

DEVOTIONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER – *These devotions were shared by the pastor in July of this year and they have been gathered together as a series. The Lord's Prayer is a great tool for strengthening our prayer life, as it sets out the model for prayer taught by the very Son of God.*

7/6/2020

The Lord's Prayer

Jesus does something amazing in the Sermon on the mount right around chapter six. He not only talks to us about how important it is to pray, but he trains us to do so as well. For centuries the church has used Matthew 6:9-13 as a guide for prayer.

We have prayed it in our church word for word as a prayer in and of itself. When we pray in this way it takes on a special holiness because we are praying the very words that Christ taught us to pray. The level of connection is high, the traditions of the church are strong in the word-for-word usage, and it connects many of us to the timelessness of our faith and of our place in the church.

Christians have also used it as an outline, taking each piece of the prayer and expanding on it. When you pray the Lord's prayer in this way you treat it as a map highlighting all the aspects of a good and spiritually healthy prayer. All across the ages many Church fathers and mothers have walked slowly through this prayer phrase by phrase and gained much wisdom and insight in doing so.

Let's just start with the simple word-for-word version today. The prayer is included below, and I encourage you to pray through it 3 times today. As the next week or so of devotions unfold we'll be walking through it line-by-line and using the thoughts of many throughout church history as our guides.

But for now, may God bless you as you pray the prayer Christ taught us to pray.

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one. Matthew 6:9-13*

7/7/2020

Matthew 6:9

Our Father in Heaven...

In the book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, there is a beautiful and awe-inspiring scene of worship shared. It's a picture of worship *in heaven* before the very throne of God. There are so many details in this description and all are so very full of meaning but let me draw your attention to just one of them in chapter 5 verse 8

When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Many interpreters view these 24 elders as the full representation of the work of God on earth. That is to say it's 12 plus 12. It's Tribes-of-Israel + Apostles-of-Jesus, or Old Testament plus new, or Israel plus the church. If that's the case then *one of the twenty four* is representing you, and holding a bowl that *contains your prayers* which rise continually in the presence of God.

Your prayer makes it that far! Your prayers are continually heard, continually known in the presence of the most Holy God. So when we begin our prayer with the simple, and often overlooked address of "Dear God", or the more formal "Our Father in Heaven." Perhaps we should take a moment right there to stop and reflect:

God is about to listen to me...

What a gift! What a Holy and precious gift! Your creator is about to hear your prayer, you are about to share your heart with God, what comes next from your lips will be heard in the very halls of heaven itself. It will not only be heard there, but it will be heard by a God who is most good, most just, and who very much loves you... so much that God invites you to use the title "Father" when you pray!

The next time you begin your prayer, just pause, at the start, just after the address. Take a moment to contemplate the true miracle that is about to happen. Prayer is one of the most amazing gifts that God has given us.

7/8/2020

Hallowed Be Your Name. –Matt 6:9–

Holy is a word that is often misunderstood in church. It is the root word for that famous church word “hallowed” meaning that God’s name is Holy, or something like “may your name be Holy”. And yet as often as we throw “Holy” around in conversation it is a challenge to pin down exactly what it means, so let’s talk about that for a moment:

When the Bible uses the word “Holy” for a person, item, place, or thing it is a word of ownership. It’s a way of saying that _____ (person, place or thing) belongs to God. To be Holy is to be dedicated to God, to the service and pleasure of God, to be one that walks in the ways of God, or an area where God is, or was, or will be.

Holiness therefore is the ultimate goal of the Christian as they work out their discipleship, their following of Jesus Christ, their walking in the way. We try to take each facet of our life: our gifts, talents, possessions, relationships, and more, and we dedicate those things to God. It’s a lifelong process that is called sanctification (another fancy church word – meaning: the process of becoming Holy).

In the prayer “Holy” is used to describe another possession of God -- his name. May the name of God be special, and unique, belonging ONLY to God. May nothing on earth ever be like it. May nothing be confused with it. May it inspire awe and reverence always. Hallowed be the Name of God: a name that you and I are privileged to carry, to use, to speak aloud. May the Holiness of God’s name be reflected in our lives. May people look upon us and say “That one belongs to God”. May God’s name be set apart from all others, set above all others, and may it be the name that will cause every knee in heaven and on the earth and under the earth to bow. Hallowed be Thy Name.

It’s a statement of power, of Holiness, and of the very nature of God. What a great way to begin a prayer!

