

**INTRO:** I heard a story once about a man sent to prison for a hit and run death. He was driving along a road at night, and when he realized he had run over someone, he floored it and drove away. He was eventually caught and what made the crime even worse was that the medical investigation showed that if he had stopped right away and called for help, then the person’s life might have been saved. While he was in prison, a reporter interviewed and asked him why he had done it, why he had run. And the man said he had thought a lot about it and he had this explanation.

He said that when he was a boy, his father had a gold pocket watch that he kept wrapped in a handkerchief in the top of his chest-of-drawers. One day when his dad wasn’t around, he got the watch out to look at it, and he dropped it and broke it. So he wrapped it back up, put it in the drawer and didn’t say anything. Some time later his father discovered and called all the children together and asked them who broke the watch. But the boy still didn’t say anything, and his dad never found out. He got away with it.

He told the reporter that became the pattern of his life. Whenever I did some little thing that was wrong or embarrassing, I never admitted it, never owned up to it, always hid the truth. Eventually that became my character. It became who I was. So when the big test came, when honesty and facing up to what I had done was literally a matter of life and death, I responded as I always had. I failed the test, and it destroyed me.

The Lord Jesus knows that life is full of tests, big ones and little ones. And the only way you are going to get through them is if you seek God. If you regularly pray, Lord, deliver me from evil in the tests of life. I’m going to come into these tests. Don’t let them destroy me. Deliver me.

We’ve noted the past two weeks that in the second half of the Lord’s Prayer, Christ is teaching us the importance of praying for ourselves. The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are about God. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.

The last three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are about us.

Give us our daily bread. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation. This word “temptation” is a Greek word that has a number of related meanings.

Sometimes is translated “test” and sometimes “trap.”

And you can see how those things are related.

Because a test can also be a trap. It depends on how prepared you are.

Sometimes teachers will give a pop quiz. What’s the purpose of a pop quiz?

It’s to find out if students are mastering the material as they are going along. Teachers know that there are always students who are procrastinators.

And if the only time they are tested is on dates they know about in advance, they won’t keep up, they’ll just cram at the last minute.

So teachers give a pop quiz—and that test reveals what’s inside the student.

If they’ve been studying all along, then the test is actually an encouragement—but if they haven’t, then that test becomes a trap.

And morally speaking, if you’re nurturing evil.

If you’re nurturing deception or cowardice or lust, when a test come along, then it becomes a trap and reveals what’s inside.

So Jesus is teaching us the importance praying:

Dear God, don’t let my tests, the inevitable tests of life, become traps.

Deliver me from evil in the tests of life.

I know they’ll come, but don’t let them devour me.

Don’t let me be sucked in. Don’t lead me into them.

Tests are sure to come. What are they going to reveal about you?

And how does praying about them help you as a Christian?

Three ways. I’ll give them to you as we go.

But before I say anything else, I want to give credit where credit is due.

Most of what I’m going to say comes from a wonderful sermon on passage by Dr. Timothy Keller, former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC.

**MP#1 The first way to deal with the tests of life is to expect them.**

Christians, of all people, shouldn't be surprised by the tests of life.

They shouldn't come as a total shock.

Jesus mentions them in the Lord's Prayer.

And since the Lord's Prayer is a model for how we are to pray every day—  
not the exact words, but the structure and themes—

Jesus is conditioning us to see tests and trials as an expected part of life.

Jesus is saying: I expect you to be constantly praying about them and seeing them.

Oftentimes we don't even see little tests, because we don't think of them as tests.

We think they're irritations.

Why is my boss making such unreasonable demands?

Why is my spouse so hard to live with right now?

Why are we struggling to pay the bills this month.

But they aren't irritations, they're little tests. Jesus wants you to see them that way.

Opportunities to respond with patience, compassion, or courage.

Ways to move you along, ways to make you more mature, mastering material.

And what Jesus is teaching in this passage is that through prayer,

you are enabled to see the irritations of life as little tests of character.

But Christians are not only supposed to expect the little tests, sometimes big tests.

In Ephesians 6, the famous armor of God passage, Paul says:

Put on the full armor of God, be alert to Devil's schemes so that what?

“So that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground.”

He's saying that in every Christian life, there are going to be evil days.

Days when you are hit with big tests and temptations.

Expect them. Be ready for them. Don't be caught off guard.

The Apostle Peter says the same thing in chapter 4 of his first letter.

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering  
as though something strange were happening to you.”

It's a command: Do not be surprised.

If you let yourself be surprised, that can weaken you.

How can this be happening to me? Why is this happening to me?

That surprise and the confusion can actually be a big part of what casts you down.

But Christians shouldn't be surprised. Jesus said, pray about it and expect it.

One day in your work you might be faced with a major moral dilemma.

You know you have to stand against it or expose it, but you also know that it will be in your best interests to sweep it under the rug.  
And it really bothers you that you're actually struggling over this.

