

LEAD US ONTO LEVEL GROUND

Psalm 143

I. WHY DO A SERIES ON HOW TO PRAY?

A. TO SERVE GOD MORE EFFECTIVELY

1. FIVE GOALS

- Share the gospel
- Disciple the next generation
- Touch the city
- Train ministers
- Reach the world

2. EFFECTIVENESS

- **Ph 4:13**—*I can accomplish all things through Him who strengthens me.*
- **Jas 5:16**—*The effectively powerful praying of a righteous person can accomplish much*

B. FOR OUR BENEFIT

1. To know God better
2. To meet our own needs
3. To help others

C. BEING CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

1. Obeying His command—**Lk 18:1**—we should **always pray**—and never lose heart
2. Becoming like their Master—Christ-like
3. Following His example—He prayed continually

II. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT PRAYER

- ❖ **DRAW CLOSE TO GOD—WE HAVE SPECIAL ACCESS—TO “OUR FATHER”**
- ❖ **INTERCEDE URGENTLY FOR AND WITH EVERYONE WE KNOW**
- ❖ **FOR GOD’S PEACE UPON OUR COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORS**
- ❖ **BE INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE AMIDST TURMOIL**
- ❖ **OUR WITNESS WILL BE GODLY AND DIGNIFIED**
- ❖ **FAITHFULLY PROCLAIM CHRIST AS THE TRUTH**
- ❖ **WORK WE WILL EFFECTIVELY RECLAIM THE LOST**
- ❖ **THAT THE FATHER WILL SHOW HIMSELF IN A MIGHTY WAY**
- ❖ **BE HUMBLE—“NOT TO US, O LORD”—GLORIFY HIM ABOVE ALL**
- ❖ **STAND BOLDLY FOR HIS SUPERNATURALITY**
- ❖ **TESTIFY TO HIS HOLINESS—BE HOLY LIKE HIM**
- ❖ **HELP CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN THE HOLY AND THE HUMAN**
- ❖ **CALL UPON NAME OF THE LORD—PROVISION—PROTECTION—SALVATION**
- ❖ **URGENCY ABOUT CHRIST’S RETURN—BEING READY AND WORKING**
- ❖ **HELP BUILD HIS UNIVERSAL KINGDOM—NOT PETTY FIEFDOMS**

- ❖ **BECOME** WHO HE MADE US TO BE—AND **DO** WHAT PLEASURES GOD
- ❖ BE AWARE **HIS HEAVENLY WILL** IS FOUNDATIONAL, ETERNAL AND SUPREME
- ❖ ASK GOD TO KEEP US IN HIS **PERFECT WILL** EVERY STEP OF THE **WAY**
- ❖ ASK GOD TO REVEAL HIS **SPECIFIC PURPOSE** FOR EACH OF US HERE AND NOW
- ❖ HELP GOD ACCOMPLISH HIS **HEAVENLY WILL** ON EARTH
- ❖ WE DON'T WORRY, BUT **RELY** ON GOD FOR **ALL** OUR PROVISION
- ❖ WE DISCOVER WHAT OUR REAL **NEEDS** ARE
- ❖ WE TRUST THAT **GOD TRULY CARES** AND WANTS WHAT IS BEST FOR US
- ❖ WE EXPERIENCE A **SALVATION** THAT **BEGINS** WITH AND IS **SECURED** BY GOD
- ❖ WE **HUMBLE** SEEK GOD'S **FORGIVENESS** TO CANCEL OUR **DEBTS**
- ❖ WE DESIRE GOD'S **PRESENCE** TO CLOSE THE **GAP** AND RESTORE OUR **JOY**
- ❖ **NO SIN IS TOO GREAT—NO DEBT TOO BIG**—IT CANNOT BE FORGIVEN
- ❖ BECOME **FORGIVING** PEOPLE—BECAUSE WE CARE FOR OUR NEIGHBORS
- ❖ **INTERCEDE** WITH THE FATHER FOR **OTHERS'** FORGIVENESS

III. LORD'S PRAYER—verse 13

Mt 6:13a—And lead us not into temptation

A. WHY EVEN PRAY THIS?

1. SEEMS NO NEED TO DO SO—GOD TEMPTS NO ONE!

Jas 1:13—Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

2. ANSWER—LOOK AT MEANING AND CONTEXT OF 'TEMPTATION'

- a. 'Temptation'—πειρασμος—is **neutral** = trial—test
- b. Root meaning = from 'to **assay**' [**gold/forensics**]
—to determine quality/worth/value
 1. Can be **positive**—produces good results—proves item worthy
 2. Can be **negative**—produces bad results—proves item worthless

