

Prayer - the Mortar of Christian Relationships (Part 3 of 3) Rev. Gerie Martin

The last time I shared about prayer, I shared with you the beginnings of what is commonly called “the Lord’s prayer.”

In Matthew 6:9, responding to the disciples request to teach them how to pray, begins by saying, “Our Father.”

Notice He did not say, “My Father”, but He said “Our Father”, thereby including all who believed upon Him then and in the future. If you remember, I shared the fact that this was a very unusual way to pray in those times because good Jews never said the name of the Lord out loud, considering it too holy to mention on human lips.

But here, Jesus is declaring openly that God is not just a God somewhere up there that throws lightening bolts at us. He is declaring not only His family relationship to God, but ours as well, indicating for the first time what kind of relationship God has wanted with His people all along. He wants to be their Father and He wants His people to recognize him as such.

Only those who are born of the spirit of God can rightly call God “Father” and this statement tells His children that we can now come before God seeing him as “Daddy” or Father.

In verse 10 we shared that the phrase “thy kingdom come” refers to the future kingdom of God upon the earth. Jesus is telling His disciples to pray for the kingdom of God to come, the purposes of God to come upon the earth.

The kingdom of this passage is referring to the full and effective reign of God, through the high priestly work of mediation between God and man, represented by and in Jesus Christ. If you remember from reading the book of revelation Jesus will rule the entire earth, all nations coming to worship him, during the millennium on earth. His rule, His time, His kingdom is what we are being told to pray to come upon the earth.

It is telling us that we are not to think of our own needs first when we pray. The first thing Jesus did in teaching prayer was to acknowledge the Father in Heaven as the one to whom He was praying and then began to teach the disciples to pray for the kingdom of God to come upon the earth.

This tells me that this is the main priority in God’s mind; that His kingdom and His power and His glory be returned to the entire earth as it was intended from the beginning.

It is the first thing God himself tells us to pray for; this tells me it's the most important thing to him.

This kind of rule of God comes only through the regenerating process of the new birth in the lives of individuals and will reach its pinnacle when the last enemy, sin and death, have been destroyed at the Lord's return.

Another thing we touched on was the phrase thy will be done, which emphasizes the idea that the main purpose of prayer is to bring about the conformity of the will of the believer to the will of God. Prayer, therefore, is an act of spiritual expression which brings us into conformity to the very nature and purpose of God, which molds and makes us into the image of our Lord Jesus.

Verse 11; this section of the prayer begins with a request. "Give us this day our daily bread." Notice here that Jesus didn't say "Hey dad, you have to supply my need this day, according to your riches in glory. Your word says it; therefore you must do it in order to maintain your status as God. If you don't supply my needs, in the manner in which I think they should be supplied, than you aren't God in my life."

Jesus, the son of God, is showing the utmost respect to the Father and He makes a request of God. He says "give." That word give has a very broad meaning in scripture, but the usage in this passage means the person requesting has come to God or to Christ as the author or source of what one has or receives;

In other words, Jesus is acknowledging that His source, His entire dependence for His daily needs is God himself. He is asking God to take from the portion that belongs to God and share it with us. Jesus is, in effect, placing a respectful request upon the covenant relationship He has with God and is telling us that this is how we are to receive all things from the Father; by respectfully asking Him to give us what we need this day, based upon our covenant relationship with him. It is a relationship between a respectful child and a loving Father.

This term "bread" may be applied to the provision of food in general, or anything which sustains the body. When we speak of eating the bread of someone, it means that we are being sustained or supported by someone. This is how God wants us to be, eating from His table, being sustained by Him, eating what He supplies to us on a daily basis. Matthew 15 speaks of the "children's bread." This is what Jesus is referring to in that passage, the provision which belongs to those who are in God's household, eating from His table, fed by His provision.

The term daily (gr. *Epicusios*) denotes something which is indispensable. It is something we must have in order to survive. This concept of daily provision of bread fits perfectly with the Old Testament example of the daily provision of manna to the Israelites while they were wandering in the wilderness. They had to rely on him for food, water, healing, etc. Everything was given to them that they needed, just as God promised.

They were on their way to a land that was promised to them, but not yet theirs and they had to totally rely upon the provision of the Lord in order to survive.

Just like Abraham and the promises to him that His "seed" would be like the sand of the seashore and the stars in the skies; just like Moses with the prophecy of His people being given the promised land that He did not see fully; so too, Jesus, having the promises of God of nations being His inheritance, did not fully see this in His time of being upon the earth.

