

“The Lord’s Prayer: Lead Us”

Luke 11:1-4

September 25, 2016

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Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

Sermon:

Introduction...

Kenneth Bailey tells in his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* of multiple trips to a well in the Sahara desert. [p. 128-129] Each time they went out to this well, they always used the same, wise and experienced old guide who knew the desert like the back of his hand. As Bailey and his colleagues got to know the guide, they realized he was amazing. They trusted him implicitly, and were literally trusting him with their lives! There was no way they would ever be able to navigate the desert on their own!

Bailey says that they go to the point where each time the guide was preparing to take them out, Bailey and his friends would say, “Don’t get us lost!” What were they saying? Did they think he would get them lost? Did he need a reminder not to get them lost? Of course not! He wasn’t going to get them lost, but their statement was actually a declaration of their total dependence upon the guide! They were admitting that if he got them lost they were done for. They had no hope on their own. He was their only hope not to get them lost!

Today we are taking our final look at the Lord’s prayer. As we come to the final petition, the final request in the prayer, think about this example. Think about telling your guide, “Don’t get us lost!”

Text

Please read with me from Luke 11:1-4.

Explanation

“Lead us not into temptation.” At first glance, it seems pretty simple. We ask God not to tempt us. But wait a second! Does God actually tempt us?!? Doesn’t James 1:13 say that God does not tempt us? Is this a contradiction in the Bible?

As I prepared for today’s message I came to realize that this verse is quite troubling to many people. We really wonder, or perhaps inherently believe that God tempts us. That is, after all, why we pray for him not to lead us into temptation, isn’t it?

Well, actually, no. **God does not tempt us. God does, however, test us.** What’s the difference? Temptation inherently means temptation to do wrong or evil. Temptation always comes from the devil. Temptation is the suggestion to do what God does not want you to do, or to resist doing what God does want you to do. That’s fairly obvious, I think, from our use of the word temptation.

The issue, though, is that in Greek the same word is used for both a positive test and a negative temptation. It is not clear from the Greek which is meant here. So let’s see what the difference is between testing and tempting and work from there.

Temptation, by definition, is an enticement to do evil. **Testing, by contrast, is intended to show and improve our character.** Thus, in Genesis 22, God tests Abraham, asking Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac to God. We really struggle with this passage because we cannot imagine God asking us to do something to heinous! However, we must remember that culturally the pagan people around Abraham did this sort of thing. Abraham did not have the Bible or thousands of years of history to see God’s character. So while shocking to us, the shock to Abraham would have been about how God would be able to fulfil his promise to make Abraham a great nation if Isaac was dead. The test for Abraham was to see if he would obey God even when it didn’t make sense. Would he obey God even if it meant going through a very dark valley?

Abraham obeyed God and passed the test. Not only did God call off the sacrifice at the last minute, but God provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. Abraham passed the test, his character of obedient trust was demonstrated and his character was strengthened and improved. He saw that God will provide! He saw that God is faithful even when things look terrible.

The root of the word for test or temptation (peira) means the experience one gains by attempting something. [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, “peira”, p. 640] The verb form of this word is the word used for refining gold. [Darrell W. Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World*, p. 94] You heat it

up, let the impurities come to the surface and you spoon off those impurities. When God tests us, this is what he is doing with our character. He turns up the heat, waits for the impurities to come to the surface, and then, with our cooperation, he spoons off those impurities.

But take note that it is with our cooperation that God removes the impurities in our character. God respects our free will and so it is only when we submit to God and cooperate with him that he removes the impurities. That is, **it is only when we submit to God, cooperate with him and obey him that we pass the test.**

What happens if we don't submit to God, cooperate with and obey him? What then? Well, that means that we are disobeying God. That, by definition, is sin. When we are in times of testing, Satan loves to come along and turn that test into a temptation. [Johnson, p. 93]

That is why, in Matthew's edition of the Lord's Prayer, the final request is "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one!" Matthew uses two parallel clauses to highlight the meaning of the first clause. The second part of the request sheds light on what the first part means. When asking God to not lead us into temptation, we are asking him to deliver us from the evil one. (In Greek it is not clear if "evil" means evil in general or the evil one. I think it means the evil one.)

What it boils down to is that we are asking God not to lead into testing because we know we are likely to fail the test! We don't want to be exposed to Satan's tempting during our testing because we know the weakness of our own character. We are asking God to save us from that danger.

Two other options inform our understanding of this text as well. Remember, Jesus spoke Aramaic with the disciples, not Greek. So when he taught them the Lord's prayer it was in Aramaic. The word in Aramaic that would be translated into the Greek word for lead can mean cause or permit. [Bailey, p. 129] Ack?!? There's a whole lot of translation going on here! What does it mean?

