

Deliver us from evil

People once commonly believed the world was becoming a better and safer place, but few hold that view today. Watch almost any television news channel and you will see reports filled with some of the worst kinds of news—evidence of evil at both corporate and individual levels. The Bible says *'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?'* Jeremiah 17:19.

1. Temptation

What does it mean when the Lord's prayer says 'lead us not into temptation? It is confusing but the New Testament was written in Greek and the original word for 'temptation' has two meanings:

'Sin'. We should remember that Scripture says, *'When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone'* (James 1:13). Therefore, this cannot be the intended meaning here.

'Testing'. The phrase can therefore be understood as, 'God, if you lead us into testing, deliver us from evil.' James also writes, *'Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything'* (James 1:2–4). Testing will therefore come our way, helping us mature and grow in faith as we trust God through the hardships we face.

2. Desires of the flesh

Our natural desires are not always godly and can lead us into sin. It is wrong to blame everything wrong onto Satan even though originally sin entered the world through him. Paul writing to the church at Galatia mentions some of these desires which draw us away from God.

'So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want' Galatians 5:16-18.

'The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God' Galatians 19-21.

Paul knew something of this struggle: *'For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?'* Romans 22-24.

The answer is found in Christ: *'Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!'* Romans 7:25.

'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things' Philippians 4:8.

When we think wrong thoughts we need to immediately distract ourselves from letting them embed themselves into our spirit by get some exercise, take a cold shower, speak in tongues, play with your kids, put on cheerful or praise music. It's all part of the battle.

3. Confrontation with powers of darkness

John Maxwell comments 'I believe the evil one watches for the right time to attack Christian leaders, and he is especially active before an advance for God's kingdom, after a victory, and when a leader is just plain tired' (Partners in Prayer Pg 83).

Evil may arise from direct *Satanic or demonic* activity. Jesus experienced this in Matthew 4:3-11, but He conquered every time through the power of the Spirit and speaking out pertinent Scriptures. Three times He experienced this. For example:

'The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'".

Psalms 1 endorses the same principle of meditating on the importance of God's Word. *'Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night'* Psalm 1:1-2.

When returning from a holiday I put this principle into practice of meditating on God's Word. I received an anonymous letter. It was like a curse. However, this curse had no resting place with me, so I accepted by faith this verse *'Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest'* Proverb 26:2.

Ephesians has much to say about 'spiritual warfare' and Christians wanting to grow in their faith will experience this and especially those on the front line of attack like pastors and Christian workers.

'You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross' Colossians 2:13-15.

There are many ways of ministering to the oppressed with Jesus. However, in the way of spiritual oppression the following are some ways to note:

Some points to note:

1. Never counsel a person of the opposite sex unless another person of the same sex is present.
2. It is useful to have another trusted person ministering with you and the one seeking help.
3. Jesus ministered with lots of compassion, as we should too. it's not about us simply trying out some technique on people.
4. We are to uplift and magnify the name of Jesus.
5. Never assume that mentally ill people are troubled by a demonic influence. Ongoing medication is necessary and the ministry approach used should be low key. Never ever encourage a person to come off medication unless they first have their doctor's approval.
6. Never assume that ongoing counselling is inappropriate. People who have been abused usually need wise, ongoing counselling with a skilled counsellor.
7. If a person disrupts a worship service because of some unwanted behaviour it is helpful to remove them to a side room and to pray with them there. Unhealthy disruptions are a distraction.

'He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners' Isaiah 61:1–3.

Disclaimer: This article is intended to encourage and equip Christians through biblical teaching and practical application. It reflects the author's understanding of Scripture and is not intended to replace the careful personal study of God's Word, prayer or the counsel of wise and mature Christian leaders. Any comments on medical matters are provided for general information only and should not be regarded as professional advice.