

Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer Part Eight – Deliver Us From Evil

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By Pastor Ricky Stephen**

Our Villain Origin Stories

Stories often follow deep, recurring patterns called tropes. One common trope is the, "Villain Origin Story." Many films, like *Joker*, *Maleficent*, *Cruella*, and *Wicked*, explore how essentially good people become twisted due to hardships like a wicked stepmother, loss or having green skin.

Life presents difficulties—Jesus warned us we would face trouble.

But why does suffering turn some people into Batman and some people into Magneto?

How do we keep our difficulties from becoming our villain origin stories?

Jesus gives us the option to pray: *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:13).

In prayer we turn to our Savior to deliver us from ourselves, our troubles and the evil one.

I. Deliver Us From Ourselves: The Flesh

Realizing how easy it is to ruin one’s life can be a sobering moment. There are countless ways to make destructive choices, even in an instant. Jesus warns:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

The road to life is narrow, with steep cliffs on either side.

Teenagers face these choices early. High school reveals diverging paths—some leading to life, others to destruction. Being a teenager is hard, and even those who stay on the right path have close calls. Augustine famously prayed, *“Lord, give me chastity and continence... but not yet.”*

In moments of temptation, there’s often a subtle nudge from the Holy Spirit. Honest prayers — *“Please keep me from doing anything stupid”* — are sometimes the most effective.

In teaching us to pray ‘lead us not into temptation,’ Jesus is inviting us to ask God for help. Our self-control isn’t totally in our control due to trauma, culture, head injuries or genetics. We need help resisting temptation.

Dallas Willard says to pray ‘lead us not into temptation is “...a vote of ‘no confidence’ in our own abilities.”¹

In Biblical language, we are being invited to pray for deliverance from our ‘flesh.’ John Mark Comer describes the flesh as, “*our base, primal, animalistic drives for self-gratification... our instincts for survival, domination, and the need for control.*”²

Praying for deliverance from our flesh is praying for deliverance from the idols we worship. Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas identified four primary idols: money, power, pleasure, and honor (see the ‘finding your idol’ exercise below). We should learn our primary idol and pray for help in that area.

In prayer we turn towards our Savior for deliverance from *ourselves*, our troubles and the evil one.

II. Deliver Us From Our Troubles: The World

Temptations are everywhere, but not all arise from selfishness or evil. Villain origin stories remind us that hurt people hurt others. God understands this and sees humanity as lost children, not enemies.

However, there’s also a danger in using past wounds as excuses. Christopher Nolan’s Joker in *The Dark Knight* tells different stories about his scars, highlighting that while we all have reasons, we are still responsible for our actions.

By teaching us to pray, “*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,*” (Matthew 6:13) Jesus is inviting us to pray about our scars and troubles.

But does God tempt us with evil?

“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.” - James 1:13-14

God is pure goodness and cannot be the source of temptation. It turns out there is another option for translation of the phrase in the Lord’s prayer.

The Greek word for *temptation* can also mean *testing*. As in, ‘lead us not into the test.’ As one Greek lexicon notes, testing means:

“...to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing.”³

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pg. 265.

² John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, pg. 111.

³ Louw and Nida, entry on *Perasmos*.

Jesus affirms hardship, *“In this world you will have trouble”* (John 16:33). Ecclesiastes echoes, *“All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest”* (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). While suffering is a mystery, it shapes people differently—some emerge refined, others embittered.

This prayer is about ensuring our hardships don’t define us negatively. Scars are inevitable, but how we wear them matters.

Darrell Johnson rephrases this prayer: *“Father, as you lead us into the test, do not let the test become a temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*⁴

The Father doesn’t always protect us from troubles. Sometimes, like Jesus, He needs to do something that puts us in the way of suffering. Sometimes, like Paul, He needs us to learn dependence in difficulty. Sometimes, suffering just happens and the reasons are a mystery.

But God isn’t like a mean teacher giving us a rigged test. He doesn’t like our suffering; He isn’t a sadist.

One way to pray about our troubles is to pray for protection, safety, health or healing. It’s okay to ask for safety and healing, but when trials come, we also pray they don’t destroy us.

Because - Prayer is turning to our Savior to deliver us from ourselves, *our troubles*, and the evil one.

III. Deliver Us From the Evil One

Evil like the Joker’s is rare but real. Some, like Alfred in *The Dark Knight*, believe a few people simply, *“...want to watch the world burn.”* History has its share—dictators, serial killers and sadists.

