**Lead us not into Temptation**

James 4:1-10

Today we conclude our short series on prayer. Here is what we have covered so far:

Prayer is:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. A miraculous relationship
 | “Our Father in heaven” |
| 1. Worshipful communion
 | “Hallowed be your Name” |
| 1. Total surrender
 | “Your kingdom come” |

Prayer is first and always ***a relationship with our heavenly father***. It is possible because we have been adopted by the blood of Jesus, but we must never lose the wonder and awe that prayer is also IMPOSSIBLE because God is in heaven, exalted in wisdom, power and glory beyond our weak, sinful, selfish ability. “Our Father in heaven” ushers us into the presence of our loving, glorious God.

And we immediately acknowledge that ***He is Holy***, expressing not only that wonderful truth but also expressing our desire that more and more people would come to share in that knowledge - “Lord, may your name be honored as Holy - because it is holy!”

Then we pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” ***committing to Jesus as our King*** and surrendering to His rule and reign in us and through us.

 Prayer is:

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| 1. Daily dependence
 | “Give us this day” |
| 1. Overflowing grace
 | “Forgive us our debts” |
| 1. Spiritual warfare
 | “Deliver us from evil” |

Then prayer progresses to ***ask for our daily bread*** - which, we learned, is about asking for more of JESUS, who is the bread of life, than it is about asking for literal food and other needs. Our Father in heaven knows all that we need, but above all what we need is God Himself, and more of His Holy Spirit.

Last week Jason helped us connect our own forgiveness in Christ with the ***forgiveness and grace we give to others.*** As those who have been infinitely loved and completely forgiven, we must be channels of that same overflowing grace to others.

Finally, today we conclude with “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” We will see this two sided prayer is how we can cry out to God to ***rescue us from the evil INSIDE us and the evil OUTSIDE us***. So let’s take a closer look at this prayer for double deliverance.

Lord, Rescue us from the evil **Inside** us

“What causes quarrels and… fights among you? Is it not your passions at war within you?” James 4:1

***James is an immensely practical book*** - dealing with the realities of human relationships. Apparently there was some ongoing conflict among the believers James was writing to - which was common 2,000 years ago and remains common today. ***Where does conflict come from?***

* Why is marriage difficult? Why do husbands and wives have to work so hard on our relationships?
* Why do co-workers tend to butt heads?
* Why are neighbors and roommates sometimes annoying?
* Why do kids tend to fight with their siblings?

Say you were in my office as **a married couple** here is how it would probably go at first. There would be some finger pointing - “He did this…” “Yeah, well, she did this…” I would listen to try to discern the presenting problem and to help the couple peel back the onion to see the root problems underneath their surface conflict.

* Here’s the complaint: “He’s never home. And when he’s home, he’s still not there.”
* His response: “Yeah, I work hard to provide. She doesn’t appreciate how hard my job is. She doesn’t appreciate all the work I do on the house and car and yard.”

Now, is this couple fighting about **time management**? If we just sit down to compare their calendars and help them communicate to find a compromise on enough work time but maybe 4-5 dinners at home each week and only one late night at the office? The couple might be tempted to settle for that kind of “help.” But is that the help they really need? Obviously there is more going on than a little trouble of him managing time and her managing expectations. There is a lot more under the surface.

That’s where James takes us - **directly into the heart**.

“What causes quarrels and fights?” He does not say, “Your difficult circumstances.” He does not say, “Your work-obsessed husband,” or “your unappreciative wife.” Work is not the problem. ***Time management is not the problem.*** The problem that James puts his finger directly on is “YOUR PASSIONS that war within you.”

Our real problems - our deepest struggles - are not about our situations, but about **our HEARTS**.

Consider this when you pray, “Deliver us from evil.” ***What is the evil from which you most desperately need to be rescued?*** Is it illness or is it the fear in your heart? Is it your insensitive husband or the irritable selfishness in your heart? Is it your overbearing boss or the selfish ambition in your heart?

The answer from the Bible is - **the heart, the heart, the heart**. Passions, desires are at war within us. All the time. That’s the problem. If you diagnose the problem as OUT THERE you will never apply the solution that you need.

* **If the doctor gives you antibiotics** to treat an infection in your body you would be a fool to chop them up and sprinkle them in your yard or to make a paste and apply it to your wife’s forehead.
* Antibiotics must be ingested - because a problem INSIDE YOU needs a solution INSIDE YOU.

Of course, ***the problem is sin in our hearts*** and - Praise the Lord - the solution is the gospel! As we pray that the Lord would deliver us from the evil inside us, James gives us three steps to sincerely make that our prayer. The first is DIAGNOSIS.

