Teach Us To Pray

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ONE

On the Heels of Prayer

merica was built on prayer—a strong foun- dation if there ever was one. Revisionists would have you believe that the signers of the Declaration of Independence were all pantheists, deists, or agnostics who didn't have a lot of time for God. If that's true, then agnostics back then sure prayed a lot more than Christians do today.

For instance, both morning and evening, our first President knelt before an open Bible to pray for God's leading. Perhaps one reason this nation is faltering morally is because God's people don't spend much time praying for her.

What I find especially fascinating, however, is that Jesus also needed prayer. Naturally, we as- sume that His faith was inherently strong, but the Bible tells us Jesus would arise early in the morn- ing and go off by Himself to pray. Sometimes He would pray all night, like He did before choosing His apostles.

After reading that story, I realized that I don't pray enough and I don't pray very well. Yet prayer is so important. Indeed, every revival comes on the heels of prayer. For instance, God poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after His new church was on its knees together for 10 days. And later, "When they had prayed, the place where they were assem- bled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31 NKJV). We need to pray more as a church and in our own lives.

TWO

The Principal Business

harles Spurgeon said, “All the Christian virtues are locked up in the word prayer.”

One of the main tasks of the Christian is prayer, to have direct communion with God.

William Kerry was a missionary to Burma, India, and the West Indies, but he was also a shoe cobbler. People sometimes criticized him for “neglecting” his trade because he spent so much time in prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. Kerry answered, “Cobbling shoes is a sideline; it helps me pay expenses. Prayer is my real business.” And God used him mightily to convert many. On this topic, Martin Luther commented, “As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.”

But how do we pray? I am asked this ques- tion a lot, but the truth is, even I have to ask, “Lord, teach me to pray.” The disciples asked Christ this question when they saw Him com- ing from a session of prayer. His face was beam- ing with the light of heaven and energized by the Holy Spirit. No wonder they pleaded, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Still, these men had been going to church—the temple—all of their lives. They had recited hundreds of prayers and had heard the priests pray out loud. Yet when they saw Christ, they knew they were missing something. Somehow they, like most of us, failed in their principal business.

Sadly, not very many know what it means to pray, and thus it is probably the most neglected opportunity and privilege we have. Yet every Christian needs the gift of prayer because it’s the breath of the soul. Jesus said, “You do not have be- cause you do not ask” (James 4:2 NKJV). He wasn’t saying we never pray, but that we ask poorly. So how do we ask?

I think the best way to find out is to first look at the pattern our Lord gave us, which is com- monly called the “Lord’s Prayer.” Of course, that’s really a misnomer, because it wasn’t actually Jesus’ prayer. Jesus said, “After this manner therefore pray ye” (Matthew 6:9). It’s a pattern for us to pray, so technically it’s really a disciple’s prayer. Let’s look at this blueprint for prayer to learn how God wants us to come to Him.

THREE

The Makeup of Prayer

he Lord's Prayer is comprised of seven peti- tions, which are divided up very much like the Ten Commandments. The first three peti- tions are God-ward—vertical—and the last four petitions deal with the horizontal relationships we have with others. Likewise, the first great commandment is to love the Lord, and the second great commandment is to love your neighbor. God should come first in our prayers; His counsel and will should be the great priority in our lives. But we must also not neglect our relationships on earth, which is why Jesus' model includes those around us.

Right now, we'll concentrate on those first three petitions, and later, we'll look at our prayers concerning our friends, family, and neighbors. Then we will find some biblical and practical answers to common questions about prayer.

First, let's consider that these first three pe- titions to God have a unique relationship to the Godhead. The first petition deals with the Father, "Our Father … Hallowed be thy name." The sec- ond petition deals with the "kingdom;" that's the Son. Jesus spoke many parables about the Son going to receive a kingdom, and coming back as the King of kings. Without Him, we couldn't even come to the Father. And concerning "your will," who is it that leads us into the will of God? The Spirit, the one who impresses on us the will of God and the love for Christ. It is the Spirit who gives the power to do the will of God. And so you have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit represented in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

FOUR

Addressing Our God As a Family

God as a father is a theme that runs through the entire Bible. He is the creator of all life, and the protector of His children. In the Old Testament, His list of names includes: “Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). He is powerful and omnipo- tent, yet He is also the all-sufficient provider. Taken together, He surely is the God of the universe rul- ing from heaven, but we can still approach Him personally as our Father.

Even better, “Our Father” tells us that we are received as children of God. “Behold, what man- ner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). God is willing to adopt us into His family. What a beautiful truth! “Our Father” says we can share in the inheritance He gave through Christ—that we are a part of the heavenly family. The Bible says, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father … give good things to them that ask Him” (Matthew 7:11)? We can go to our Father knowing that He has the very best gifts in store for us.

The very phrase “Our Father” is clothed with love. He’s someone who we can safely ap- proach with love, even when He disciplines us. Proverbs 3:12 records, “For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights” (NKJV). Psalm 103:13 adds, “Just as a fa- ther has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him” (NASV). This also means that we are a family of brothers and sisters, praying to “our Father.” He’s not just my Father; He’s your Father too.

