

The Lord's Prayer: A Guide
Dr. Stuart Bond
July 20, 2008

I know it was a powerful time for many of you last Sunday. If you weren't here, we wrote down the names on a 3x5 card of those we are working on forgiving and brought those names up here. One person told me that it was a great exercise but that she needed an extra card to write on. In case you were wondering what we did with the cards, I have kept them all and have been able to match just about all of you to who you need to forgive...

Of course, we threw them away. I trust that you are doing your homework and you are on the way to forgiving the people you need to forgive, including yourself.

We have been looking at our requests for ourselves during this second half of the Lord's Prayer. We have examined the need for resources. We need the bread that sustains us every day and we need the bread of heaven. We have examined our need to have relationships. The prayer pushes us to do the hard work of being the ones who practice the art of forgiveness. Today we look at a third need: our need for guidance.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

About fifteen years ago, Cindy and I were doing our best to fulfill the parenting plans for our kids. On that particular, winter weekend, we were to take Geoff and Andrew to meet their father at North Bend, most of the way up Snoqualmie Pass. We packed them up and set them in the car and took off. It was a dark and stormy afternoon. We made it to the meeting place by our appointed time. The boys transferred to their father's car and we headed back. By then it was a dark and stormy night. But it was not just dark and stormy. It was cold, freezing cold. In one of the worst ice storms the Northwest has seen, the roads became an absolute sheet of ice.

I crept along the icy highway going exactly the speed of the car in front of me and the car behind me. Now and again someone would blow past us as if we were scardy cats to drive so cautiously. Sometimes we would see their car again, as we passed it in the ditch off the road. Almost every hundred yards there was another car that had slid off the highway. A lot of them were four wheel rigs—the drivers were too confident in their supposed traction. The radio kept telling us that four wheel was no better than two wheel on this ice, but they barreled ahead. Others had simply become caught in one of those slow slides that you cannot control and they drifted to a roadside where they sat now, perhaps waiting until the thaw would come in the morning when they could get a new start. Others were utilizing the tow services, getting pulled out so they could move forward.

That sense of danger, that foreboding, that caution is the sense of this line of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus does not teach us to pray, "Lord, we have no concern about temptation and

we know you have conquered evil.” It is not arrogance. It carries the tone of, but for the grace of God there go we.

Jesus seems to have a tremendous respect for the power of temptation. That is partially because he knows what he is talking about. In the Book of Hebrews, there is a debate the writer is answering. The question was how can we replace the priestly structure when it is the priests who represent us to God? Priests know what we are facing and they can plead on our behalf. Jesus can’t possibly understand what we are going through. In response is Hebrews 4: 15 and 16:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

He has been there. He knows the feverish dreams that haunt us at night, the crazy schemes that call to us when we want to change something that isn’t going right. Nikos Kazantzakis’ *Last Temptation of Christ* was a fictional account of Jesus’ life. It bristles with creative ideas and a few heresies. He wrote it, he says in the introduction, to flesh out what it means that Jesus was tempted like we are. In Kazantzakis’ book, the last temptation Jesus faced was the temptation to simply shirk his heavenly assignment and go off to lead a simple life. That is not a biblical idea, but it isn’t too hard to imagine, is it? We are all tempted to pack it in, to give up, to run away and hide from the calling on our life.

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus understands the pull of temptation. He also understands what happens when we yield to those temptations. They become a slide off the road into the control of the evil one.

To be a Christian is to say, “I accept that my life will be challenged by the forces of evil. I realize that some calamities are going to attempt to overwhelm me, to swamp the boat of my faith and laugh at me while I sink.” Ben-Sira was a Jewish writer who wrote what most of us know in our heart is true: “My child, if you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing.”

Steve Farrar wrote a book called *Finishing Strong*. In that book he tells the story of twenty year old Peter Bisagno. Peter was going into the ministry when his future father in law challenged him. “It has been my observation,” the older man said, “that just one in ten who start out in full-time service for the Lord at twenty-one are still on track by the age of sixty-five. They’re shot down morally, they’re shot down with discouragement...they get obsessed with making money...for one reason or another nine out of ten fall out.”

Peter was shocked. He said that he could not believe that. He knew that his friends were more true to the faith than that. He went home and wrote down the names of 24 of his

peers in his Bible. They were young men who were all sold out for Jesus Christ. They were trained for ministry and burning in their desire to be used by the Lord.