The original intent of what Jesus said could also mean "do not permit us to go into temptation" rather than "do not cause us to go into temptation." In this case, the word would be temptation, rather than test. This is very similar to what we spoke of at the beginning when Kenneth Bailey described following a guide into the desert saying, "Don't get us lost!" It is a way of saying, "Don't allow us to get lost" because we would be in a terrible state if you did!

This is one of the things about free will. God permits us to do what we want in many situations. God "does not do violence to our will." That is, God does not force us to obey him. He does not force us to refrain from sin. He respects our decisions. When we ask God to not allow us to slide into temptation, to not permit us to fall into temptation, we are asking that God's will be done! We are coming back to a way in which we ask God to fulfil our previous request that his kingdom come- his authority to rule be followed.

The final explanation for what this petition could be saying centres around the word "into." **"Into temptation" implies yielding or succumbing to temptation.** [I. Howard Marshall, *Luke*, p. 461-462] One could then translate the request "Cause us not to succumb to temptation." We are asking God to keep us from sin, which is a completely reasonable request! It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are cleansed of the indwelling power of sin. Asking God to cause us not to yield to temptation fits perfectly.

So there we have 3 different ways of understanding this request. First, God does test us. We may ask God not to test us because we know our own frailty and know we will fail the test! Furthermore, we know that when we are in the time of testing, Satan leads us to temptation. That is, Satan entices us to disobey God, to fail the test through disobedience. We ask God not to lead us to the time of testing because we know that will expose us to temptation which we need protection from.

Second, it could be a matter of "permitting" rather than "leading." God, please don't permit us to go into temptation. This is a broader example of our first meaning. We ask God to keep us from testing because being tested is one of a number of situations in which we are exposed to temptation. This second understanding broadens that to include all situations in which we are exposed to temptation. Do not permit us to go into temptation is a preventative measure against sin.

Third, it could be implying giving in to temptation, not just being tempted. It is not a sin to be tempted. It is only a sin to give in to the temptation. Jesus was tempted, yet he was without sin! So the third way of reading this request in the Lord's prayer is "do not allow us to give in to temptation."

Application

So how do we apply all of this? You may be wondering what use all this discussion is. It seems like we're not sure what the sentence really means! Is it temptation or testing? If it's testing, what does that mean and why don't we want it? Is it lead in the sense of causing or is it more of permitting and allowing? In that case, the last word would be temptation. Don't allow us to go into temptation. Or is it saying specifically falling into temptation, succumbing to the temptation and actually sinning?

While it may be frustrating not to be sure what exactly Jesus meant, maybe that is what he meant! Or, at least, maybe that is a positive side effect of the ambiguity of the request. It actually fits many different situations we find ourselves in.

We are being taught to pray daily for protection against falling into sin. However we understand the theological nuances of God not tempting us, the final result of this request is that every day we need to pray for deliverance from sin! Even when we have found Christ, we need to continually pray for deliverance from sin.

I've said it before and I will say it again, **living the Christian life means living a lifestyle of repentance.** Each day we need to pray for forgiveness of our past sin. Each day we need to forgive those who have offended us and include that as part of our relationship to God. Each day we must also look forward, not just look back, and ask God to guide our path and protect us from falling into sin.

Sometimes people take a cavalier attitude toward sin. They think that because they can ask Jesus for forgiveness after the fact that it's not a big deal if they fall into sin or not. But this prayer teaches us the exact opposite! The person who is following Christ not only relies on Jesus to forgive the sins they commit, but also asks for protection against further sin in the future!

This is part of living a life in which you are completely oriented towards God! That's what a life of repentance is- living a life in which you are regularly and diligently checking and correcting your life trajectory so that you are headed straight for God. This means asking for forgiveness and reconciliation for the times you went off track. It means praying for help staying on track in the future.

Another application is that **God does lead us through times of testing.** Remember, after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert. This was a time during which God the Father was going to strengthen the Son, Jesus, reaffirming his call. But during that time, Satan comes along and tempts Jesus. Satan gives Jesus options and entices Jesus to sin. Jesus does not give in to temptation, but he certainly experiences them! So the Holy Spirit led Jesus through a period during which Satan tempted him.

God does bring us through difficult times. God even brings us through affliction, through times of pain and suffering. Remember the 23rd Psalm. It begins by speaking of God as my shepherd who leads me to good places. Then it shifts that even if I go through the darkest valley, or the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Two reasons. Explicitly, David says he will fear no evil because God is protecting him with his rod and staff. But implicitly David will fear no evil because even if he is walking through the darkest valley, he knows it is God who leads him there! As Christians, we must never forget this! Sometimes we find that we are in the darkest valley. Perhaps we are there because we made bad choices. That can be the case. We reap what we sow. If we rebel against God consistently we may find ourselves in dark places.