Ex: actual values of coins

- **Nickle** 74%
- **Penny** 53%
- **Dime** 14%
- **Quarter** 14%
- **Half-dollar** 14% [**most actual worth**]
- **Dollar** 4%

- **1942-5 Nickel—most valuable = 17x face value**

- c. Usage in New Testament—two contexts

- Positive—'trial'

- Negative—‘temptation’
- d. May lead to process that improves—makes it better—or ‘right’
 - **Bells are machined**
 - **Piano is tuned**
- e. Passing ‘test’—may lead to negative side-effects!
 - **Passing audition—winning contest—but cannot handle fame**
 - **Ex: Susan Boyle**

3. YES—GOD TEMPTS NO ONE—**BUT**

- **But** He **allows** trials/temptation—for many reasons
- **But does He** ever *lead* us to temptation?

B. GOD DOES LEAD US ‘TO BE TEMPTED’!

❖ ‘To be tempted’—not—‘into’ the temptation itself

1. **Abraham—to sacrifice Isaac**
2. **Jesus—Holy Spirit took Him to wilderness—in order to be tempted!**
3. **Jesus—before crucifixion—facing greatest temptation of all!**

a. After meeting the ‘Greeks’

Jn 12:27-8—Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, “Father save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father glorify Your name.

b. After Lord’s Supper

Lk 22:28—You are those who have stood by Me in My temptations.

c. His **prayer** in Garden

Mk 14:36—Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me! Yet, not what I will, but what you will.

C. WHY GOD LEADS US ‘TO BE TEMPTED’

1. **Build character**—through exercise of our will/choice

- Innocence is not goodness
- ‘Good’ results only by facing bad and exercising character/will

2. **Grow** in faith and perseverance—**James 1**

- Trying of faith—produces perseverance
- Perseverance produces endurance
- Endurance makes us ‘perfect’—‘complete’—what God intends us to become

3. Win **victory**—that achieves something for God—[like Jesus on cross]
4. Set **godly example** for others—witness
5. **PROSPERITY** and BLESSEDNESS
 - a. With prosperity comes temptation
 - o **Israel—going into Canaan—‘perils of prosperity’**
 - b. If we ask for “no temptation” at all—then we are asking not to prosper!

D. PRAYING NOT TO FACE TEMPTATION

1. God *might* answer this prayer—occasionally
 - Especially—if He knows we cannot withstand it!
2. Why God does not *usually* do so—certainly *not* always
 - a. Robs us of choice—exercising our will to please Him
 - b. Stunts our growth
 - c. Keeps us from fully serving Him
3. Conclusions
 - a. The ‘ideal’ is not for us never to face temptation
 - b. Sometimes God puts us in the path of temptation/trial
 - c. Then we have no option but to face temptation—we cannot walk away!

E. SO—WHAT IS THIS PRAYER ABOUT?

1. Probably not asking *never* to face temptation
2. Certainly not—“**don’t lead us into temptation**”—as in some versions:
 - **NKJV/NET**—**And do not lead us into temptation**
 - **HCSB**—**And do not bring us into temptation**
3. *Key point* → LEAD US!
 - a. Walk ahead of us!
 - o Do not abandon us!
 - o Especially—when we are headed for temptation
 - b. Lead us—**not** this way → **into** temptation
 1. Don’t let us ‘enter *into* temptation’—to ‘fall *into* temptation’

2. Lead us in your ‘right’ way—so we can go ‘through’ temptation
 3. Protect and strengthen us—so we can resist—not succumb to temptation
- c. **NLT** is close: [And don’t let us yield to temptation](#)

o Better—[And lead us—not to yield to temptation](#)

4. How this fits ‘temptation’ in **James 1**

Jas 1:14—*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust*

- a. Jesus’ prayer asks God—to stop us from being “carried away . . . enticed”
- b. Instead the Father “leads us **not**” into sinful action—but to right action

F. SUMMARY—THIS MEANS:

1. Walking humbly—but confidently—with God
2. Expecting God to challenge and stretch us
3. Not avoiding danger—but *risking* it all for Him—and with Him
4. Not flirting with temptation—assuming we can defeat it alone

Ex: ministers who think they are *above* temptation

Ex: Bob Harrington—chaplain of Bourbon Street—testimony

5. Depending on God to protect and guide—directing us through danger
6. Trusting God to deliver us—not *from* the challenge—but *through* the trial
7. Jesus was telling us to seek—God’s **protection** and **direction**—in our daily walk

* * * * *

IV. PSALM 143—DAVID’S PRAYER FOR PROTECTION AND DIRECTION

1 *Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness!* **2** *And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous.* **3** *For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in dark places, like those who have long been dead.* **4** *Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart is appalled within me.* **5** *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands.* **6** *I stretch out my hands to You; my soul longs for You, as a parched land.* **7** *Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails; do not hide Your face from me, or I will become like those who go down to the pit.* **8** *Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up*

my soul. 9 Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take refuge in You. 10 Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground. 11 For the sake of Your name, O LORD, revive me. In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble. 12 And in Your lovingkindness, cut off my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.