That young man eventually became Pastor of Houston First Baptist. Here are his words: “I am now fifty-three years old. From time to time as the years have gone by, I’ve had to turn back to that page in my Bible and cross out a name. I wrote down those twenty-four names when I was just twenty years of age. Thirty-three years later, there are only three names remaining of the original twenty-four.” (Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong*, pg. 6)

No matter who we are, we face the test. We may want to blame God for the test. When Peter Cook, Christy Brinkley’s ex-husband, notices the cute young thing watching his children, was that God giving him a test? If that is true then the problem was not him. It was God! The test was too difficult. He just couldn’t control himself. He is a victim. In the Book of James we get a corrective to this kind of thinking:

James 1: 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James’ words are sort of a biblical version of the phrase Rita May Brown coined: “Lead me not into temptation—I can find it myself.” We cannot blame God for every temptation we face. When the prayer says, “Lead us not into temptation” it is a reminder that this is not what God does. He doesn’t lead us into temptation. Instead, he throws us a rope to tow us out of it.

That’s why we read in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it.”

There it is! At the end of the verse that little window, that hope: “...he will also provide a way out...” In the words of the Lord’s Prayer, we ask to be delivered from evil. It doesn’t mean that there will be no evil. It doesn’t mean that we will avoid the test. But our prayer is that we will make it through, that we will journey with him even if the road is a sheet of ice. Our prayer is to be delivered.

When a package is delivered, it goes from one place to another. It makes the journey safely. In the same way, when a child is delivered, it crosses from one very cramped space to another. The Lord’s Prayer says “deliver us from evil.” In other words, we want to make the journey from the place where evil runs things and has control over us to the place where evil does not hold sway.

If we want to be guided out of evil then we had better stay close to the Guide. “Lead us not into temptation” means that, when temptation comes, we will say, “Lord, is this the

right way? Is this what your word teaches? Is this what you would have me do? Would doing this glorify you? Or is it something that will land me in the spiritual or marital or personal ditch? Will it hallow your name or drag it through the mud?"

This past week, Tony Snow, the former press secretary and news commentator, passed away. He faced the test of cancer and he was good enough to write about what this test meant. He reflected on a friend who went through cancer:

Most of us have watched friends as they drifted toward God's arms, not with resignation, but with peace and hope. In so doing, they have taught us not how to die, but how to live. They have emulated Christ by transmitting the power and authority of love.

I sat by my best friend's bedside a few years ago as a wasting cancer took him away. He kept at his table a worn Bible and a 1928 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. A shattering grief disabled his family, many of his old friends, and at least one priest. Here was a humble and very good guy, someone who apologized when he winced with pain because he thought it made his guest uncomfortable. He retained his equanimity and good humor literally until his last conscious moment. "I'm going to try to beat [this cancer]," he told me several months before he died. "But if I don't, I'll see you on the other side."

His gift was to remind everyone around him that even though God doesn't promise us tomorrow, he does promise us eternity, - filled with life and love we cannot comprehend, - and that one can in the throes of sickness point the rest of us toward timeless truths that will help us weather future storms.

Through such trials, God bids us to choose: Do we believe, or do we not? Will we be bold enough to love, daring enough to serve, humble enough to submit, and strong enough to acknowledge our limitations? Can we surrender our concern in things that don't matter so that we might devote our remaining days to things that do?

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

We face the personal trials. But here, as elsewhere in the Lord's Prayer, the subject is "us." It is we who need to avoid temptation. That means that the evils we face are not just in our own, personal lives, but they are part of a larger pattern, the principalities and powers that the Apostle Paul speaks about.

When we hear about the slaughter of people in Rwanda, is there not evil afoot that goes beyond the madness of the mob? When we are trapped in an entire system whose profit involves making our air un-breathable, isn't there something pernicious about this that goes beyond mere profit margin? When the best of our scientific minds from around the

world have poured themselves into the master project of creating enough nuclear destruction to erase all of humanity many times over, isn't there something more going on here than a terrible waste? This is what NT Wright says:

“...it is the prayer that the forces of destruction, of dehumanization, of anti-creation, of anti-redemption, may be bound and gagged, and that God's good world may escape from being sucked down into their morass. It is our responsibility, as we pray this prayer, to hold God's precious and precarious world before our gaze, to sum up its often inarticulate cries for help, for rescue, for deliverance. Deliver us from the horror of war! Deliver us from human folly and the appalling accidents it can produce...Let us not be engulfed by social violence, or by self-righteous reaction! Save us from arrogance and pride and the awful things they make people do! Save us—from ourselves...and deliver us from the Evil One.

