

Matthew 6:9-13

New International Version	Holman Christian Standard Bible	English Standard Version	English Text Original Manuscript
<p><sup>9</sup>“This, then, is how you should pray:</p> <p>““Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  <sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’</p>	<p><sup>9</sup>“Therefore, you should pray like this:</p> <p>Our Father in heaven,  Your name be honored as holy.  <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come.  Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  <sup>13</sup> And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.  [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> Pray then like this:</p> <p>“Our Father in heaven,  hallowed be your name.  <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come,  your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread,  <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.</p>	<p>Our Father in the heavens  Make holy your name  Bring your kingdom  Bring about your will  As in heaven also upon the earth  Give us this day our daily bread  And forgive us our debts  As we have forgiven those  Indebted to us  And lead us not into temptation  But deliver us from evil</p>

## **What is Temptation? What is Evil? Two Difficult Questions to Answer**

We have already talked about evil. In almost each petition of the Lord's Prayer the problem of evil has been present. Whether it is meeting God's need for a hallowed name or a social system that rewards some and denies others, the Lord's Prayer has called us again and again to confront the continued existence of evil in the world. Here we confront it directly.

As a biblical scholar, one of the interesting things about this petition is its choice of terms to describe the "thing" from which human beings need rescue. It is not clear whether the Greek (*ponerou*) here is supposed to refer to an individual, like the devil, or to some more abstract power.

What is also interesting here is the use of the idea of "testing" or "temptation." Like evil, this term is ambiguous. It is not clear whether the source of this testing comes from within us or something outside of us. It is a problem we find throughout the New Testament. Many in Jesus' day believed that human trials were a result of human actions and had nothing to do with God. This comes across clearly in James, for example, where it says, "No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, lured and enticed by it (James 1:13-14). Others saw testing as the result of evil outside influences, as in the temptation stories in the Gospels. Nevertheless, individuals then, as they do now, saw suffering as an opportunity for education. I cannot tell you how many times I've talked to people going through trials and they've asked me, "Why?" This question of why points to our belief that somehow suffering should teach us something. And they seem to think that once they learn the lesson, then the suffering will be over.

What is evil? One way to define it is as the absence of justice. The Lord's Prayer addresses all those areas in which injustice prevails: profaning God's name, disregarding God's kingdom, opposing God's will, neglecting social structures that keep people from receiving what they need, refusing to be merciful to one another. It is the continued existence of these things that keeps evil an ever-present reality. The absence of justice, by itself, however, does not translate into evil human deeds. It is the continued existence of this state of affairs that lures us into doing evil things. This is what testing is all about.

### **Temptation Lives in the Choices**

We are tested (or tempted) because the possibility of doing evil continues to exist. In almost every moment of our lives we are confronted with at least three choices. We can commit ourselves entirely to God's vision for the world. We can commit ourselves partly to God's vision for the world. We can commit ourselves partly to God's vision, choosing to modify it according to what we think or want. This is the equivalent of saying "Yes, Lord, but..." Or, we can choose to commit ourselves to a vision other than God's. These choices are important because through them we help create the future. And the lures that draw us into sin are not always easy to see, nor is it always easy to know how we can advance God's vision in every moment. This is why we call upon God. We recognize that we alone cannot usher in the fullness of God's vision for

the world. God must play an active role in overcoming the injustice that confront us on every side.

And so, when we ask not to be led into temptation we are recognizing that we can be led astray into visions of the world that do not correspond to what God desires. We are then asking God to intervene -to step in- and help us as we struggle to discern God's vision. What is more, when we do fail to live out God's vision in our actions, we ask God to rescue our failure. By doing this we acknowledge to ourselves and God that what we do influences the outcome of God's vision, and that this power has been bestowed upon us by God and must be used wisely.

### **Stay Vigilant Regarding the Evil...**

#### **Hold Fast to the Good**

Now back to the ambiguities of "testing" and "evil." Evil first. The Lord's Prayer recognizes the supernatural dimensions of evil, which is why God must be involved in its abolishment. Whether it comes from inside us, or is the consequence of being lured by something outside of ourselves, the Lord's Prayer does not let us "off the hook" for the evil that exists and is unleashed in the world. When you think about what the earlier petitions asked, you recognize quickly that we already live and participate in a world that is deeply influenced by evil. We often practice it without even recognizing it. In order to stop advancing evil, we must be rescued from its grasp. Temptation or testing is the lure to go back to the practice of evil, it is something we have to be vigilant about avoiding. The advancement of evil cannot be attributed to one being alone. We participate in it whenever we neglect to refuse to stop it. And so, this petition says, "Lord, keep me vigilant."