Or you might help somebody financially, or give them a chance, at great cost to yourself. And this person gives every indication they are going to make good. But they violate your trust and you're surprised how easy it is to be cynical.

Or maybe it's a loss you suffer. You've wanted to accomplish something, but because of a relational loss or financial loss or health loss that dream dies. And you are shocked at the bitterness that wells up in your soul, and how tempted you are to become critical and jealous.

What's happening? Evil days. Painful trials. Christians have them.

And though you might be surprised and disappointed by your response to them—you should never be surprised by the trials themselves.  
The reason most people are surprised by trials is that they have a simplistic and naive view of life. Good people have good lives. Bad people have bad lives. And, of course, most people put themselves in the "good people" category. Then real life happens. And good people have bad lives and bad people good lives. And it throws them into confusion and the worst comes out.

But Christians see life in a completely different way.

We see it through the cross. We have a cross-centered view of life. Jesus was the best man ever. He lived a perfectly good life—and what did he get? He got the worst life. He was rejected and mocked and crucified. He was subjected to terrible trials. But out came resurrection and eternal life.

That's the message of the cross.

The seed goes into the ground and dies before it sprouts and produces fruit.

The ore is crushed and refined in the fire and out comes gold.  
From death comes resurrection. From sacrifice comes redemption.  
From the cross comes the crown.

If you're still shocked when bad things happened, you don't understand the cross. Jesus said pray: Lead us not into temptation—expect it, prepare for it.

He was the best and he got the worst and he says—follow me.

**MP#2 The second way to deal with the tests of life is to know that the real enemy is evil, not pain.**

The enemy is not the circumstances, it's not your pain and suffering—it's evil.

If we only had the first part of this petition.

If it was only “Lead us not into temptation,” we could get the impression that we’re just being taught to pray, God, get me out of this situation.

Don’t ever let me be tested. Keep me out of trouble.

It’s certainly to ask the Lord to change your circumstances and get you out.

Don’t ever hesitate to ask him that.

But second part of the petition shows what you’re really after.

The second half of the petition restates and expands the first—

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

In other words, the way we pass the test and gain victory over temptation

is not just by getting out of a bad situation, it’s by avoiding evil in the situation.

Jesus is saying that the only thing that can really hurt you in the tests of life is sin.

Tons of suffering can’t hurt your soul, but one ounce of sin can devastate you.

When coal goes under pressure, it turns into a diamond.

When tests come upon you, if you respond with honesty, compassion, faithfulness, will just turn you into a diamond. It’s not the circumstances that are the trouble.

If you respond with impatience, dishonesty, unfaithfulness, bitterness, selfishness—that’s what will hurt you. will ruin you.

So it’s not the circumstances that are the problem.

If you’re under stress and you think the problem is your circumstances.

You’re wrong. You need to pray. Lord, help me to obey.

And if you obey, then you’ve won.

Eventually, in God’s good time, the pressure will come off, circumstances will ease, but as long as the pressure is on, if you are obeying, you’re becoming stronger.

I had an Old Testament professor in seminary, Dr. Phil Long.

Once during a lecture he got off track for some reason and said:

Men, some of you are going to be in wealthy churches, where many of your church members will be much better off than you are.

If God calls you to a church like that, you must be on guard against envy.

Be on guard against coveting and envying the lives of your wealthy parishioners.

You might think that won’t be a temptation for you, and it probably won’t

when you are you are young and idealistic, but when you hit middle age,

when you perhaps have some financial pressures, it will be a temptation.

If you fall into it, it will hurt you and your ministry.

Then, after that short rabbit trail, he was back to his lecture.

It was one of those things you could easily forget but the reason I remember it is because I knew of Dr. Long's father. He was also Dr. Long, Dr. George Long. And he was, for over 20 years, the pastor of a very wealthy church— Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. (I've heard that Lookout Mountain is the wealthiest community in Tennessee. There is more money there, even than Brentwood.)

When Dr. Long the pastor came to Lookout Pres in the mid 1960s, it was a spiritually stagnant country club church.

But after he had been there 10 years, in 1975, there was a true revival. People still talk about it—the Holy Spirit woke people up and saved people, and that church is still today, decades later, a vibrant, Spirit-filled church. When I was in college, I would sometimes go to Lookout Pres to hear Dr. Long.

So when Dr. Long, my professor, made that comment about the temptation of ministers to envy rich church members, and I knew all that history, I realized that it must have been something that his father had shared with him. Dr. Long, the pastor, must have faced that temptation. There must have been a season he struggled with it. Probably some particular circumstances that brought on the temptation. But he had a glimpse of how destructive it would be if he gave in to that sin, so he prayed for protection—and the Lord heard his prayer. That was very interesting to me. It gave me an insight I didn't have into one of the particular temptations of the ministry.

