

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

9: Lead us not into temptation.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

This line of the Lord's Prayer can feel a little confusing – why would God tempt us to do things wrong? Why would he ever lead us into temptation? Why would we have to ask him not to tempt us if he is a holy and loving God?

As we will see in our first bible study God would never tempt us in this way. But we can easily allow ourselves to be tempted, and perhaps the prayer is asking God to help us with this – to help us to deal with situations which are very tempting to us but are wrong, and damaging and hurtful to others and to ourselves.

*Or perhaps the line is not speaking about being tempted in the ways we normally think about temptation but is really thinking about being **tested**. As we will see later Jesus was tested in the wilderness as he tried to work out his vocation. What was the right way for him to live and act? Perhaps this line of the prayer is asking God to help us and be with us when **we** are tested about how to live and how to act. Perhaps it is asking God to be gentle with us and to protect us from situations we will find too difficult or where we will make bad choices.*

Some questions in twos before sharing, if you are able to, with the whole group:

- What do you think about what is written in the introduction above? As you have said this prayer over the years, how have you thought about this line in the prayer?
- Do you think God would ever tempt us or test us? Do you think he helps us when we are tempted or tested?
- When you have a big decision to make – especially one that might affect you and others in a significant way – how do you go about making it?

Our first bible passage is from the book of James. In this passage James speaks both of temptation and testing but is clear that temptation to evil would never come from God. He does, nevertheless, see resisting

temptation, and dealing well with testing, as being part of Christian development, and this can feel quite challenging! Please read the passage through and then reflect on it together. As usual the questions at the end may help you.

James 1.2-5,12-18

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 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, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole? What strikes you or puzzles you?
- How do you react to the thoughts about enduring temptation?
- *The book of James can sometimes feel a bit "blunt" and a bit unforgiving. This passage seems to speak about having to "get it right and then we'll flourish!"* How should we think about the times we get it wrong; when we give in to temptation; when we make mistakes?

In the next passage we are going to reflect on the very well known passage when Jesus is tempted, or tested, at the beginning of his public ministry. After you have read the passage through, please reflect on the

nature of these three testings. Why these three? What is going on? What is Jesus wrestling with? How does he deal with each of these temptations? The further questions at the end may help to guide you discussion.

Luke 4.1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written,
"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you",
and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." ' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

- What are your reactions to the passage as a whole?
- Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness?
- What is significant about the three temptations – why does Jesus wrestle with these three things in particular?
- What does this incident teach about Jesus?
- Are there things in this passage which might help us when we are tested or tempted?

*It is important to remember that at the heart of the Lord's prayer is **forgiveness!** We are all human and we all succumb to temptations and we all let God and each other down in all sorts of ways. But please remember that forgiveness and grace is central to the Christian life and to Jesus' teaching! But in this last passage we are going to reflect on the life-giving joy that comes from a life that makes choices, however inadequately, for living God's way and allowing God to live in us. Please read the passage and then reflect on it together. Once again, the questions at the end may help.*

Galatians 5.16-end

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

- What are your reactions to this passage as a whole?
- *When Paul speaks about the flesh he is thinking about very human desires which are often very easy to give in to and damage community.* What do you think about the two ways of living? Do we live somewhere between the two?
- The fruits of the Spirit are perhaps a reflection of the very qualities of God. How might we invite the Holy Spirit to more fully a part of our lives?

Closing Prayer