7/9/2020

Your Kingdom Come... --Matthew 6:10—

In the final moments of the story of Jesus, when Christ appears, arrested, before the Roman governor Pilate, it is the Roman governor who is frightened at first. And this is because there is a claim of kingship over Jesus. He has been accused of claiming to be king of the Jews. For Pilate this is a sticky situation because if Jesus is an *actual* king then Pilate has a sticky political situation on his hands. So he tries to find out the truth when he interrogates Jesus in the gospel of John (ch 18).

Christ's response is as puzzling to Pilate as it has been to Christians throughout history. The words of heaven are not always easily understood. "I am a king." Jesus essentially says... "but my kingdom is not of this world." And then goes on to insinuate that *if it were*, this would not be a good day for Pilate.

Thy Kingdom Come is a potent and powerful prayer. We literally ask for heaven to invade earth. One could call it a warfare prayer but I would be careful with that language. The Kingdom of Heaven has never demonstrated any strong desire to take the world by force. Christ's kingdom works differently than that. A place is prepared for us, and we will be there one day... so what does it mean to ask that heaven invade earth in the here and now?

I believe it's a whole lot of prayers all wrapped into one:

- It's a prayer of blessing – there are no pandemics in the Kingdom of God
- It's a prayer of justice – there is no racism in the Kingdom of God
- It's a prayer of deliverance – there is no sin, no addiction in the Kingdom of God
- It's a prayer of righteousness – culture leads to goodness, not depravity in the Kingdom of God
- It's a prayer of relationship – we desire to be closer to God
- It's a prayer of power – We invite God to be our sovereign

It is this and more, and as the Lord's prayer continues, we will express our own desire to *be a part* of the arrival of heaven on earth. We accomplish that each day with each Godly action, and we anticipate the day when the Kingdom of God has come!

7/10/2020

Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. —Matt 6:10—

Now we're getting into the more challenging portions of the prayer. This next section is about God's will. We have praised God's Holy name, we have asked for God's kingdom to come, and now we get more specific and ask for God's will to be done.

Literally we say: "I want it to go in my life, here on earth, the way *you* want it to go God."

Which means we are also saying: "Don't let it go *my way*."

SO MANY Christians pray this part of the prayer without considering the resounding gong that it can be within our own souls. If it's going to be GOD'S WAY then it *won't be our way!* But we love to be in control, we want to be the architect, the orchestrator of all that we do. We have plans, we have planners, calendars, schedules, lives, jobs, practices, and a million other things going on. We've got this.

Have you ever considered how odd it is that we pray this prayer as taught by Jesus but then so very often live quite the opposite?

To pray "thy will be done" is to invite God to *teach us* what exactly is the will of God. It is to open ourselves up to the guidance, direction, and way of God in our lives. It is to be willing to sacrifice what leads us away from God, and embrace what draws us near. Usually those are not the things we would like to be sacrificing and embracing, and yet when push comes to shove the Christian must always face that question: *My way or God's way?*

Be bold in your prayers when you say *thy will be done*. Continue to grow in your understanding of what it means to walk in the way of God and learn the will of God... and when it comes to it, may we set down our own way, and take up the one that leads to life.

7/30/2020

Give us this day our daily bread. —Matthew 6:11—

Oh what a challenging passage to pray this one is. It is *not* just about food and it is still friendly to the gluten-intolerant, because this passage is bread-as-a-metaphor for (quite simply) **all-the-things-we-NEED**.

Need, not want. Need, not crave. Require, not desire. And on and on... How many times have we entreated to God to give us something that we did not truly need? And how many times have we anxiously worried that God would not provide us with the basics? Only to later learn that provision was on its way and all we required was patience and trust.

The mature Christian who is able to trust God to provide for them the same way that God provides for the grass in the field and the sparrow in the air... that is a person who is free to do the work of God, free to seek the will of God, because they trust in the Lord to provide what they most need. They also trust God to *know* what they most need, better than they do themselves.

Give us this day our daily bread... is a bold prayer of trust and assurance. God you know what I need, and I trust you to provide it. May we be gifted with the wisdom to see the difference between needs and wants. May we be gifted with the trust and security to know that God will provide, and may we boldly trust God to supply our daily bread.