But my point is that the thing you ought to fear most of all, in whatever trial you are facing, is that you will sin against God. Worry about that.

Make that the focus of your prayers. Lord, get me out of this situation.

But if you choose to keep me in it, please, deliver me from evil.

Don't let me fall, help me to be faithful.

If you are going through a test right now, what are the sins connected with it?

Self-pity? Bitterness? Immorality? Bring those to your Father in prayer

That brings us to the third point:

That brings us to the third point:

**MP#3 The third way to deal with the tests of life is to look at them through the love of your heavenly Father.**

We've noted all along that we can break the Lord's Prayer up into parts for study,

but we also have to look at it as a whole. Every petition has to be understood in terms of the opening words Jesus taught us to pray—  
Our Father in heaven, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
Whenever you pray, you have to remember your adoption.  
You have to remember you are a beloved son and co-heir with Christ.

So how does the love of your heavenly Father and your sonship change the way you look at and pray about the tests of life?  
There are basically three ways that people react to fiery trials and evil days.  
You will probably see yourself in one of these reactions.

Some people respond with angry despair  
I've been a good person. I've worked hard, served God. I don't deserve this.  
Some people respond with guilty despair.  
I'm a terrible person. It's all catching up with me. This was bound to happen.  
Some people harden themselves, become indifferent and cynical.  
Life stinks. I don't care any more. There's no use trying.

When suffering happens, and it will. When tests come, and they will.  
You can give in to angry despair, guilty despair, or cynicism—  
or you can be a Christian.  
A Christian is someone who knows that he is an adopted child of God,  
because of what Jesus Christ has done for him.

A father doesn't adopt a child because the child resembles him and has already displayed the character and values of the family.  
No. A father adopts a child to make him a part of the family.  
He adopts a child because he hopes to instill in him the character and values of the family.  
The motive for adoption is not the character qualities of the child, it's the good pleasure of the parents. It's what they want to because of love.  
And that's exactly how the Bible describes our salvation!  
It's beautiful.

Ephesians 1 says that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in him before the creation of the world, in love he predestined us to be adopted as sons.  
Why? Was it because he saw we were inherently good or because we had faith?  
No. Paul says it was in accordance with his pleasure and will and for the praise of his glorious grace.  
He chose us because he was pleased to do so through Christ whom he loves.

When you look at the tests of life through your adoption, it changes everything. If you tend to respond with angry despair—I don't deserve this!

You understand that what you really deserve is to die and go to hell.

Because you know you are a sinner and know the guilt of your sin.

That completely undermines your tendency to shake your fist at your Father and say—This is not fair.

But on the other hand, if you tend to respond with guilty despair, you look at your adoption and know God doesn't hate you. You are his beloved son or daughter.

So you know your suffering is not punishment for your guilt

If God was punishing you, you would be dead already.

It's part of his good plan for you.

And adoption gets rid of your cynicism. Life doesn't stink. It isn't pointless.

All fathers hate to see their children suffer.

But sometimes they let them hurt for a time to accomplish things.

A good father has his reasons, and God is a good father.

Look how he treated his eternal son Jesus Christ.

He sent him through fiery trials and dark places to accomplish redemption.

When Jesus was baptized, God said from heaven:

“This is my beloved son in him I am well pleased.”

Immediately after that the Spirit lead him into the wilderness where he was tempted

And that temptation came roaring back three years later in Gethsemane.

God the Father allowed that for his beloved Son.

And Jesus passed the test for you. He went all the way to the cross, so that you can be a beloved, adopted Son of God.

That's how you have to look at your suffering.

I've told you this story before, so please excuse me.

I have an aunt and uncle who for years have been members of a church in North Carolina that is the home church of the Billy Graham family.

Ruth Graham was a member and it's where all the Graham children grew up.

It's called Montreat Presbyterian Church. We worshipped there a few weeks ago.

When Ruth Graham died back in 2007, after her funeral, there was a small reception for family and church friends.

People started telling stories about Ruth Graham.

One funny story the Graham children told, that my aunt and uncle said brought



down the house, had happened just a few months before. The family was all together and their father, Billy Graham, started talking about his various aches and pains and health problems. And finally Ruth said, “Billy, shut up and die like a Christian.”

That’s the point I’m trying to make. I just don’t have the guts to say it so bluntly. You have your aches and pains—your fiery trials and evil days.

Face them as a Christian.

That means you expect them. You aren’t surprised.

You pray about them and know they’re coming.

Jesus had them, and a servant is not greater than his master.

And remember that the enemy is not your pain, the enemy is evil.

It’s sinning against the love of your Father in the trial.

Pray for God to get you out, but mostly pray for strength to obey.

And look at everything you are going through in terms of your adoption as a son and the love of God the Father. Adoption secured for you by Christ, who was tempted for you, and passed the test even when you fail.