This brings to mind another reason why this prayer is such a great pattern for us. Notice the word “I” doesn’t appear in the entire prayer! We all typically pray frequently using “I” or “me,” but in this prayer, it’s a collective. In our culture, we get the equation upside down; it’s you, then your friends, and then God. In the Bible, the priority is reversed. Love the Lord, then your neighbor, and then you. (If you need an easy way to re- member, just think of J-O-Y. That’s Jesus, Others, and You!)

FIVE

"Which Art in Heaven"

ur pattern of prayer also tells us how near and how far our Lord really is from us. "Our Teach Us to Pray Father" is a very intimate, up-close idea, but "in heaven" gives us a sense of His distance from us. We are separated from God, and we're acknowl- edging that by saying, "There's a problem: We're here; You're there." What's caused this separation? Isaiah says, "Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God" (59:2 NKJV).

In the garden, God asked Adam, "Where are you?" In our prayer, we're confessing to God that we're far away from Him—much in the same way that Adam ran from God. We've been separated from paradise. But we have hope. Did you know that the first three chapters in the Bible tell how sin came in through the serpent and that we've been separated from heaven and paradise; how- ever, the last three chapters of the Bible tell how the serpent is destroyed, paradise is restored, and we're once again together with God?

Another reason the Bible says, "which art in heaven," is because we need to make a distinc- tion between our earthly fathers and our heav- enly Father. Our earthly fathers are frail, carnal, and sinners by nature of being human. The God in heaven is perfect. All of us have a natural, sub- conscious tendency to superimpose on God our relationship with our earthly father. For instance, those who have earthly fathers that are overly indulgent end up thinking that God the heavenly Father is also permissive. Those who have earthly fathers that are stern generally have a picture of the heavenly Father as an exacting judge.

That ought to make us think. We need to spend a lot of time in prayer asking God to over- rule the mistakes we have made with our children. Yet when the Bible says, "Our Father which art in heaven," it's telling us we need to look past our flawed earthly relationships and know that He is our perfect model and that we can approach Him directly. You don't have to see God through the broken glasses of your family experience.

SIX

“Hallowed Be Thy Name”

o we have approached God because He’s our Father in heaven. And our first petition to our God is “Hallowed be thy name.” Now the name of God is a central issue in the great controversy between good and evil. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is to defend the glory of God.

The devil has slandered God’s name. Do you know someone who has said, “If God is love, then why do innocent children die?” Insurance com- panies call earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters “Acts of God.” What kind of reputation does that give God? The devil is a master at smear- ing the character of our Father. He has God, the good, wonderful, loving, longsuffering, merciful One, portrayed as a cruel, indifferent tyrant arbi- trarily punishing His creatures. God’s name has been defiled by the devil.

Thus the purpose of the Christian, by God’s grace, is to defend the name of God as much as we can, to reveal who He really is. Unfortunately, we need to pray “hallowed be they name” because we’re not very good at it. Even in the Bible, we see God’s own people do more to dishonor His name than the full-fledged pagans. And times really haven’t changed much since antiquity.

Remember, we said the Lord’s Prayer some- what mirrors the Ten Commandments. The third one commands, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). Using God’s name in profan- ity is only one small part of breaking this com- mandment. But taking God’s name is like a wife taking her husband’s last name. When you’re a baptized Christian, you take the name of Christ, but if you live like the devil after you’ve taken Christ’s name, you’re taking His name in vain. Who does more harm to the Christian cause, the pagans or professed Christians who live like the world?

Christians should be advertising for the goodness of God, but in many cases Christians do more harm. Instead, all around the world, we see professed Christians attacking and killing others, such as in Ireland, Africa, and Croatia. What does that do to God’s name? Jesus says, “Love your ene- mies … overcome evil with good” (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:21). Christ is slandered because of the bad behavior of those who take His name in vain. So “Hallowed be thy name” is asking God to help us, in word and deed, honor His precious name.

SEVEN

"Thy Kingdom Come"

e are in the middle of a battle between two
kingdoms. An enemy kidnapped the world when Adam and Eve surrendered the dominion that God had given them over the earth. Ever since, the priority of God's children has been to "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

Of course, we must make two distinctions when we speak of God's kingdom—the spiri- tual and the physical. We know that the spiritual kingdom of God is very much alive in the world today, because Luke 17:21 says, "The kingdom of God is within you." When Jesus began preaching after His baptism, He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). This aspect of the kingdom is available now. If you have accepted Christ into your heart, then He reigns from His throne in your heart. Paul says, "Let not sin … reign in your mortal body," but rather let Jesus be your King and rule over all that you do (Romans 6:12). That's the first kingdom we should seek after: God's spiritual kingdom within our hearts.

But someday the meek will inherit the earth and God's literal kingdom is going to rule over this world with a very real and physical kingdom. Do you think we would need to pray, "Thy kingdom come," if God's kingdom was already established? When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, as recorded in Acts 1, the disciples asked, "Will You at this time restore the kingdom?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons" (Acts 1:6, 7 NKJV).