V. EXPLANATION

A. GOD'S PROTECTION

1. DAVID BEGINS WITH AWARENESS OF **DESPERATE NEED**—WHEN FACING TRIAL

- v3—soul is persecuted—life is crushed—dwelling in dark places like the dead
- v4—spirit is overwhelmed—heart is desolate
- v7—without you my spirit fails—like going down to the pit

2. DAVID'S TWO **REMEDIES**

a. **First** remedy—before anything else—He seeks **God's presence**

- v6—stretch out my hands for you—my soul longs for you
- v7—answer me quickly—do not hide your face from me
- v8—let me hear your mercy in the morning

b. Second remedy—He seeks **protection** and **deliverance**

- v8—I trust in You
- v9—Deliver me—I take refuge in You

3. THREE DIVINE PROMISES WHEN FACING TRIALS/TEMPTATIONS

a. God is **present**

PS 46:1,11—God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

b. God is **able** to deliver

II Pe 2:9—The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation . . .

c. God **promises** to deliver

I Cor 10:13—No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

4. OUR RESPONSIBILITY—WATCH AND PRAY

a. After praying in the Garden—for His Father's will to be done

b. Jesus Himself—while facing temptation—exhorted Peter and the other disciples

Mk 14:38—*Keep watching and praying, that you may not fall into temptation; the spirit is willing but the body is weak.*

B. GOD'S DIRECTION

1. CONTEXT OF LORD'S PRAYER

- a. *Thy will be done on earth*—**Mt 6:10**
- b. We do His will on earth—by obeying Him
 - o By obeying Him
 - o Not 'falling into temptation'
- c. So—we must be *taught* His will—be *shown* His 'right' direction

2. DAVID SEEKS GOD'S DIRECTION

10—*Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.*

3. WALKING ON 'LEVEL GROUND'

- a. Meanings—of 'level'
 - Hebrew = 'straight'—'flat/plain'—'upright'
 - Greek LXX = 'straight'—'without delay'—'without detours'
- b. Encompasses three ideas
 1. Walking **straight**—following directly behind God—*wherever* He takes us!
 2. Walking **upright**—in a godly manner
 3. Walking **without delay**—immediate obedience to God
- c. More than following laws
 1. Laws do not *prevent* temptation
 - o They define its boundaries
 - o And expose our sin
 2. Legalistic devotion to laws—is a deadly temptation!
 - o **EX: Pharisees**
- d. But follow God *Himself*!
 1. First—know and obey His law—do the 'right things'
 2. But also—understand and fully do His will—do 'things right'
- e. David tells us how to do this us—**ask** God to *teach* us
 - o **His will**—**v10**—*Teach me to do Your will, for you are my God*

o **His way**—v8—*Teach me the way in which I should walk*

f. Be prepared to go *wherever* He commands—even into the face of trial/temptation

C. GOD'S COMMISSION

1. WHY WALK ON 'LEVEL GROUND'

- To **please** God—obey Him—and do His will
- To **avoid** 'falling into' temptation—harming others and offending God
- To **protect** ourselves—for our own good
- To **lead** others—onto level ground

2. KINGDOM IMPLICATIONS

- a. Jesus prayed—"thy kingdom come"—then—"for thine is the kingdom, power, and glory"
- b. Our kingdom responsibility—to **lead** others into the kingdom
- c. By setting the example—in the face of 'trials' and 'temptations'

3. Isaiah's passage similar to **Psalm 143:10**—[lead us onto level ground]

Is 40:3-4—*A voice is calling, Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become **straight**, and the rugged terrain **level**.*

- a. This prophesied John's commission—quoted in all four Gospels
- b. We are commissioned to do the same!
 - John **prepared** the way for Jesus—so should we!
 - John **endured** trials—so should we!
 - John **pointed** others to Jesus—so should we!
 - John **straightened** the path—for salvation—so should we!

VII. INVITATION

HIGHER GROUND

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Refrain:

Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven's tableland,

A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where those abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heav'n I've found,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."