

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

One of the comments we make at Morning Prayer quite frequent is that we want to understand the bible as we read it without any great theological or scholarly somersaults.

The moment the preacher starts explaining that the words used in the bible don't really mean what we think it means, it does become frustrating.

To be fair, we have to grapple with the fact that the bible was written in different languages many centuries ago, the use of language changes and interpreting it now is not easy.

The sentence we have to study today is a case in point.

Our church bible says (NRSV)

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

And then in a little footnote at the bottom says

Or – us into temptation.

When I've been reading the commentaries on this part of the Lord's prayer, the explanation for what this part means can depend upon whether they choose "trial" or "temptation" as the most accurate meaning of the original words.

Because of both our versions of the Lord's prayer, we are most familiar with 'temptation'.

As a child I used to think "why would God be leading me into temptation and I need to ask him not to?" I would have been helped by the Contemporary English Version that says "keep us from temptation". Of course! That makes sense.

Billy Graham said that temptation is evil made attractive.

The Author C.S.Lewis wrote, No one knows how bad they are until they try to be good. It's a silly idea that good people don't know what temptation is.

The actress Mae West said " I generally avoid temptation, unless I can't resist it".

It is a shared human trait, every single one of us knows what it is to be tempted. Being tempted is not a sin. Sin is often the result of giving in to temptation.

There are an awful lots of quotes about temptation, and I thought this one was relevant for today's topic.

"... the devil doesn't come dressed in a red cape and pointy horns. He comes as everything you've ever wished for ..."

– Tucker Max,

When I do confirmation preparation, one of the first topics is what these opening questions mean to us.

(slide)

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

**I reject them.**

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

**I renounce them.**

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

**I repent of them.**

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

It's only when we have a working understanding of the devil and evil and its impact on us that we recognise the relevance of these questions and today's line from the Lord's prayer.

This prayer is intended for frequent daily use and Jesus is putting absolute essentials in.

He knows we face temptations and he knows the source and it's relevant we keep this in mind.

Apart from the Lord's prayer, I'm not sure how often you might pray against evil, or temptation or such matters.

Last thing each day I say a Compline prayer and the one for Tuesday is the Cuthbert prayer. It includes

*He alone is my refuge, my place of safety  
He is my God and I am trusting Him.*

*He will rescue you from the traps laid for your feet  
And save you from the destroying curse*

*His faithful promises are your armour, you need not be afraid of  
any terror by night, or the death arrow that flies by day.*

Clearly Cuthbert's experiences lead him to create a prayer very directly about God's help and protection. He lived in far more dangerous times than I do but he also travelled far and wide proclaiming the Gospel. That's not going to go unchallenged by those opposed to God's Kingdom.

The Apostle Peter might have written a similar kind of prayer. What is His experience of temptation and evil?

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of*

*believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

God does not lead us into temptation, temptation is going to be coming our way and we asking to be kept from it.

Temptation is the slippiest of slippery slopes.

Which brings us to the second part, deliver us from evil – or as in today's reading, the evil one.

There can be three responses to the whole notion of evil and the Devil.

The first is to ignore evil and the Devil as if they didn't exist and was of no concern.

The second is the opposite. To be so concerned about evil that we wallow in it and the Devil is everywhere all the time.

The third is to think we are superior to evil and our righteousness is overcoming it. Like the Pharisee who thanked God he wasn't like the sinner.

All three would be a mistake.

If it wasn't an issue – Jesus wouldn't have included it in His prayer.

If it was the one thing we should focus on above all else, the Lord's prayer would be about evil and nothing else.

If we were superior to it, we wouldn't need to be praying this prayer.

The right attitude is to acknowledge that we all have the capacity to be tempted, that temptation leads to sin and that the devil will find ways of tripping us up where he can.

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

Have you ever taken a wrong turning on a journey? How far did you have to go before realising and turning round? I did exactly that just the other week. I ended up going the long way back to our Airbnb. Where was the mistake?

By the time I was taking the turning down the wrong road, the problem was already firmly established.

The root of the matter; the beginning point of going the wrong way was some miles back when I stopped paying attention to the journey and was involved in a conversation about something else.

The time to pay attention to temptation, is before we are being tempted. The Lord's prayer, keeps this fresh in our minds.

And however you understand evil, or the evil one, the best defence is offered by St.Peter. Resist, standing firm in the faith.

And the reason we can resist is Jesus. He has confronted evil on the cross and overcome it. He has faced temptation in the garden of Gethsemane and overcome it. And he invites us to pray that we will be led on the journey of life being kept from temptation and being delivered from the evil one who would seek to accuse and destroy.

As I was considering this aspect of the Lord's Prayer a song came to mind which I particularly like. Life is a journey and there are times of difficulty just as there are times of great joy and happiness. We can be tempted and tripped up when tired and weary and worn down in the darkness, and we can be tempted astray when elated and successful and not paying attention. The lyrics of this song seem to be a good prayer.

Lead on, lead on, O kindly Light  
Amid th' encircling gloom;

Though far from home in the darkest of night,  
Still You will lead me on.  
The distant scene, the path before me  
I do not ask to see;  
But guard my feet o'er mountain & valley  
One step sufficient for me.

Lord, we pray that you guard us against temptation and when we are being tested keep us so that our foot does not slip.

Lead us on.

We pray that we have a right understanding of Satan's schemes and work, and in Jesus name we claim protection.

Lead us on.

We ask that the Holy Spirit be our guide, alerting us to pay attention and to remain firm in the faith. When we slip, we thank you for forgiveness and pray for the strength to carry on.

Lead us on we pray in Jesus name.

Amen.