So when we pray this simple line, we are praying for the whole world and we are praying for ourselves. It is a prayer of understanding the powers of this fallen world, and it is a prayer of trusting in the God who is ready to guide each of us who have fallen or are right now falling to temptation. It is a prayer that recognizes both the temptations we face and the truth that God is greater than the tempter.

What can this mean for us? It means that we will face the challenges of life not as if they are some surprise but as if they are part of what it means to be a Christian, and probably part of what it means to be alive. It means that, when the trial comes, we will recognize that we do not want to be owned by evil. We want to be delivered from it. The only one who can make that delivery is the one who is teaching us this prayer. He is the one who understands what we have been facing and he is the one who wants to lead us past the jagged rocks of temptation, even if we have already been bloodied by them. He wants to lead us past the trial and away from evil and into the presence of God.

Many of you knew Traci Rogers—one of the lambs that was entrusted to us here at Emmanuel. One of the first person's Traci met was Bob Fitch. She looked up at him from her weakened, terribly thin frame and said, “Would you be my friend?” Thus began the journey with Traci. That journey ended last week when her body finally shut down and she passed away.

We held a graveside service for her. Her two families were there: her biological family and her Emmanuel family. Person after person went forward to say what she meant to them, how this frail, obviously near-death woman had taught them so much about life. There were testimonies of people who found that, while they came to help and serve her, she was the one who was able to give a lift, to share a word, to do a deed of kindness. She was delivered from the evil of isolation, of fear, and of a sorrowful life by the work of God through this church. It seems to me that the temptation that haunted her inner life was to believe that she was bereft of all, that no one would or could ever love her.

While she was here at Emmanuel, you slowly, carefully, prayerfully delivered her from that evil perspective. Inch by inch, life by life, surprise birthday party by bible study, homeless feeding to Thanksgiving meal, vehicle providing to apartment decorating, you continued to challenge the idea that she was worthless. Jack Light told me his last words to Traci the night before she died. They had just finished feeding the homeless. Traci took a big part in that and was someone Jack could rely on. He said, “I need you, Traci. You do a great job, and I need you.”

If her temptation was to believe she was worthless, then her deliverance was to learn she mattered and that she was a precious child of God. That was God working through Emmanuel. Good on you for living out Jesus’ prayer in that one life.

Deliverance comes in many forms, which leads me to...you. How about you? I wonder what deliverance you could use. Is there an evil that is pressing on your life and trying to control you? Maybe it is not trying—maybe it is controlling you right now and you need to be pulled out of the ditch. Do you find that evil seems to run the entire world in which you live and you simply wonder if God is there at all? Could you use a relief from the temptations or trials that call to you, trying to wreck your life and steal from you the chance of finishing strong?

If so, turn to him. If so, decide that you want to follow Jesus Christ and his calling more than anything else in the world. This past week in my online Bible study we heard from the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the Philippians that what he most wanted to do was to represent Christ well. “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” (Philippians 1: 20)

That is the perspective we truly want, isn’t it? We want to be sold out to Jesus Christ. We don’t want any part of our life to be a shame to the Gospel. But there is a thief who wants to take that from us. The trial and evil stalk us. It might be illness that leads us to the temptation to think God can do nothing. Or it might be global warming and the ever-present display of our inhumanity to one another that leads us to despair of God ever leading us forward. Our faltering belief robs us of the expectation and hope that Paul speaks of, that we once had, and we want it back. Or it might be that your trial, the evil you face is an inner dialogue that torments and mocks you like Traci must have experienced.

When these things come in the dark night of the soul, remember that your high priest knows what you are facing. He longs to reach you and to be, once again, the guide he once was to you. All he needs is for you to take his hand. Perhaps you could bow your head now and let the truth that is for you and your life wash over you as I pray this prayer for you. You add what needs to be added to be true for you in your heart. Listen, as I pray for you, and for me, our prayer of surrender. Let us pray: “Lord, be my guide through the stormy night. I don’t want to go into the ditch. I would rather walk with you through whatever valleys I face, even if that means the valley of the shadow of death.

Only lead, God. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from this world of fear and hurt and sorrow. Deliver me from evil.”

Amen.