But what about those times we find ourselves in the dark valley and it's not because we have strayed from God? What are we to think then? Remember, God sometimes leads us through dark valleys. God sometimes leads us into times of testing. Why? To demonstrate and strengthen our character!

Just this summer many of us watched the Olympics in Rio. The Olympic competitions are a time of testing for the athletes. This is a time of tremendous testing for each athlete to see how well they can do. This is their opportunity to shine! For their development as an athlete to come through. In a similar way, God sometimes brings us to a time of spiritual testing, a time of spiritual struggle and exertion. Why? To demonstrate our character and development.

When we pray for God not to lead us into a time of testing it is because we know we are weak. We know we will fail. We know we will be tempted to disobey. That is why we ask for deliverance from the time of testing. But we must remember that sometimes God does take us through difficult times in order to refine us, just like gold is refined in the fire to be purified.

Sometimes **God allows us to go through difficult times, through times of trial or testing, because he knows that during those times we will cling to him that much more tightly!** David, before he became king,

went through incredibly difficult times, yet he is a man described as “a man after God’s own heart.” The name David itself means beloved of God. God allowed David to go through repeated times of testing. Why? Because it strengthened David’s character in preparation for him to be king. It also strengthened David’s relationship with God! It drew David closer to God, teaching him to rely on God more fully and thoroughly no matter what the circumstances.

Are you going through difficult times? Are you going through times of testing? Ask God why. But ask God knowing that he may be doing this to draw you closer to himself. He may be doing this to refine you, to turn up the heat and see what impurities come to the surface. He may be doing this to demonstrate to you his faithfulness even in difficult times. These are all legitimate part of times of testing!

And if you are going through a time of testing, beware of temptation! The devil certainly does not want you closer to God! He does not want you clinging to God or having your character improved. He knows that during times of testing you are vulnerable in different ways than times of blessing or ease. So beware of temptation during times of testing. Beware of the desire, the enticement, to reject God, to rebel against God, to take offense and hold onto it. Beware of the temptations that come with being tempted, otherwise you may waste the trial! You may waste the opportunity to be refined and instead fall away from God or fall into sin.

The Lord’s Prayer begins with “Our Father,” a reminder of God’s desire for a close relationship with him, a reminder that God is our loving Father, eager to provide for us what we desire if it is within the boundaries he has laid out for us. Here, we see that the Lord’s Prayer ends with our side of wanting a close relationship with God. The final petition, regardless of how you understand the details, is a request that we be delivered from those things that pull us away from God- temptations! The prayer begins with a reminder from God of who he is and the kind of relationship he desires for us to have with him. It moves through the appropriate priorities of putting God first, of asking for his character to be honoured, of seeking his will and authority to be recognized and obeyed. It moves to a request that our loving heavenly Father meet our needs, then it squares away the problem of our sin, asking for forgiveness and reconciliation between us and God as well as between us and others. All of this is part of living life in the Kingdom of God, living under the authority of God.

Then the prayer closes with this last, intimate request for our relationship with God- a request that God protect us from that which would cause a rift in our relationship, from those enticements to disobey his authority, which would dishonour his name. From beginning to end and everything in between, the Lord’s Prayer is about relationships. It does address our relationships with one another, but **primarily the Lord’s Prayer is about our relationship with God.** This is what Jesus teaches us to pray!

So as you pray, whether you follow the structure of the Lord’s Prayer or not, follow the intent and the content of it! Begin by remembering who you are praying to. Set yourself in your proper place as a beloved child of the King of Kings! But before you get too familiar with the King of Kings, get your prayer priorities straight. Before coming to your own requests, begin your prayer with God’s priorities. Pray for his name and his kingdom. Pray that they be honoured in the world, but also in your life and the life of the church. “Our Father!”

Pray that God will meet your needs. This is one we’re used to. But don’t forget to pray for your need for forgiveness! And let your prayers for your own forgiveness prompt you to forgive all those who need your forgiveness too.

Finally, pray for protection. Pray for God to lead you, but not to allow you to succumb to temptation. Pray that God will draw you close to himself, even if that means a difficult time of testing, but cling to him and pray for deliverance from temptation so that nothing interferes with your relationship with God.

Relationships matter and the Lord’s Prayer is a relationship prayer. Let it be the model for your own prayer life. Shape your prayers on the principles of the Lord’s Prayer. Shape your prayers to be relationship prayers. God wants you to have a rich, meaningful prayer life because it is through this that he can develop a rich, meaningful relationship with you. Because God loves you and wants you to be close to him. Amen.