But how does someone move from childhood pain to mass murder?

In the Lord’s Prayer there is another translational difficulty. It could be ‘deliver us from evil’ or ‘deliver us from the evil one.’ Most commentators favor ‘the evil one;’ but, theologically both are true.

In Ephesians 2:1-3 we read about the three sources of evil: the world, the flesh, and the devil:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴ Darrell Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World*, pg. 99

Yes, evil occurs without spiritual influence. Through our fleshly desires or a sin-soaked culture, we can be driven from lashing out in pain to intentionally causing harm.

Also, Ephesians 2:1-3 suggests that before knowing Christ people, “...*followed the ways of this world...*” and “...*the ruler of the kingdom of the air...*”— a reference to the devil.⁵

Jesus calls the devil the, “...*father of lies*” (John 8:44). He uses lies to take us from lashing out in pain to intentional harm. The bullied kid believes the lie that they need revenge and becomes a school shooter. The politician seeking justice believes that they need compensation for their work.

He also doesn't fight fair. Many who perpetuate evil were victims in their history.

When we pray, “deliver us from the evil one,” we ask God to guard us from being used by evil.

Evil is already defeated. Colossians 2:15 declares that Jesus, “...*disarmed the powers and authorities...[through] the cross.*”

Spiritual warfare includes “authoritative prayer.”⁶ In Acts 16:18 Paul drives out a demon with the following language:

“...Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment the spirit left her.”

Authoritative prayer requires discernment. There are those spiritually gifted to understand what is going on in the realm of the ‘principalities and powers’ who will feel more compelled to pray this way. It also means being wise. In Acts 19 we read the harrowing tale of people trying to command spirits and being beaten for it. This is not to be done lightly.

Authoritative praying also requires remembering our authority is delegated. We do not command in our authority but in ‘Jesus’ name.’ ‘In Jesus’ name,’ means that we have been led by Jesus to pray this way, and that our command is consistent with God’s Kingdom and ways. Just saying, ‘in Jesus’ name,’ doesn’t mean it is Christian.

In prayer we turn towards our Saviour to deliver us from ourselves, our troubles and *the evil one*.

⁵ For more on demonology see our last sermon I last year’s Ephesians series titles ‘Stand (Pt.2). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wTi2VI_ngl&list=PLDNX1r3sbZrgTK8TBd8t_GKJUctQBpgM&index=17

⁶See Richard Foster, *Prayer*, ch. 20.

IV. You Have a Saviour

Jesus gave us the prayer, “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*” (Matthew 6:13). But:

“We...have to come to grips with the fact that Jesus gave this prayer to his disciples, but that when he prayed it himself the answer was 'No!...He would be the one who was led to the Testing, who was not delivered from Evil.’”⁷

Jesus bore the full weight of evil: the schemes of wicked men, the brutality of Rome and the depths of spiritual darkness. Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us He took on flesh to, “*...break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil...*”

We have a Saviour.

If we fall into temptation, He will pluck us back out.

If evil has us in His claws and the darkness is closing in, He will shine His glorious light.

If we give ourselves to Him, He protects us and delivers us.

Finding Your Idol:⁸

Aquinas identifies the four primary idols as: money, power, pleasure, and honor (the approval of people).

To find your idol, compare yourself to the average desire people have for the above things. Do you like money more or less than other people?

Eliminate the ones that count the least. So, if you don't care what people think more than others, honor might be the bottom.

Keep going until you have one left.

That's probably your idol.

For example:

I care what people think way less than others. Honor is my #4.

I have average self-control. Pleasure is #3.

I like money more than other people, but not way more. I try to have more of it and talk and think about it disproportionately. Money is #2.

But I want power. I have more power than anyone else I know, and I'm not satisfied yet. Power is #1.

⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*, pg. 50.

⁸ Adapted from Arthur C. Brooks, *Build the Life You Want*

Open Up:

Are there any places in your life you consistently pray for protection or against temptation? How and where did you learn to do that?

Dig In:

1. Take time to do the ‘find your idol’ exercise with one other person in the group or on your own. If it’s appropriate and there’s comfort, share your results.
2. What does it look like to pray faithfully through our hardships?
3. What places in your life need you praying for protection?
4. Have you had experiences of people using ‘authoritative prayer?’ How did you feel about it?
5. What would it look like to recognize spiritual reality—good and evil—in your praying?

Prayer:

Take time to pray for the three areas hardships come at us from. If you can share requests for protection, relief from hardship or spiritual reality, pray about those.