity too good to ignore. That night, under the cover of darkness, he drove to the wrongdoer's house. He filled their garden with the trash he'd found and with some of his own.

That's not an option we're to take. The Bible tells us: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Do not take revenge, my friends but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’” (Romans 12:17 - 21).

We surrender our right to get even because it's not worth what can happen to us. It's like a grizzly who's willing to share his meal with a skunk because he knows if he takes action - he's gonna wind up stinking. We're going to stink worse if we try to exact revenge.

Our grandkids, and their parents, took a quick trip up to Wausau. While there they explored some of the trails. 5 1/2 year old Chloe likes to linger behind the group with her mom -- take their time to enjoy the sights. Tiffani was telling Chloe they had to keep following the signs to make sure they stayed on the right trail. At one point Chloe said, “How are we still on the right trail? I know! God! God is pushing us on the right trail...not the trail of death or the trail of sin...but the trail of life and happiness!”

God is our Deliverer who won't lead us into temptation and will deliver us from evil.

Closing:

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24, 25).

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance...Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him” (Psalm 32:7, 10).