7/31/2020

And forgive us our debts... -- Matthew 6:12a—

Forgiveness is directly asked for in this prayer. It is not danced around, or led up to, or hinted at. It is boldly asked right along with every other request. We approach God with the full knowledge that we are in a sinful position. This is something that requires humility, a willingness to recognize where we have fallen short of the glory of God.

One cannot pray “forgive me my sins” while being prideful, while boasting, or leaning on our own righteousness or Christianity. To follow Christ is to ask to be forgiven.

But to follow Christ is also to *be forgiven*. To know that God loves us far more than God desires to punish us. To know that growth in grace, that faith formation is the goal. It invites us to look at our lives as a journey to, or a walk toward God. This gives us the freedom not to get stuck on any one failure, or be pressed down by shame.

You are a Holy and blessed child of the living God. That God sent his Son to sacrifice for your sins, so when you pray: Ask for forgiveness, show repentance (undo whatever brokenness you can), and then move on. God forgives you, lifts you back up again, and says with *encouragement* “Go and sin no more.”

8/3/2020

And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors... --Matthew 6:12—

There's a parable in Matthew 18 that is quite connected to this part of the Lord's prayer. In it, a servant is forgiven of a life-ending, bigger-than-imaginable debt by his master. It's a debt that was so large, financially, that the servant had no chance of paying it back. Some of my commentators even say that the ruler himself may not have even had that much money.

That same servant encounters someone who owes *them* money, a much smaller sum. Just a few weeks worth of salary. It's a significant amount but nothing at all compared to what the servant was forgiven by the ruler. And yet forgiveness is not extended... not even for this smaller amount.

There's so much in that story.

When we pray "forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.", we take ownership of the fact that God has forgiven *us* of a life-ending, bigger-than-imaginable debt. Freedom has been offered where punishment was expected. Life was offered where death was expected, and we stand in awe and gratitude. When it then becomes our turn to offer even a portion of that grace to someone else in the name of the God who gave it to us... we forgive.

This is what it means to be a child of God. It is to be forgiven, and it is to forgive. They are connected, one flows into the other, empowers the other. God's grace toward us *allows* us to be graceful and forgiving to others.

May we live within the forgiveness of God, and may we extend it to others in Jesus name.

8/5/2020

And do not bring us in to the time of trial, --Matthew 6:13--

The closing two requests of the Lord's prayer are for protection. In the NRSV this phrase is worded "into the time of trial" but in the classic King James it is "Lead us not into temptation."

"time of trial" and "temptation" are both English versions of the same Greek word: *Peirasmos*. It means a 'testing' but not a nice kind of testing. It's the kind of testing where the goal is to prove guilt, to expose a weakness, to trap, to tempt. Sometimes it is rendered as a disaster or a plague, which makes sense because disasters have the potential to bring out the worst in us.

You could reword this as "please keep me out of situations where I am likely to make the wrong choice." You could also translate this as "please protect me from the kind of testing that comes from natural disasters." It's interesting that this is a prayer of protection from both *personal* disasters, and from *large scale* disasters.

It is right and Good to ask the Lord for protection, so much so that Christ included it in the model prayer for us. May we see the protective hand of God upon us, and those we pray for, during this challenging time of Covid. May we see the protective hand of God in our own personal lives as the Lord guides us *away* from places where we would be weak and vulnerable to temptation.

8/6/2020

"...but rescue us from the evil one." --Matthew 6:13—

This final phrase of the Lord's prayer is the second half of our prayer for protection. It harkens all the way back to the Genesis story with the first of us, Adam and Eve, and the forbidden fruit.

That is not just a story of humanity and God, there is another character. The Bible calls it *the serpent*, and its intentions are clearly evil. It wishes to do harm to us, to our relationship with God, and possibly wants to do harm to God by harming us. The serpent in the story weaves a crafty deception that puts Eve in a place where she is *more likely* to choose to disobey God, to choose to sin. Evil has *influenced* the story, and Evil is real.

Unfortunately, and against the way we would like life to be, Evil is real and has an effect on the world. There are powers, ideas, and people who cross our paths with true and malicious intent to do harm and this prayer is asking protection from that kind of danger.

If you take a look at the closing prayer of protection in the Lord's prayer you can see it is all-inclusive. We ask for protection from *disaster*, and *temptation*; something we do have control over (not necessarily the disaster, but how we respond to it). And we ask for protection from *evil* which intends us *intentional harm*. Together these form the two different kinds of trouble we face here on earth, and this prayer asks us to invite God to protect us in both situations.