

The Lord's Prayer: Deliver Us From Evil

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, not our will be done, but thy will be done. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 6:13 (NRSV)

And do not bring us into the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – The Lord's Prayer: Deliver Us From Evil

In Greek mythology, the Sirens were half woman/half bird creatures that lived on an island. With the tantalizing charm of their siren song they lured mariners to their destruction when their boats crashed on the rocks in the search to get closer to their irresistible singing.

Homer tells us there were only two escapes from the Siren calls:

First, there was Orpheus the Argonaut. He was the greatest musician and poet in the Greek myths. His songs were known to charm wild beasts and coax even rocks and trees to move and sway. Orpheus immediately realized the peril the Argonauts were in as they sailed by the sirens. He took out his lyre and sang a song so clear and ringing that it drowned the sound of the lovely, yet deadly voices of the Sirens. They made it through.

Second, on another journey, Ulysses' ship passed the Sirens. But they were prepared. Ulysses had the sailors stuff their ears with wax, so they couldn't hear the Sirens. But Ulysses himself wanted to hear the Siren call. So he had himself tied to the mast so he could hear the beautiful voices, but couldn't steer the ship towards them. And the crew couldn't hear his commands to go to the island either. As the ship passed, not only the melody enticed Ulysses, but also the lyrics. The Siren's words promised wisdom, deep knowledge, and power to all who came to them. Ulysses' heart was enticed and entranced, but it was the ropes that held him back. Sometimes it's good to be against the ropes. The ship quickly sailed to safer waters unscathed by the sirens.

These are wise lessons for us to take to heart.

First, we need to find something more beautiful than what we're being tempted by. Christ is our Orpheus—he is the way, the truth, and the life. The new song he gives drowns out the siren

sound—and it leads us to safe passage. Christianity isn't about alleviating and extinguishing desire—Christianity redeems and redirects desire. Find the beauty and the goodness of the living Christ—and passionately pursue God's will.

Second, the key to self-control is to tie yourself to the mast of the Master—Jesus Christ. Lash yourself to the Lord. The ties that bind us to Christ and one another set us free from crashing into the rocks or staying at rock bottom. Jesus teaches us to pray:

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Matthew 6:13 (ESV)

The Christian life is not a safe harbor—sheltered from storms, turbulent waters, or the lure of the siren call. We must be prepared and prayerful about these tests throughout this voyage of faith we find ourselves on. Jesus is in the boat with us, and he has power over wind and wave.

Last week we looked at our relationship to past sin. Forgiveness from God and forgiveness towards one another helps heal our past. This week we look at our relationship to future sin. Deliver us from evil, or as our translation says, deliver us from the evil one—which is the devil. Jesus is teaching us not to live a reactive existence. We need to be forward thinking and future oriented. To be prepared with a plan BEFORE temptation comes our way.

There are things we can do now to avoid future regrets over rash or unwise decisions made in the heat of the moment.

First, we need a good dose of humility. Even at our best and strongest, we're never immune from stumbling. What do the Scriptures say? Pride cometh before *the what?* The fall.

There's a strength in remembering we're human, that we have weak spots and blind spots—that we need help from God and others. To continue with the Greek myths—even the great warrior Achilles had a weakness. Do you remember what it was? His "Achilles heel." Some of us may not have an Achilles heel, but maybe an "Achilles mouth" or "Achilles brain." Recognizing this is half the battle. Even so, doesn't it drive you nuts that it's *so dang easy* to repeat bad habits and *so darn hard* to form good habits? There's a reason for that:

The COSTS of a good habit are usually in the present,
and the REWARDS of a good habit are later.

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and the COSTS of a bad habit are later.

Because of our preference for the present moment, instant gratification usually beats out delayed gratification. We need some serious help to rewire our brains and renew our spirits.

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Even the confident and disciplined Apostle Paul was attuned to his “Achilles will” in this wonderfully honest confession of his in Romans 7:

*I do not understand my own actions.
For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
... when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.
— Romans 7:15, 21 (NRSV)*

The struggle was real, even for an apostle.

We too have our various struggles and temptations:

- To give up
- Not care
- Avoid or numb ourselves to our problems
- To cut corners
- To take advantage of others
- Go against what you believe
- Seek revenge, to stay bitter
- To do impulsive things that are harmful to yourself or others

... and that’s the short list.

Paul continues on about our human plight:

*Wretched man that I am!
Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
— Romans 7:24-25 (NRSV)*

There are three kinds of prayer: Wow, Thanks, and Help.

This is a help prayer:

Deliver us from evil—evil from within and evil from without.
God, help me not to compromise my character or integrity for a short-term gain or selfish glory.
God, help me to keep the faith.
God, save me from myself!

