

Notes

The Lords' Prayer, Temptation, and Our Rescue From Evil

Matthew 6:13; Jerry Truex; Sept. 11, 2016

[See slide 2 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

A. Introduction

Today I am going to look at the significance of the Lord's Prayer as whole. Then I will focus on the Sixth Petition for which there are different translations.

Matt. 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (RSV)

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (NRSV)

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ

B. The Lord's Prayer

1. The structure

The address	Our Father
Three you-petitions	Let your name be hallowed Let your kingdom come Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Three us-petitions	Give us daily our bread of existence Forgive us our debts, as we forgive... Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
Doxology	For yours is the kingdom and the power....

Notice how the Lord's Prayer divides in half.¹

¹ Many authors note this structure; e.g., John Dominac Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lords' Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 2011) 48.

The Temple was

- a *massive complex* and covers the same area as 12 football fields
- the center of Jewish worship – *the House of Prayer* and the center for the three great pilgrimage festivals: Tabernacles, Passover, Dedication/Hanukah
- the place of God's presence – *the House of God*
- the connection point—the *axis mundi* (the cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar, center of the world)—between heaven and earth.

So the Temple was the House of Prayer, the House of God, the place where heaven and earth intersected, and the place where people pilgrimaged three times a year to commune with God.

[See slides 7-8 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

A modern analogy for the ancient Jewish Temple is the Great Mosque in Mecca

3. Prayer replaces the Temple

[See slides 9 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

Now, when you look at the structure of the Lord's Prayer, what has Jesus done? He has identified prayer as the place connecting heaven and earth, not the Temple.

[See slide 10 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

The earliest followers of Jesus saw themselves as the New Temple.

1 Cor. 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (NRS)

John 4:21, 23. ²¹ Jesus said, "Believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain [Mt. Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem [Mt. Zion] ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..." (NRSV)

[See slide 11 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

With the Lord's Prayer, Jesus has identified *acts of prayer* as:

- a. the *connection point* between heaven and earth, not the Temple
- b. the *place of God's presence* on earth, not the Temple
- c. the *axis mundi*² of the universe, the place where we bring heaven to earth.
- d. the *link* between phenomenal world (the world we see and experience) and the Reality of Being and Consciousness behind the phenomenal world.

[See slide 12 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

Our senses—sight, touch, hearing, feelings, thoughts—often obscure our essential connection with Reality/God—but prayer re-connects us.

[See slide 13 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

4. What is the primary function of prayer?

We often act as if prayer is about asking for things—like a wish list. But the structure of the Lord's Prayer suggests that prayer connects heaven and earth. Prayer connect humans with the Divine.

Prayer "plugs us in to our power source" – like a smart phone

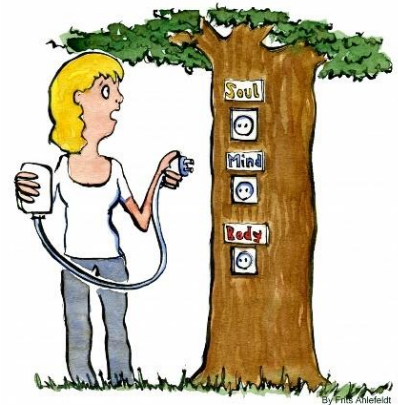
"Through prayer and meditation we seek conscious contact with God" (11th step in the 12-step program).



² The *axis mundi* refers to the cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar, center of the world, or the connection between heaven and earth in certain religions and philosophies. It is symbolized by mountains, sacred trees, a column of smoke or fire, a tower, cross, steeple, ladder or staircase to heaven.

[\[See slide 15 in the PowerPoint presentation.\]](#)

We are good at connecting to people through social media, but when it comes to God—the Source of spiritual power—we are often perplexed. How do we plug into God for that spiritual energy?



Jesus has told us.

- Prayer plugs us into God.
- Prayer connects heaven and earth.
- Prayer recharges our body, mind, and soul—it renews our spirit!

C. Sixth Petition: Testing & Rescue

[\[See slide 16 in the PowerPoint presentation.\]](#)

Now, let’s turn to the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

Matt. 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (RSV)

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (NRSV)

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν ἀλλὰ ρύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ
peirasmon ponērou

The general thrust of the Sixth Petition is clear. It is a request for God to protect us. We are asking God to protect us from situations that might overwhelm us physically or morally, and especially to protect us from anything that might cripple our faith and trust in God.

That is clear. But there are some questions and ambiguities that need addressing.

The Sixth Petition has two parts, one negative and one positive.

[\[See slide 17 in the PowerPoint presentation.\]](#)

1. Negative: "Lead us not into testing/temptation" (Mt. 6:13a)

Here there is a question about God's role in the temptation or testing process. The Sixth Petition seems to suggest that God might tempt us or lead us into trials.

