

The petition, **'Lead us not into temptation'**, reminds us all that life is full of dangers. There are snares everywhere to trip and trap us so we might be ruined. (Psalm 141:9) *'We are beset before and behind by temptations and cannot throw them off.'* (Luther) We can't ignore them. None are immune! Temptation intensifies as we grow older. The mature apostle Paul said: *'Who will save me from this body of death?'* (Rom 7:24) and, *'I live a life of hourly danger.'* (1 Cor 15:31 Phillips) Not less but more trouble is the real Christian's experience. We are persecuted for our beliefs. We are pressured to conform to the world's ethics. Don't be surprised about your tough times! (1 Pet 4:12) Some people misuse Scripture to promise a life of comfort and ease. Moses' words: *'If you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you'* (Psalm 91:9-10), are often held up as an absolute guarantee against physical, financial or emotional pain, ignoring many other psalms that lament the fact that harm definitely comes to us. Derek Kidner says, *'This is a statement of exact, minute providence, not a charm against adversity.'* It is a promise that everything that comes to us, including trials, is part of God's Fatherly care. He will keep us safe, and he will keep us to the end. ***'Christ suffered...follow in his footsteps.'*** (1 Pet 2:21) On faith's front line *'we must go through many hardships for the kingdom.'* (Acts 14:22) The pattern of the Christian life is *suffering for a little while and glory after.* (1 Peter 1:6-7) Like the Psalmist we *'walk in the midst of trouble'* (Psalm 138:7). Just as he prayed: *'Protect me from wicked people who attack me, from murderous enemies who surround me'* (Psalm 17:9) so we pray: *'Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from the Evil One.'* (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4) The Greek word **peirasmos** means 'temptation' or 'test', and both simultaneously depending on the context. A **test** is hard and challenging and has a positive purpose. When Paul says, *'even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself'* (Galatians 4:14), he means that his illness, although a real trial to him, revealed how genuine was the love of the Galatians for the apostle. James writes: *'Consider it pure joy...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.'* (1:2-4) **Trials** come from God to prove our faith, holiness and character. (Luke 22:28; Acts 20:19) **Temptations** are also trials but they have a negative intent: to entice to sin, whether arising from the devil, sinful desires (James 1:12), or outward circumstances. (Luke 8:13) *'God cannot be tempted and neither does he tempt anyone'* (James 1:13) He does use adversity to test *'the genuineness of our faith'* (1 Peter 1:6) and our maturity. (James 1:4) *'Lead us not into temptation'* acknowledges that we naturally shrink from suffering. We're not to be masochistic. We must guard against misunderstanding God's way of maturing us. Holding wrong perspectives about our trials can lead us to doubt God.

Wrong perspectives about our trials arise from **pride**. God 'must' act in the way we think best. We set the terms God must satisfy in order for us to follow his leading.

**'Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.'** (Matt 4:1) Jesus was led into the arena of testing. If anyone understands **why** we face testing; **what** to do with feelings; **how** trials strengthen faith and secure future - it is Jesus.

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.'* (Heb 5:7-9)

Trials teach us to obey and pray; to offer our tears and trust to God to bless others. A Roman victory parade is Paul's way to show how pain is a gift from God for others.

*'Thanks be to God who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.'* (2 Corinth 2:14)

**'Spare us Lord, but if trials must be, give us strength to come through victoriously.'**

**'The Lord does know how to rescue the godly from trials'** (2 Peter 2:9) All that happens is for our good, to make us more like Jesus. (Rom 8:28-30) Nothing can separate us from God's love. (Romans 8:38-39). God won't let us be tested beyond what we can bear, but provides a way for us to endure.' (1 Cor 10:13) Without testing we can't develop moral muscle or strong faith. In all our weakness God promises us His strength. (2 Cor 12:9-10) We need to synchronize our trials with God's nature and with our real need of God? Jesus sang Psalms 113-118 before he suffered on the cross. Helmut Thielicke writes:

*'If any among us are at their wits end they ought to try to put aside all their grievances and even their petitions, and simply praise God in order to turn their hearts to the end of the ways of God. **Nothing changes us so precisely so much in the darkest moments of life than praise of God.** During WW2 a German man, through his calm composure, inspired peace in many people. What was his secret? In the most frightful moments of an air raid he stopped praying and continued only to praise. That lifted him clear of the spell of those ghastly moments, and looking beyond those seconds of mortal terror he saw the vast expanse of eternity and the end of the ways of God. **His songs rose high above the sirens.** We can praise a man only when we have seen what he accomplishes. But we must praise God in order to see what he accomplishes. **Therefore we should praise him at the very moments in life when there seems to be no way out.** Then we shall learn to see the way out for our own lives because God is there at the end of every way and every blind alley.'*

*'Those who sacrifice thank offerings...I will show my salvation...I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.'* (Ps 50:23; 51:16)

*'Everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction and not happiness. If it were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our existence the result would make life too trivial to be endured.'* (Malcom Muggeridge)