1. Diagnosis: Temptation comes from our own evil **Desires**

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” James 1:13

Think about the phrase, ***“Lead us not into temptation.”*** We are praying that to our Father in heaven. Our loving, perfect, holy, entirely good Father. Do we need to pray that so that He remembers not to tempt us? Does God need to hear that so He’s like, “Oh, man, I almost forgot that I’m not supposed to tempt these silly humans!”

Of course not! **God CANNOT be tempted and NEVER tempts anyone**. We don’t pray to prevent God from doing something that He cannot and would not do. So what does this prayer mean? Where DOES temptation come from? Look at the next verse in James 1.

1. Diagnosis: Temptation comes from our own evil **Desires**

“But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” James 1:14

It is those sinful desires, those evil passions that are at war inside of me - that is where temptation comes from. And that is what we need God to save us from. “Lead us not into temptation by our own sinful desires. **Save us from OURSELVES**!” That is the accurate diagnosis.

1. Diagnosis: Temptation comes from our own evil **Desires**

“Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” James 1:15

What a vivid picture! ***Our sinful desires start like little tiny seeds.*** They incubate and wait for the opportunity to be conceived. What fertilizes that wicked egg of adultery? The flicker of desire for something forbidden. What fertilizes that evil egg of murder? The tiny spark of desire for control. What fertilizes that microscopic egg of robbery? The little flame of desire for more - more comfort, more security, more things.

***Once desire has conceived it has a life of its own.*** And left alone, it will start to grow. A passing thought, a little daydreaming, a small compromise. I knew a pastor who was eventually caught having embezzled over $10,000 from his church. They were never sure the actual total. It started with one purchase - a small one, I’m sure, down at the bottom of the receipt. Most of the purchase was legitimate church expense - but that last item was for his kids. He made a copy of his receipts anyway, so it was a very small step to fold up the bottom of the receipt and just cover up that last purchase. The first time I wonder if it happened accidentally.

But it went on - and I’m sure ***over time it got easier to do and easier to justify***. “The church doesn’t pay me enough anyway. It’s just a few dollars here and there. God wants my kids to be happy. He wants our family to eat.”

**DESIRE.** It grows in secret and then gives birth to sin. Sin, as it then grows and spreads, will take over like cancer and eventually kill you. In his case what it killed was his job and his career in ministry - damaging lots of relationships along the way.

***If you get the diagnosis wrong you will never get the treatment right.*** Your biggest problem is not outside of you, it is the sinful desires in your own heart. Admitting that is the first step toward change. And it leads to the second, from diagnosis to DECISION.

1. Decision: Forgive our sins, which we **renounce**

“But he gives us more grace… ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” James 4:6

***Confession must lead to repentance.*** Once you realize the cancer of sin in your heart, you should be ready to receive the treatment God has provided in the sacrifice of Jesus. His blood is the cure! But you have to receive the treatment by faith! You have to call on Jesus to forgive you.

**If you remain stubborn and proud**, God Himself will oppose you. Only when we humble ourselves, confessing our sins and turning away from them, can we experience God’s grace. That is true from the first moment of salvation to when you take your dying breath. Humble repentance is not a one time thing for the Christian - it is a daily thing, an hourly discipline. ***Don’t just repent - keep on repenting.*** Keep on humbling yourself under the mighty hand of God, so He can lift you up with His grace! Look at the promise in 1 John.

1. Decision: Forgive our sins, which we **renounce**

“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

***God’s promise is not just to forgive.*** Yes, praise be to His glorious grace, He forgives our sins and removes them from us as far as the east is from the west. All of your sin, past, present and future, is nailed to the cross and you bear it no more. But God’s grace not only forgives - it PURIFIES.

This is where C.S. Lewis compares God to a **DENTIST**. You go to the dentist with a toothache and all you want is relief from the pain. He may give you a shot of Novocain to dull the pain, but no decent dentist will stop there. He is going to drill into that tooth or remove the rotten tooth entirely. ***He finds where the decay has happened and works until it is gone.***

**This is SANCTIFICATION**. God continues to root around in our lives looking for decay and drilling into it until it is gone. He is committed to PURIFY us from ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. But we must humble ourselves to keep getting back into that dentist chair, accepting that the drilling is necessary and good for us.

God is not content to just clean up some of our more disturbing behaviors. He will not just polish up the outside of the cup or dish. He will not whitewash the outside of a tomb. ***God wants your HEART - every cubic millimeter of it.*** Diagnosis leads to Decision which must lead to DEVOTION. Actual change, that comes from the heart.