And then we pray—in our divine 911 emergency rescue call from evil:

Deliver us from school shootings.
Deliver us from divisiveness.
Deliver us from evil.
Deliver us from the evil one.

The 12 Steps are onto this principle:

Recognize your powerlessness, and
look to a Higher Power to do for you what you can't do for yourself.

When you think about it, sin is a lot like addiction. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus is that Higher Power and that Higher Person from heaven that humbled himself by becoming one of us to help us. He's able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he's been there—tested in every way as we are—*only he did not sin*. And he's not self-righteous about this. The good news is that Jesus uses his power to help us, not harangue us. To deliver us, not disparage us.

In Exodus, the Israelites were tempted in the wilderness—they doubted God's provision, grumbled, complained, worshiped the golden calf—and ended up having to wander for 40 years before going into the Promised Land. Jesus is a re-do of that. He did for us what we couldn't do.

After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested—and he passed the test that we all failed. In the wild, Jesus trusted God and resisted the tempter's traps. Jesus was ready for his mission to save the world, to save us. Christ is in us—helping us to ignore instant gratification and wait for delayed gratification. To choose what's best for me, what's best for others.

Jesus teaches us to pray, "watch and pray so that you don't enter into temptation." Prayer helps us to discern the good voices from the bad voices out there. The Lord's Prayer also helps us reframe our temptations and to see them as growth opportunities. To see trials as opportunities for us to sacrificially choose to worship God and not idols. A chance to show our love to God. See your temptation, see your wilderness as a place of preparation, testing, growing, and learning. The wilderness is a place of endurance and new beginnings. The trials and temptations we go through strip us bare, where we have only God to rely upon. It's in the wild where our foibles, our weaknesses, our fears, our doubts, and waverings are exposed to the elements. God is doing a divine pruning of our lives—so we can grow in our new ways.

Jewish teachers emphasized that passing the test, staying faithful in trying times or times of testing was one of the ultimate ways to hallow God's name. Not a way to be seduced into evil, but to demonstrate your loyalty and faithfulness.

- Reframe your temptations.
- With God, if we fall six times, we get up seven.
- When you fail, fail forward.
- If you're going through hell, don't stop.

When we pray *lead us not into temptation*, we pray for God to redeem, reframe, and redirect our motives—to satisfy our longings in good ways. We all have different underlying motives and yearnings in our lives—to find love, connect with others, to save time, win acceptance or approval, reduce uncertainty, to find meaning and purpose in our lives.

We get into trouble when we think the wrong things will meet those needs.

- We think Instagram or porn or Tinder will meet our desire to feel connected with others.
- We think approval will come from our amount of Facebook likes.
- We think that eating food or drinking will reduce our anxiety.
- We think that money or retail therapy with our credit card will give us prestige or purpose in our lives.

Jesus helps us reframe, to return to God, and turn to others for real relationships—to find meaning and purpose by doing God’s will and helping others. God can also lead us away from temptation and *deliver us from evil* by changing our environment.

In James Clear’s book *Atomic Habits*, he talks about Vietnam and heroin use. In 1971 our country was heading into sixteen years of fighting the Vietnam War. A shocking reality was discovered: 20% of US troops were heroin addicts. But an even more surprising statistic came to light: when heroin users came home, only 5% became addicted again in the States after a year, and only 12% relapsed within three years.

Basically, 9 out of 10 soldiers kicked one of the most addictive drugs known to the planet—cold turkey. *How?* The soldier’s environment radically changed when they came home. While in Vietnam, the soldiers were surrounded by triggers and by other fellow soldiers who used. Drugs were easy to get, they were stressed out by war, and they were far from home. When they left the environment, 90% of them changed.

This applies to our life and faith, too.

- Come home to God—the war has been won.
- Live your unhealthy habits behind.
- Come to a good church home.
- Set up a system around you that will encourage faith, rather than failure.
- Choose good company.

We pick up habits from those around us. The closer we are to someone, the more we imitate them. So, hang out with Jesus. Hang out with Christians. Hang out with people that have the values you want. Join a culture where your DESIRED behavior is the NORMAL behavior—it gets modeled before your very eyes and encourages you to do what you really want to do. Community is big-scale help. Take it small-scale, too. Ask a trusted friend to help you with your temptations. Don’t struggle alone—trusted friends can help.

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Finally, it also helps to have a plan—a specific plan. Tie your desired behavior to something you already do:

- After I pour my coffee ... I will read my Bible.
- Before I eat ... I'll pray.
- After I sit down to eat dinner ... I will give thanks for two things in my life.

- When I buy something ... I will give something away.
- When I see stairs ... I will take them.
- When I want to buy something over \$100 ... I will wait 24 hours.

Put what you want to do around you. Make good habits easy and bad habits difficult to get to. But most importantly, turn to Christ.

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Amen.

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