The Christian of today is living in a land that is promised to them by God, but they have not seen the fullness of the rulership as yet. We are also wandering around, waiting to see our promised land, which has not yet manifested. But while we are here we are relying upon the generosity of God to provide us with our needs, our daily, indispensable food. He tells us to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things (food, clothing, shelter, etc) shall be added (given) unto you.

Every word in this prayer has a lesson in it. We ask for bread; that teaches us sobriety and temperance or balance; and we are to ask only for necessary bread.

We ask for bread and that teaches us honesty and industriousness. We do not ask for the bread of others, nor the bread of deceit, proverbs 20:17; nor the bread of idleness, proverbs 31:27; we are to ask for the “children’s bread,” honestly worked for and received with gratitude from the hand of the Lord.

We ask for our daily bread; which teaches us constantly to depend upon divine providence. We ask God to give it to us; not sell it to us, nor lend it to us, but give it to us. No matter how great the person we may become in this world, we are dependent upon the grace and mercy of God for our daily bread.

When we pray, He gives it to us. When we ask for bread for the poor, it teaches us compassion for the poor. It teaches us that we need to pray for with our families and for the needs of our families. We pray that God would give it to us this day, which teaches us to renew the desires of our souls towards God, as our daily needs are supplied.

We need to come to the place in our walk with Christ that we could no longer go one day without prayer as nourishment to the spiritual man within us, any more than we desire to go a day without physical food to nourish us.

Verse 12; the phrase “forgive us our debts, refers to sins which are our moral and spiritual debts to God’s righteousness. Jesus is telling us that we must come to God and acknowledge we are sinners and to ask for forgiveness from God.

That word debt means a trespass or an offense which requires reparation or repayment of a debt. It means that something is “owed” to the one whom we trespass against and requires a repayment, a satisfaction, a compensation or expiation. It requires a forfeit, a penalty. i.e. Something is owed and we must pay up. We know from scripture that we could never in ourselves repay such a debt. Also from scripture we know that Jesus paid this debt for our sins by dying upon the cross and in doing so, made provision for our every need. We receive this provision by asking, in respectful requests in prayer, just as Jesus did.

The request and it is a request, not a demand, for forgiveness of sin is made by the believer. In order to be saved is a necessary request of God. One need not necessarily name all of the sins, but must confess that he is a sinner. For continued spiritual growth and cleansing however, the believer acknowledges their sins in particular. Our expression of forgiveness does not gain salvation for us. We are to seek forgiveness in the same manner as we forgive others. Forgiveness is the evidence of a regenerated Heart. If we are unable to ask God and others for forgiveness, our Heart has not been changed inwardly.

According to Matthew Henry’s commentary of the bible, this kind of prayer teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that all other things shall be

added or given unto us. We pray for the needful things and comforts of this life after we ask for the things of God's glory and kingdom upon this earth..

There is also a promise here as well as a condition. If you forgive, your Heavenly Father will forgive you also. We will receive reward or judgment depending upon our choices here upon the earth.

In Max Lucado's inspirational study bible it is stated this way: God sees everything we do, and He will reward us even for the good works we do that no one else notices or is even aware of in our lives.

In this example of prayer Jesus holds out several incentives to the believer as He recommends the way of the kingdom of God as the path to be followed. We have a promise of reward or retribution at the last judgment or in the course of history. We will reap what we sow, so to speak.

Any courting of human applause is discouraged; actions, which if done before men in order to receive their approval, have no spiritual value and are discouraged. The highest of all incentives is the example of God himself and we are to emulate him in all of our ways for His pleasure. His children are to reflect their Father's character.

Leviticus 11:44-45 reflects this same teaching and no doubt Jesus was drawing upon this word, which the people of His day would recognize. It is called the law of holiness because of its recurring repetition throughout the word. "I am the Lord your God....you shall therefore be holy as I am holy."

In the Sermon on the Mount, just preceding this teaching on prayer in Matthew 5:48, Jesus says "you, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." In this context perfect means something like "all-embracing in your love." Jewish believers would be totally familiar with this teaching. They would have easily understood that if God does not discriminate between the good and the bad in sending His gifts of sunshine and rain, His children should equally show kindness and forgiveness to all.

Jesus entire life was the practical manifestation of His teaching on forgiveness, especially in His regard to service and sacrifice. He repeatedly insisted that the highest honor lies in humble service, not as a reward for service, but in the service itself. Walking in holiness, as God is holy, means that we walk in service itself, without thought of reward or position, forgiving others as they trespass against us. He walked in forgiveness and service to those who He knew would eventually crucify him and loved them nevertheless.