1. Devotion: Change our **Hearts** as you change our **Lives**

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:8

Desires grow into sinful habits. ***Habits become temples of idolatry***. Instead of loving and serving God, we love and trust and serve ourselves and the things of this world. We worship created things instead of the Creator. ***But God calls us*** away from that double-mindedness and away from that pollution of our love - ***to ONE LOVE, ONE MIND, Purity of Heart, single-minded, wholehearted devotion.***

How is this possible? We have to PRAY! We have to ask God to “lead us not into temptation from our own sinful desires!” We have to know our own sinful inclinations and the idols that are most enticing to us - so we can do battle with these temptations that would destroy us if we let them! We have to know our sin, so we can fight our sin with the power of the gospel. ***Only the victorious love of Jesus can bring this cleansing and internal change.***

1. Devotion: Change our **Hearts** as you change our **Lives**

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” James 4:8

As we pray “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,” **we are inviting God to change us.** We are begging Him to continue the work He started in us to help us draw closer to Him in love and to let go a little more of the world. And what a promise is here - if we will just take one step, ***God will take a bigger step*** toward us. If we will just turn away from sin a little, ***Jesus will weaken its hold on us***. If we will just pause for a moment to pray, ***the Holy Spirit will show us the way out*** so we can escape the temptations we are facing. For there is always a way out!

But don’t miss this ESSENTIAL DETAIL. This is a **CORPORATE PRAYER**. It is not, “Lead ME not into temptation,” it is “**LEAD US** NOT into temptation.” We desperately need each other in our struggle with sin. We all have bilnd spots, so we need other believers to help us know our sin and get the diagnosis right. We need one another to kindle hope that change is possible and the work is worth it.

***God is PERFECTING US!*** He is making us more and more into the image of Christ. This is slow, painful chipping away at our remaining sin in our hearts. But as we pray - individually and together - the Lord graciously helps us see more of the sinful desires at war within us. His kindness leads us to repentance and a deeper experience of His grace as we confess and repent. And He continually works to change our hearts so we love HIM more than we love ourselves and this world. That’s what it means to pray “Lead us not into temptation.” First, it is calling on God to rescue us from the evil INSIDE US. But it is also engaging in the spiritual battle with the forces of evil OUTSIDE US. We will touch on that briefly.

Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” Matthew 6:10

Temptation mainly comes from the passions and desires at war within us. But there are also dangers around us. We often think of our enemies as “the world, the flesh and the devil.” The flesh is what we have dealt with so far - those sinful inclinations and desires inside us. ***So now we turn to the world and the devil.***

***How can we live pure, holy, undefiled lives*** in a dark, sinful, idolatrous world? How can we resist the schemes of the devil, avoiding his traps and guarding ourselves against his fiery arrows? ***Part of the answer - a big part - is PRAYER.*** The entire Lord’s Prayer, as our model, is a protection from the evil inside us and the evil around us. “Deliver us from evil,” recognizes that GOD is the only One who can protect us. On our own, we are no match for the devil and his army of demons.

***Next to JESUS, the devil is a tiny ant*** - utterly powerless next to the complete authority and unsurpassed majesty of the divine SOn of God. But next to you and me - the devil is the giant dragon, the terrifying enemy. On our own we are no match for satan. But in Christ, we are equipped for the battle. Jesus has not left us defenseless. And, of course, Jesus Himself is WITH US in the battle - which is a huge reason why we need to pray - ***so we remember who we are and WHOSE we are.*** We pray to our Father in heaven - we are His children! Jesus is our brother. The Spirit of the Almighty God lives inside us. We walk in the power and authority of Jesus Himself.

But we walk in a dark, sinful world. Listen to verse 4, which exposes the danger of IDOLATRY.

 Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

* Idolatry: the world’s many voices and **Counterfeit** gods

“You adulteress people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” James 4:4

When we love the world more than God; when we worship and serve created things rather than the Creator, that is called idolatry. We usually don’t bow down to little statues, but our idols are no less disgusting to the Lord. ***Our God is a JEALOUS God*** who envies intensely and will not share His glory with another.

***Idolatry is spiritual ADULTERY.*** It is unfaithfulness to God. Obviously, this is true of “the big sins” like physical adultery, murder, theft. But it is also true of the internal sins - lust, greed, vengeance, gluttony, selfishness, pride. And it is even true of good things we turn into GOD THINGS.

* **Work** can become your functional god if it is the main thing you think about, the main thing you love, the main thing that gives life meaning and fulfillment.
* **Family** can become your functional god. Your wife and kids can become idols to you if you love and serve them and find yourself neglecting your time with God, your service in the church, your outreach in the community.
* **YOU** can become your own functional god. By default, because of the sinful desires in our hearts, we tend to worship and serve ourselves. If you don’t actively work to expose this idolatry you will find plenty of voices in the world who tell you to bow down there and just go all the way - because “it’s all about you” and “You deserve it” and “treat yo-self” and “learn to love yourself,” and “take some me-time.”

These are the worldly, ***self-focused messages that our culture SHOUTS*** - constantly. If we don’t slow down to pray and saturate our hearts and minds with Scripture, those voices will begin to gain traction in our lives. “Lord, deliver us from evil!”

