

"THE RICHNESS OF PRAYER"

I was thinking about parents and children listening together here at our service or at home on the live stream and I realized it is almost certain children were present when Jesus first delivered The Sermon on the Mount and gave us the Lord's Prayer. Of course, there is much that he says to specifically to adults in the Sermon on the Mount, but it is not likely that everyone in the crowd dropped the kids off for Sunday School or called in a babysitter before going to hear Jesus preach.

It is easy for me to imagine Jesus looking at families stretched out among the flowers on the grassy hillside. He does mention grass, flowers, birds and children in the Sermon. Perhaps he saw a father scoop up a tired and stumbling toddler and holding her in his arms, or taking a snack out of a sack and offering it with a drink of water to his child. He gestures and says, in **verse 8**; *Your father knows what you need before you ask him.* It's the kind of thing you might say if children and families were present. Isn't it? I'm just imagining that. The bottom line is Jesus says prayer is important for all of us and prayer is best understood as part of a father and child relationship with God.

Some of us need this teaching on prayer so deeply right now in the present circumstances. For your mental and emotional health, you need to take care of your self, and Jesus teaches us to pray, in part, to stay sane and healthy. It's so exhausting dealing with everything right now. You can get sucked into a 24-7 cycle of polarizing, confusing, frustrating, and sometimes frightening social media and news feeds. It's draining. It builds up toxic fear and anxiety. You can end up suspicious, defensive, and exhausted. Can prayer help with all of that? Oh yes. And, prayer plays a crucial role in God's plan to meet all our needs and advance the causes of his kingdom, his rule in this world.

Let me start today with a quick review from last week. I shared, for the children, and of course, it is just as relevant for adults, the five parts of the Lord's prayer. They each begin with the letter "P." *1st.) Praise. 2nd.) Purpose. 3rd.) Provision. 4th.) Pardon. 5th.) Protection.* Last week we looked at the first two, Praise, *"Hallowed be your name,"* and Purpose; *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* As I said last week to you children who are watching, I hope you can learn this prayer and make it part of your life. Parents and other adults, I hope you will embrace this prayer also and pray it daily.

As we look at the second part of the Lord's Prayer, Consider the richness of it. Just as God cares about the glory of His name and the coming of his kingdom, so also God cares about the daily necessities of life. He cares about provision, pardon, and protection.

It is important to see this because one thing we learn here is that...

I. CHRIST WANTS US TO PRAY ABOUT ALL THE THINGS THAT ARE NECESSARY.

Verse 11 says, *Give us today our daily bread.*

A. What does it mean to pray for daily bread?

We almost instinctively know Jesus just speaking about bread in a narrow sense. There is a figure of speech used in many languages in which one idea is a symbol for other things also. When **Psalm 44:6** says, *I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory;* the bow and sword are symbolic of all human means and weapons! And when Christ, here tells you to pray for your "*daily bread*" he is telling you to bring all of your needs to God in prayer. Martin Luther said daily bread is, *"everything necessary for the preservation of this life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government, and peace."* There is a richness to this prayer.

B. Does God care for and provide things like that?

If you look at Jesus' life, you see plenty of evidence that he knows about life's necessities and cares about them. He talked about wearing clothes that were patched. He noticed what it meant for a widow to give an offering of two small coins. He seemed to know about homemakers who had to stretch the food budget and could only afford one penny to buy two small birds. He uses illustrations like this because he knows the everyday necessities of life *are* necessities.

Illustration: When I was a child, I thought bread just came off the shelf or from the grocery store. I didn't know any better. As you get older, you learn that you can trace things back. There is a great poem to teach children about prayer and thanksgiving, and it's good for adults too. I believe it was first written as a hymn for Sunday School. It's titled: *Back of the Loaf*. It goes. *"Back of the loaf, the snowy flour, and back of the flour the mill, and back of the mill the wheat and the shower and the sun and the Father's will."* If you don't understand that, ask your parents. **James 1:17**, *Every good gift comes from God.*

God cares about all the little things that are necessary to life and...

C. God provides what we need so we can live for his purposes.

There is a particular vision for life that runs through this prayer. The prayer begins with praise: *Hallowed be your name*". Then there is prayer for God's purposes: *Your kingdom to come, your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven*. It is at this point that Jesus teaches us also to pray for God's provision. So the provision we are asking God to give us is to supply a life surrendered to His praise and his purposes.