Sometimes, however, we have trouble forgiving others. Remember, forgiveness is more often a process than a one time act. In other words, don't expect too much too soon. If the sin against you has been a small, picayune sin, you can probably forgive it easily and just let it go, which by the way, is the meaning for the Greek word, "forgive." But if the sin against you is a big one, you are probably not going to let it go quickly.

Forgiveness of others is one of the biggest keys to effective prayers. Beginning to work the process of forgiveness in our lives is all that God requires. We must take the first step; God will help us in the rest.

We can begin to forgive, and that is all that God asks and requires of us.

Try praying this way. "Father, I'm angry at _____. Praying for _____ is very difficult for me. So, I lift _____ before you and ask that you will change my Heart towards them.

Verses 13-15 lead us not into temptation is a plea for the Help of the Father God in our daily confrontation with the temptations of sin. James 1:13-14 makes it clear that God does not tempt us; rather we are tempted by our own lusts. However, God does test us in order to give us the opportunity to prove our faithfulness to him. It is never His desire to lead us into evil itself. Therefore, if we resist the devil, we are promised that He will flee from us.

The final part of this prayer as we know it today is not found in the original texts. "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen." It was added later as a doxology of praise and is originally found in I Chronicles 29:11. This part goes on to say for if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

In teaching in this manner Jesus was giving us a pattern to follow, an outline if you will, but He leaves the details to the individual to fill in, according to their personal walk with God. He gives you the framework of your prayer life and expects you to fill it in on a daily basis, according to your praise of God, your daily needs, which are different for every person and your love of him.

In the first petitions of this prayer of the Lord, our soul raises directly to God; in the following petitions we face the things which will hinder us in our daily walk and in the final ones we find the solutions to all of these difficulties we face on a daily basis.

In the first part we find that we are awed by the character of God; Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name;

In the second part we are awed by His divine plan and purpose; Thy kingdom come, thy will be done; all of these comments indicate a close, personal relationship with the Father, which is why the Jews were troubled by this kind of prayer relationship they had never experienced before.

The third petition speaks of the moral condition of man and His need for dependence upon a holy, just, merciful and forgiving God:

Give us this day our daily bread; a call for provision and dependence upon God.

Forgive us our debts; a call for divine mercy and forgiveness.

Lead us not into temptation; a call for gracious guidance.

Deliver us from evil; a call for deliverance from evil which can easily overcome us.

Finally, the doxology expresses the certain hope that our prayers shall be heard and that God, in view of His great character, will bring to pass the highest good in our lives. It is an expression of the believer's confidence in the ultimate plan and purposes of God rather than a demand of what we believe to be the best thing for us. This was the pattern Jesus himself established as a guide to praying correctly.

Now, let's look at what will hinder our prayers and let's look at it from a strictly scriptural standpoint.

Your prayers are hindered if you are rejecting truth: Proverbs 28:9; if anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even His prayers are detestable.

Your prayers are hindered if you have pride: 2 chronicles 7:14; if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked way, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Your prayers are hindered if your Heart is hard: Zechariah 7:12-13; they made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord almighty had sent by His spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord almighty was very angry. When I called, they did not listen; so, when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord almighty.

Jeremiah 17:9; your heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. What makes you think you can understand your own motives?

Your prayers are hindered if you lack compassion: Proverbs 21:13; if a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered

Your prayers are hindered if you hold on to unconfessed sin: Psalm 66:18; if I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

Your prayers are hindered if you ask with wrong motives: James 4:3; when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Your prayers are hindered if you have broken relationships: I Peter 3:7; husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Your prayers are hindered if your lifestyle is sinful: Isaiah 59:2; but your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.

Your prayers are hindered if your prayers are empty words: Matthew 6:7; and when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Your prayers are hindered if you refuse forgiveness: Matthew 6:14-15; for if you forgive men when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Your prayers are hindered if you harbor hypocrisy: Luke 18:9; to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

Your prayers are hindered if you are double-minded, unstable: James 1:5; if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Your prayers are hindered if you have set idols in your heart: Ezekiel 14:3; son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

I John 2:15; do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

Heavenly Father, help us to understand your word and your ways. Help us to become mighty in prayer and intercession that your kingdom may come upon this earth the way you intended it to be. Forgive us, Father, for we have ignored your commandment to pray at all times; to pray without ceasing. We have not fulfilled the desire of your heart, forgive us.

Blessings & love,
Rev. Gerie Martin