

The Parchment

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Lead Us Not Into Temptation

As we begin the New Year, I've noticed how pessimistic people are as they look back. For example, many magazines on the racks, as well as news programs on television, described the difficulties of the last decade and year. They speak of 9/11, the economic recession, and the loss of the American Dream and way of life. Everyone can think of ways in which recent times adversely affected their life or the lives of those close to them. I can look back on the last year, even ten, and think about health crises, difficult moves, and trials with the kids' activities and schooling. In the midst of life we will face our share of temptations and struggles.

When Jesus teaches his followers how to pray, he teaches them to petition God to "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" when they face the inevitable personal struggles that come from living in this world (Matthew 6:13). The same word (*peirasmos*) can be translated as "trial" or "temptation" in the New Testament, depending on the context. The idea is that the very trials meant to build up our faith can also become opportunities for temptation to turn away from God. In this way, temptation can become a trial in itself as we struggle in our weakness to follow God righteously.

This year we can have the attitude of seeing our trials and temptations as a means to grow in faith and prayer instead of something to avoid or deny. James teaches believers to see their trials as a source of joy because they serve as a way to reveal and refine faith (James 1:2). They also become a constant reminder of the need to pray for strength and deliverance in the midst of the battle. To paraphrase, when we are faced with personal weakness and temptations, we can pray, *"Father, as you lead us to the test, do not let the test become a temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. You know that we cannot hold up under pressure—help us follow You by Your strength alone."*