Illustration: When I teach, sometimes there will be a coordinator who assigns me the room I will work in, and he or she often says something like, *"If you want anything, just ask."* I might say, I want a whiteboard, an extension cord, and some bottled water. They will get all that for me. Suppose later I call up and say, *"Listen, you said if I want anything, I should ask. Well, I want a pony. I've always wanted a pony."* Is that's what the conference coordinator had in mind? Of course not! He meant, if you need anything to accomplish the job we've asked you to us, just ask. God's promises for prayer are like that. In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus says, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you."*

A popular topic right now is "self-care." We are stressed, drained, and depleted in unexpected ways by unprecedented challenges. Prayer can be a powerful part of our self-care. In prayer, we gain strength and find serenity. But the self-care found in true prayer comes from the surrender of self to God. It comes from the surrender of self-reliance and self-made agendas to God's will and kingdom. Prayer is most powerful when the provision we ask for in prayer is part of a life of devotion to God. When the link between prayer for provision and devotion to God's purpose is severed, prayer floats off to the edge of our lives. We use it occasionally and less critically and too often for short-sighted or even selfish purposes without much thought for God's purposes. God wants prayer to be at the heart of your life, and God wants his purposes to be the heart of your prayers.

Pray like this: *"Lord, I've been so focused on the uncertainty and of this pandemic, the stresses of political and racial discord, I need your help. Give me my daily bread, provide whatever I need to become the person you want me to be, and to build the things in life that you put into my heart to build! Lord, I want my life to be filled with praise and focused on your purposes. So I boldly ask you to provide whatever I need for that."* God loves to answer prayers like that.

So, God's praise, purpose, God's provision. The next thing is pardon.

II. GOD WANTS US TO PRAY TO RECEIVE FORGIVENESS AND, IN PRAYER, TO GIVE FORGIVENESS.

Verse 12 says, *and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* One of the ancient words for sin carries this idea of a debt. The concept is we have an obligation of faith, love, and obedience to God, but we have failed to give what we owe. We have sinned, and that incurs a debt. For a debt to be canceled, someone has to pay the cost.

A. To believe in Christ means you *trust* in Him, believing he paid the debt for your sin when he died as your Savior.

Colossians 2:13-14 says, *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* Paul uses this image of *canceling the record of debt.* All of the *legal demands* line up against us to show us what we owe but can never pay. But he cancels it all. How? *He took it away, nailing it to the cross.* We receive forgiveness by receiving Christ. It doesn't just grow on you like a few extra pounds; you have to pick it up and take it to heart personally, intentionally, and humbly. The instant you do, you are forgiven your debt. You are saved!

B. Now, if we are saved and have forgiveness, why do we need to pray continually for forgiveness?

The answer is that the Lord's Prayer is not just focused on the relationship between a wrongdoer and a judge but that of a child and a good father. The forgiveness here is not judicial but relational, paternal. It's not whether you will be punished to meet the law's demands, but whether you will be close to your father as you live with him. If your dad were a judge and you broke the law he might pay the fine for you and set you free from *that* debt. You don't go to jail. You go home. But that doesn't mean your relationship to your father is restored and all that it could be. He wants to talk. In Christ, you have the forgiveness that saves your soul, but you have to continually face your faults and ask for and receive the forgiveness that keeps you close to God, your father.

An honest prayer for forgiveness contains a humble admission of wrongness. That is a good, healing, beautiful act of spiritual life. There are a lot of wrong ways to deal with the issue of sin. Sometimes we minimize our sins by comparing ourselves with others. Sometimes we set goals for ourselves and think if we can just achieve these goals that will compensate for our lives' failures. Some people try to fill their lives with distractions that dull their sensitivities to sin and guilt. Some people turn on themselves and examine themselves like a scientist dissecting a bug. They pin themselves to the dissecting table and take themselves apart, immersing themselves in the shame of their sins or probing and hoping for excuses and explanations in their past. None of that brings peace or power to our lives. Healing only comes from taking an honest look inward but then looking upward and outward to God and to Christ. So this is very simple. In all your prayers, confess your sins to God, look up to Him, ask for forgiveness. Accept God's daily grace like daily bread and find peace in that. **1 John 1:9** says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Christ is a real Savior, and we are real sinners, so we keep coming to him to continually receive forgiveness. And then...

