

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL LORD'S PRAYER 8

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“Where there is life, there is hope!” Have you heard that expression? Where there is life, there is hope! Even if the situation looks really, really bad, even if it looks like there is no possible way out, while there is still life, there is the possibility that the situation can improve.

I read about a woman who lost control of the car she was driving in the hills east of Los Angeles. Her car plunged 200 metres down a steep ravine, disappearing from view. Nobody knew where she was. She was unconscious and badly injured.

However, her car's security system was activated by the accident, and it notified the police. The police went to the location indicated by the GPS, but the car wasn't there. They searched the surrounding area, but there was no sign of the car or the woman. Then the system reported that the car was in downtown San Jose. Again, there was no sign of her.

Later the woman's family reported that she hadn't come home. The police officer tried using her iPad. Eventually he guessed her password. Then he opened the app “Find my iPhone”. This app is mostly used when the phone is under a pile of laundry or has slipped down a crevice in the sofa.

This time the phone was pinpointed to a remote location. The Fire department was unable to remove the car from the steep ravine. Early next morning a helicopter lowered a medic. Eventually they were able to get her out of the car and airlift her to hospital. While there is life, there is hope!

You will remember Jesus' words in John 14:6, where he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Wherever Jesus is, there is life, wherever life is, there is hope! St Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 1:3,4 “God gave us new life by raising Jesus from death. This fills us with a living hope, and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them in heaven, where they cannot decay, or spoil, or fade away.”

So, because of Jesus, we have hope for the future. You may ask, though, about the present. Is it only all pie in the sky, by and by, when I die? What about when I am having a terrible time at school – nobody notices me except to pick on me. Or when I have just split up with my partner? Or when my only grandchild is diagnosed with leukemia? Can we have hope for the present, too, or is all of our hope only for after we die?

In those verses from St Peter, we heard of a ‘living hope.’ It is something we have now, because of the new life that we received through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus is victorious over evil. Therefore, God can deliver us from evil in the present day.

Because he is the victor, Jesus invites us to call on God's power in the 7th Petition, "But deliver us from evil." We ask that God would deliver us from evil now, in the present day, and that he would deliver us from evil forever, when we die.

Martin Luther explains deliverance in the present day this way, "We ask in this inclusive prayer that God would save us from every evil to body and soul." Note that Luther includes our bodies in this prayer. I get the impression that some people believe that the body is inferior to the soul and impure. In this view the body is subject to appetites, while the soul is above all that and therefore pure.

This view is a misunderstanding of how God made us. God made the first humans perfect in body and soul. When Jesus came to the earth, he came with a human body, not an invisible spirit. In his body, he died and was resurrected.

Likewise, when we are resurrected, it is our bodies that are made alive, changed to be like Christ's glorious body. So, we don't despise our bodies, as if they are worthless. In this petition we are asking that God would save us from the devil's attacks on our bodies, as well as our souls. God, please protect us from sickness and disease, from fire and storm, from famine and conflict.

I think that nearly all of us can recall a time when if things had been just a little bit different, we wouldn't be here now. You might have heard me recount the time I fell asleep at the wheel of my car late at night. To the left was a steep drop of several hundred metres. To the right was a very large tree. My car was damaged, but I didn't get a bump or a scratch. Just a few feet one way or the other and the story would have had a different ending.

Remember that severe earthquake in Nepal about 10 years ago? The earthquake caused an avalanche in the mountains. At Everest Base Camp, 30 or so climbers and porters were killed. One of my best friends was there the day before the earthquake. One day later, and who knows what would have happened to him.

Sometimes God's deliverance is different than these dramatic events. Sometimes God delivers us not in a miraculous intervention, but in miraculously giving us the courage and trust we need to deal with trouble or disaster. Maybe God didn't spare me last year from getting COVID, but nor did he spare me from the love and support of family and friends while I was ill.

If you have experienced either form of God's deliverance from some form of trial, I reckon the experience can enrich you in two ways. Many of us live busy lives. Some things we say are important to us get shuffled lower on the list of priorities, as we attempt to be superman or superwoman.

When something seriously interrupts our lives, when things don't go at all according to plan, then we have the perfect opportunity to stop and think. I've got my plans for my life. What are God's plans for my life? Maybe God has got different ideas about what my priorities are.

Other questions could be “Does how I spend my time and my money match up with what I say is important to me? Has my faith grown and matured, or am I still stuck where I was when I was confirmed? In some cases, this opportunity to reflect and reassess has been so profound for some people that they actually thanked God for the trouble that befell them.

The second valuable form of enrichment I can think of concerns our empathy for those in trouble. It is difficult to really stand alongside someone in the midst of their travails when your own life has been untroubled and unchallenged. All the nice words you say might be said with the best of intentions and quite true.

But when these words come from someone who has had to learn this truth the hard way, then you can feel not so alone. Your experience might not be exactly the same as theirs, but you get the feeling that they have an idea of what sorts of fears and emotions you are facing.

For instance, I have read stories by a number of medical doctors and specialists who completely changed the way they treated patients. Did they undertake some whizz-bang professional development that revolutionized their bedside manner? No, they got sick themselves!

When they were on the trolley awaiting the anaesthetic prior to a big operation, they suddenly understood what their patients had been saying for all these years. In the same way, God can use the woman who has had a miscarriage or suffered domestic violence, or the man who has been laid off work, or the teenager who is going through awkward changes at puberty, to show understanding and empathy for those going through similar troubles.

God can and does deliver us from evil. Who knows how many times God has intervened to spare us from harm? When evil does strike, and we turn to God for help, God can bring something good out of evil, something good for us or good for the people around us.

We keep praying this petition because we keep meeting evil in this world. Friends, isn't it wonderful to know that there will come a day when evil will be no more. So, we pray in this petition that God would sustain us in faith until our last hour draws nigh.

Then death, which came into the world as the result of sin, becomes the door for us to enter our heavenly home, the place Jesus has prepared for us where there will be no more tears or crying, no more pain or suffering. Then we are set free of evil forever.

Dear heavenly Father, deliver us from evil. With Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life, we have hope. Amen.