However, James denies that God is involved in the temptation process.

James 1:13. "No one, when tempted [peiradzomenos], should say, 'I am being tempted [peiradzomai] by God'; for God cannot be tempted [apeirastos] by evil and he himself tempts [peiradzei] no one. (NRSV)

James 1:13. Μηδεις πειραζόμενος λεγέτω ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ πειράζομαι· ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπείραστός ἐστιν κακῶν πειράζει δὲ αὐτὸς οὐδένα

For this reason, some have seen a conflict between James and the Sixth Petition.

However, this can be resolved by arguing that James is dealing with "temptation" to sin, whereas Matthew is dealing with "testing" of one's faith.

If Matthew is dealing with testing our faith, then the Sixth Petition is asking God:

- Not to test our faith beyond our endurance
- Not to allow us to be overwhelmed by sin or evil in everyday life

[See slide 18 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

In Jewish tradition, temptation or testing had a pedagogical function. Trials and testing had the purpose of strengthening our faith and increasing our spiritual capacities.

Peter 1:6-7. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials [peirasmois], so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (NRSV)

Peter 1:6-7. ⁶ ἐν ᾧ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε ὀλίγον ἄρτι εἰ δέον ἔστιν λυπηθέντες ἐν ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς ⁷ ἵνα τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως πολυτιμότερον χρυσίου τοῦ ἀπολλυμένου διὰ πυρὸς δὲ δοκιμαζομένου εὐρεθῆ εἰς ἔπαινον καὶ δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

1 Cor. 10:13. No testing [peirasmos] has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested [peirasthēnai] beyond your strength, but with the testing [peirasmō] he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (NRSV)

1 Cor. 10:13. πειρασμός ὑμᾶς οὐκ εἴληφεν εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος. πιστὸς δὲ ὁ θεός ὃς οὐκ ἐάσει ὑμᾶς πειρασθῆναι ὑπὲρ ὃ δύνασθε ἀλλὰ ποιήσει σὺν τῷ πειρασμῷ καὶ τὴν ἔκβασιν τοῦ δύνασθαι ὑπενεγκεῖν

[See slide 19 in the PowerPoint presentation.]

2. Positive: "Deliver us from evil/evil one" (Mt. 6:13a)

In the Sixth Petition, we also ask God to rescue us from evil or the "evil one." Either translation is permissible. When testing does come, we are asking God to give us the wisdom and the fortitude (strength, courage) not to make evil choices.

"Deliver us" (ῥῦσαι; *hrusai*) means "rescue, deliver, or save." It expresses a rather strong intervention to rescue or to preserve someone in times of danger.³

"Evil" (πονηρός; *ponēros*) is ambiguous grammatically. The term could be masculine or neuter.

- If it's a masculine adjective, then it refers to the Evil One or Satan.
- If it is a neuter adjective, then it refers to some form of impersonal evil.

That means that *ponēros* could refer to either

- a) Evil One
- b) Physical evil - a *poor condition* or *sickness*
- c) Moral evil - *bad, evil, or vicious*

What tempts us, if not God? The Bible seems to say that we are tempted by two things: (1) the Evil One and (2) our own flesh (*sarx*), which refers to our attempt to meet our needs outside of God's will.

³ Robert A. Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: A foundation for Understanding* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1982) 297.

The Bible seems to say that God allows us to be exposed to difficult situations, even evil, so that we might grow in faith and in spiritual strength.

The assumption is that our faith, our trust, our loyalty to God—our inner spiritual capacities and love for God—can and should grow. Our inner spiritual capacities are meant to grow like anything else. Whatever does not grow, dies. Like all living things, our faith and our spiritual capacities either grow or die.

[\[See slide 20 in the PowerPoint presentation.\]](#)

D. Surviving Temptation and Testing

How do we deal with temptation? Glenn Stassen suggests one method, which involves substitution one behavior for another.⁴

- Stassen tells the story of a four-year old boy with brain damage
- The boy could not resist the temptation to create excitement by repeatedly grabbing other children's hair, and they would scream
- The boy was stuck in repeating a pattern, and he needed a new one. Simply punishing him would not give him a new pattern
- So every time Stassen saw the boy start the behavior, he would go over to the boy and gently take the boy by the elbow and lead him toward the blocks or another kind of play
- In just two weeks, the boy learned a new pattern of behavior
- Willpower to change is not enough. We need to substitute other behaviors.

E. Summary and Reflections

1. Lord's Prayer is the connection point between heaven and earth; it plugs us into divine power.
2. We can ask God to rescue us from every form of evil and temptation and that divine rescue involves our human ability to endure trials and to grow spirituality.

⁴ Glenn H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) 122-23.