In prayer, we express to God our forgiveness of others. We say, *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* It is not that you earn forgiveness by forgiving others. It is that the purpose of this forgiveness is fellowship with the Father and we can't have fellowship with a gracious Father, if we are not willing to forgive each other! The basic meaning of the Greek word translated forgive is to *let go* of something instead of *holding on to it*. To be forgiving is to be continually letting go of the things we otherwise hold on to and hold against the people who hurt us or sin against us. *The word "forgive" is often used of letting go of a literal debt of money.* Jesus used this image when he said, *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* Forgiveness is like letting go of a debt.

The Lord's Prayer concludes by telling us one more thing...

III. GOD WANTS US TO PRAY FOR PROTECTION FROM SIN AND EVIL.

Verse 13, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

A. The two phrases in this prayer; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, are really conveying one prayer request and one main idea.

The Greek word translated “temptation” is a word that can be used to mean a difficult situation, a trial, or a test. But it can also describe the process by which you are deliberately seduced into sin or evil. You have two phrases that are intended to go together to convey one main idea in a very full and emphatic way. We can paraphrase the full idea something like this: “Father in heaven, protect me in the trials and temptations of life and when they come, as they must come, do not allow me to fall under the power of evil in the midst of those trials, instead deliver me from the evil one.”

B. Here's what we learn from this: trails and testing will come, and with those trails will come unique temptations.

Someone hurts you, and God allows that to strengthen you and test your faith, but in that test, you will be tempted to refuse to forgive. Life gets difficult; you are under a lot of stress and pressure, and in that test of faith that God in his sovereignty has allowed, you are not only tested by God but also tempted by evil. You are tempted to use your trials as an excuse for sin. Maybe you figure that you have had a hard time, so God owes you a day off. Perhaps you think you've suffered some setbacks, which entitles you to a little slack when it comes to your spiritual life. When life is difficult, the evil one offers a way to lessen the difficulty or compensate for the hardships. So the temptation comes to indulge a sinful pleasure, jettison an unwelcome duty, cop an attitude, get even, be bitter, express your anger, indulge your lust, or even just give up. We are all in a time of trial. This season in your story is a season of historic testing for you, our church, our nation, and the world. So pray for protection.

Application: The famous theologian, author, and Christian leader, J.I. Packer, passed away Friday at 93 years old. I have a quote from him written down in some old sermon notes. I don't have the reference, but it is from his teaching on the Lord's Prayer. He said,

We pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” because we know our own proven weakness, slowness to see the truth about ourselves clearly, and our vulnerability. We pray, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” because, We know the skill with which Satan exploits our weak points and even our strong points, sometimes attacking us head-on and sometimes ambushing us unexpectedly and sometimes silently infiltrating our very hearts with His subtle lies.

If you sincerely pray: "*Father, lead us not into temptation.*" You will not only be taking the place of humility God so loves and honors, but you will also be asking specifically for his help and guidance. And he will hear your prayer. You have a good father.

CONCLUSION

We have to realize again the significance of the one who gives us this prayer. The Lord Jesus, who gives us this prayer, is God in human flesh. How do we know that God loves us? We look at Jesus and listen to him! God, the Son, humbled Himself and came into our world as a baby. He grew up and experienced testing and temptation. We've all crumbled under temptation and given in to sin. He did not.

In the garden of Gethsemane, he was tempted and tested, and in an agonizing struggle, he said to God the father: *Not as I will, but as You will.* Where we have crumbled, he comes through and wins. He then takes that perfect obedience all the way to the cross and lets himself be nailed to the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. We don't earn our salvation by overcoming temptation. Christ wins it for us by his victory over sin and temptation and gives it to us when we turn to him in true repentance and faith and trust in Him as our Lord and Savior.

Because of Christ, we know the love of God. We know that he cares for us. We know we belong to him. He is our father in heaven because of the grace we are given in Christ. So we are all the more motivated out of his love for us and our response of love for him, to praise him, to commit to his purposes, to look to him to provide, to come to him for forgiveness, to be forgiving toward others and to guard our lives from sin and evil. All of that is embraced in the richness of prayer.

Amen.