***Are you FRIENDLY with the world right now?*** If you evaluate what you fill your mind with - is God truly your God? Or are there some cultural idols that you secretly love and worship? James says it again:

 Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

* Idolatry: the world’s many voices and **Counterfeit** gods

“Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” James 4:4

***God is at WAR with all pretenders to His throne.*** He will not let an idol stand in your heart or mine. He will always seek to knock that thing down. The world will tell you to rebuild that shrine, but the Holy Spirit will come back in to tear it down.

***Whose side are you on in this battle?*** Are you on God’s side, fighting against the idols in the world and the idols in your heart? Or are you placing yourself on the side of the WORLD and making yourself an enemy of God? Are you working AGAINST God’s purposes for you? This takes some serious reflection, prayer and honest dialogue with another believer who knows and loves you.

**Honestly pray this week**, “Deliver us from evil, and consider the voices you are most susceptible to believe and listen to in the world. Those are false gods, those are idols demanding your worship - seeking to seduce you and call you away from the One True God! And as you pray, remember ***we are in a cosmic war*** with spiritual forces we cannot see but that are absolutely real and powerful.

 Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

* Warfare: the devil’s **Personalized** attacks

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” James 4:7

This is a vital truth and promise for us to hold onto in the battle: ***if we RESIST, the devil must FLEE!***

The devil comes to you, dressed as a shiny bright angel, and ***whispers softly in your ear the LIE that you really want to believe***, in your flesh and based on the worldly idols that you like best.

* “You deserve this”
* “You need this”
* “You don’t need God. You don’t need church. You don’t need the Bible. You really don’t need to pray.”
* “You’ve got this.”

These are LIES - by the way.

But if you hear a lie often enough, you will start to believe it. ***And the devil is no dummy. He studies you.*** He has his best minions watching you - learning what works best on you. The devil’s attacks are personally customized for each one of us. Yes, he runs very similar plays. But he times them and sets them up with YOU in mind.

**If you let down your guard**, the devil is like Cooper Cupp and he will find that opening in your defense and race through it. (Sorry, Cooper, I’m sure you’re a very nice guy. But you’re a villain in Tampa right now.)

Brothers and sisters, ***we are not unaware of the devil’s schemes!*** We know that he prowls around like a hungry lion looking for someone to devour. We know he lays traps all around us. We know that his primary tool is DECEPTION - and he is EXPERT with it. “Did God really say…?” Is his favorite question. “Is it really a big deal?” is his follow up.

So pray. “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil!” **RESIST. Stand firm.** ***Read Ephesians 6 this week*** and pray through the pieces of armor the Lord has given us so we can stand. Jesus has left you a well-stocked armory - but He doesn’t put the armor on for you. You have to suit up every day. So - soldier of the Lord - suit up! Dress for battle. Because it is a battle. And only a foolish soldier would enter the battle alone. Lock arms with a couple of other Christian friends - form a huddle - so you can stand firm and stand together! Live together. Die alone.

Let’s conclude today with **two hopeful realities**. Yes, it’s a war - but it’s a war that already has a Victorious Warrior.

 Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

* Courage: Jesus has already **Won**

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Colossians 2:15, NIV

***Jesus broke the power of canceled sin.*** He set the prisoners free. The devil was crippled by the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is a defeated enemy who is fighting a retreating action. Jesus established the Normandy Beachhead at the cross - and we are pressing forward through the hedgerows of the devil’s fortifications.

So, brothers and sisters, ***“Be strong in the LORD and in HIS MIGHTY POWER!”*** You are not alone in the battle! Jesus, the triumphant Warrior King is our Champion and He has already won! He is with us every step of the way. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him and He is the One who has sent us out on our mission to the nations. Jesus is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against us, because we fight WITH JESUS and FOR JESUS!

And one more promise to remember: Our Warrior King is coming back soon!

 Lord, rescue us from the evil **Outside** us

* Hope: Jesus is coming back **Soon**

“The God of peace will soon crush satan under your feet.” Romans 16:20

When Jesus comes back, ***He will lead the armies of heaven*** and the hosts of believers from all the ages - with the martyrs in the front - and all of the enemies of God will be immediately thrown into the lake of fire.

Jesus is right now **seated at the right hand of God** the Father in glory - waiting in that position of honor and power for the day when history will be complete, and He will return - and then all of His enemies will become his footstool. Until then, the battle continues, and we must continue to fight.

But we know that victory is certain - because ***our Victorious King is coming back soon!***

***So, let’s pray boldly, confidently, joyfully together*** - “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” knowing that the Day is coming - and it is coming soon, when the Lord Jesus will complete the DELIVERANCE He began on the cross! He will drive out the last remnants of sin, suffering, evil and death from our hearts and from this entire world! “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”

Let’s pray.

1 Peter 5:8-11 benediction