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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”**  
Matthew 6:13

□ {Mt 6:13a} **“And lead us not into temptation.”**

What are we saying when we pray this? *Is it a request for* {Mt 6:9} **“Our Father in heaven”** *not to entice us into sin?* It sure sounds like it!

→ Yet sin is all in thought, word and deed that is contrary to the will of God. The idea that God might **“lead us”** where he does not want us to go is absurd. What is more, it would violate God’s self-revelation, for {1 Jn 1:3, 5} **“This is the message we have heard from” “his Son, Jesus”:** **“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”** For that reason **“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).

Matthew 6:13 simply cannot mean the way it sounds.

So, *what are we saying when ask*, **“And lead us not into temptation”?**

It helps to remember that Matthew never heard, spoke or wrote our word “temptation.” He was working in Greek, and there is not always a precise, one-to-one correspondence between words in different languages.

📖 Such is the case here. The noun *πειρασμος* [peirasmos] that is translated **“temptation”** has two basic definitions: As in English, it can be an appeal to commit a sin; but it can also be a circumstance that puts us to the test (a situation that proves or disproves, fortifies or undermines our character, beliefs and resolve). For that

reason, we might well pray: {NRSV} **“Do not bring us to the time of trial,”** {JB} **“Do not put us to the test,”** or {TEV} **“Do not bring us to hard testing.”**

In daily life, as in Scripture, these meanings intertwine. A virus strikes and, bam! Self-pity and irritability come knocking on the door of my heart: it is my old man urging me to sin. But that same illness provides me an opportunity to substantiate and strengthen my profession of *αγαπε* [agape] love.

This is not limited to hardships. For example, I have never played the lottery the statistics show that winning big is, at best, a mixed blessing. Instant millionaires are easy prey for sins of pride, materialism and sensuality. Their high rates of bankruptcy, depression, addiction and divorce confirm that sudden wealth is, in fact, a test – one which many fail.

☼ **“Lead us not into temptation”** is an appeal for God to keep us from sinning *and* to protect us from situations that would expose our fatal flaws.

That clarifies the literal sense of these words. But *why* **“And lead us not into temptation,”** *when* {Heb 12:2} **“the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”** *was ferociously tempted and fiercely tried?*

■ {Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13} At the beginning of his public ministry **“Jesus [is] led by the Spirit into the wilderness”** and stays there for **“forty days and forty nights,”** fasting from food and human contact. He is rigorously tested by his Father and brutally **“tempted”** (there’s the verb form of *πειρασμος*) by the devil.

I used to imagine that the hunger and heat did not get to Jesus, that the loneliness was not painful, that Satan's attacks were easily deflected. I was wrong: {Jn 1:14} **"When the Word became flesh"** he embodied every human attribute except our inherited sin nature. Heb. 2:18 explains that **"he... suffered when he was tempted"**; and it is for that very reason **"he is able to help those who are being tempted"** (who are subject to *πειρασμοσ*).

Why pray **"And lead us not into temptation,"** when {Heb 12:2} **"the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"** was ferociously tempted and fiercely tried?

■ The next documented assault comes when Jesus feeds a crowd of more than 5,000. {Jn 6:14-15} **"The people [begin] to say, 'Surely, this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they [intend] to ... make him king by force, [withdraws] again to a mountain by himself."**

○ Notice the parallels with the 40 days: the first temptation occurred in **"the wilderness"** (the *ερημον* [hereemon]), and so did this one: Jesus withdraws **"to a ερημον place"** (Matthew 14:13), and the disciples say, **"This is a ερημοσ"** (Matthew 14:15).

○ In the first {Mt 4:3} **"The tempter"** (the *πειραζων* – **"came to [Jesus] and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'"** In this one Jesus miraculous provision of bread convinces many doubters that he is the Messiah.

○ In the first, Satan {Mt 4:8-9} **"showed [Christ] all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I**

**will give to you,' he said, 'if you bow down and worship me.'"** In this one, the crowd wants to compel Jesus to take control of Herod's kingdom.

This is a hard temptation! Would it be so wrong to depose wicked Herod and take the crown (by popular demand!), liberate Israel, and reform the world? Imagine what good King Jesus could accomplish from Israel's throne! Yet he declines. His mission is not to commandeer existing political, economic and military structures from the inside, but to replace them from the outside.

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■ {Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46} At the climax of his ministry Jesus tells his disciples to {Lk} **"Pray that you will not fall into temptation,"** (into *πειρασμοσ*) – and then he confronts his most stringent temptation and testing yet. Three times he pleads: {Mk} **"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me."**

I used to imagine that the Lord enjoyed unruffled inner serenity, and that he acted as if he was distressed for our benefit. I was wrong: he told Peter, James and John {Mt, Mk} **"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"**; Luke records that **"being in anguish, [Jesus] prayed"** so **"earnestly ...his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"**; Hebrews 5:17 says that in Gethsemane Jesus **"offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears."**

Why pray **“And lead us not into temptation,”** when {Heb 12:2} **“the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”** was ferociously tempted and fiercely tried?

*Is it a promise that {Mt 6:9} **“Our Father in heaven”** will exempt us from all difficult temptation and strenuous testing for the asking? Some say it is. But what does the Word of the Lord say?*

→ **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”** (2 Corinthians 4:8). What is that, if not temptation and testing?

→ **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials”** (that’s the plural of πειρασμος) **“of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”** (James 1:2-3).

→ **“Blessed are those who persevere under trial”** (πειρασμος) (James 1:12).

→ **“In all this you greatly rejoice, though... for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials”** (you know that word!). **“These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine...”** (First Peter 1:6-7).

→ **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal”** (πειρασμος) **“that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening .... But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ”** (First Peter 4:12-13).

☼ Holy God {1 Co 10:13b} **“is faithful;”** he never tempts us to sin, and **“will not let us be tempted beyond what [we] can bear”**; still, he does allow us to be tempted.

As for testing **“he will provide a way out so that [we] can endure it.”** But while that can imply escape, it often involves perseverance. Indeed, tribulation seems to be one of God’s preferred tools for our growth.

🔔 So, why pray **“And lead us not into temptation”**? Two words: trust and humility.

☼ We pray **“lead us not into temptation”** because we *trust* that **“Our Father”** pursues us with perfect love, even in πειρασμος – and in *humility* we realize that we habitually wallow in self-centeredness and self-hatred, especially when tempted and tried.

☼ We pray **“lead us not into temptation”** because we *trust* that **“Our Father”** patiently welcomes our cries for mercy and help in πειρασμος – and in *humility* we recognize that we often remain silent, not for any good reason, but out of fear and disbelief.

☼ We pray **“lead us not into temptation”** because we *trust* that **“Our Father”** clearly sees πειρασμος as the threat and blessing it is – and in *humility* we confess that we have a history of rushing headlong into dangerous temptation and retreating from constructive testing.

☼ We pray **“lead us not into temptation”** because we *trust* that **“Our Father”** knows exactly

how much *πειρασμος* we can bear before knuckling under to sin or defeat – and in *humility* we admit that we are prone to misjudge our limits, with disastrous results.

✪ We pray “**lead us not into temptation**” because we *trust* that “**Our Father**” has power to protect us through *πειρασμος* by fortifying our bodies, minds and souls – and in *humility* we acknowledge that our strength is insufficient.

✪ We pray “**lead us not into temptation**” because we *trust* that “**Our Father**” has the power to protect us from *πειρασμος* by evacuating us from it, or preventing it in the first place – and in *humility* we accept that we are helpless to do so.

In short, we pray “**lead us not into temptation**” because God is God, and we are not!

**“And lead us not into temptation.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.