The central message in the book of Daniel is that the kingdoms and idols of the world, whether they are made of gold, silver, bronze, or clay will all disintegrate before the Rock of Ages—the kingdom of God. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the

kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44 NKJV).

For the time being, we are ambassadors of another empire, advertising for a kingdom that will someday fill the earth. Christ said, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon me" (Luke 22:29 NKJV). When the thief on the cross turned to Christ and said, "Lord, re- member me when you come into Your kingdom," he accepted Christ as his King (Luke 23:42 NKJV). That's why he'll be in the kingdom, because he had the spiritual kingdom that begins in your heart.

The phrase "the kingdom of God" is found 70 times in the New Testament. Why? Because there are two kings at war, Jesus and the devil, who says he's the prince of this world. That's why we still need to pray that His kingdom will come: first within us, then someday around us.

EIGHT

“Thy Will Be Done in Earth, As it Is in Heaven”

ontrary to popular belief, God’s will in this world is not always being done. I respect- fully disagree with the notion that everything that happens is in accordance with the Creator’s will.

When something bad happens, like a tornado, you inevitably hear someone say, “Well, it must have been the will of God.” I don’t believe that’s what the Bible teaches, and if that’s really true, why would God have us pray that His will be done?

Conversely, not everything that appears to be good is from God’s storehouse either. Sometimes the devil may even cast prosperity in someone’s path to stall or derail their longing for God. You and I have no idea what’s going on behind the spiritual veil, which is why we have to pray, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

You and I naturally have our wills twisted and confused by our carnal desires. We need to pray that God’s grace and His Spirit will guide our wills into conformity with His. We also need to learn what His will is for us, and we find the best expression of that in the Word. For begin- ners, the simplest form of God’s will is called the Ten Commandments. “I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8 NKJV). So when we pray “Thy will be done,” we’re really praying that His will be done in us through submission and obedience.

Of course, Jesus is the perfect example of doing God’s will here on the earth. In John 6:38, He proclaims, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (NKJV). In the garden of Gethsemane, facing separation from the father, Christ peti- tioned God three times with, “Not My will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 NKJV). Is it always easy to do God’s will? No. If it was a tremendous struggle for Jesus, we will also need to pray, “Thy will be done”.

NINE

A Greater Will

hen God created most things, He merely spoke them into existence. But when He made Adam, he took dust from the ground, formed it with His hands, and breathed life into it. He made humanity from the earth. So when we pray, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heav- en,” we’re also admitting we’re really just clay. “In earth” also means in us. We’re humbling ourselves before God, recognizing that in our rebellion, our wills are perverted. When we pray “Thy will be done,” we’re giving Him permission to use us ac- cording to His purpose.

The Lord will never force His will on you because of the precious gift of freedom. He’s not going to force you to pray, “Thy will be done.” You have to choose to do it, to surrender your will, to be His servant, and give Him permission to activate His power and plan in your life. When you under- stand that secret, you’ll unlock the storehouses of heaven’s power.

But be advised, it works the other way too. Many of us are harassed by the devil because we give the devil our will. You may choose who your master is. And when we, through constant surrender, comply with the temptations that the devil puts in our path, we start giving him in- creased power to activate his desires in our lives. And ironically, when we exercise our freedom to submit to the devil, we, inch by inch, lose our freedom! The devil possesses our natures, and we become his slaves.

Yet it is possible to be filled by God’s Spirit. Would you like that experience? Most of us are struggling somewhere between the willing spirit and weak flesh, but when you understand that by choosing and saying, “Lord, I want you to be my God. I want you to take control. I surrender my will. I’m giving myself to you. I am powerless on my own,” you are then giving Him the power to release His will in your life. He’s waiting, but He can’t force it on us. So remember that when you pray, don’t forget to ask, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

TEN

The Lord's Prayer and Us

n World War II, a British soldier was seen creeping back in from the front lines. He was captured by his own army and accused of conspir- ing with the enemy, as he had not been given per- mission to leave. He said, "I have been out in the woods praying." His fellow soldiers mocked him and immediately ordered him to offer up some evidence. He simply told them he was by himself and that he just needed to pray. His captors threat- ened to charge him as a traitor, saying, "You're going to be executed unless you pray right now and convince us that you were really praying."

The private then fell on his knees and began to offer an eloquent, heartfelt prayer as one who was about to meet his maker. But by the end of the prayer, the commander in charge said he was free to go. "I believe your story," he said. "If you had not spent so much time at drill, you would not have performed so well during review." He then added, "I can tell from the way you prayed that you are on regular speaking terms with God."

The times of our prayers should be frequent and regular, but even more important the content should be outward. I frequently catch myself beginning with "gimme" prayers: "Dear, Lord, give me this and give me that" and near the end, I add, "God, I praise your name." According to the pattern Christ gave us, that's backwards. I know I underscored this point already, but it's worth re-peating. God has convicted me that my prayers are too selfish, and I need to keep Him and others first in mind when I go to the Father in prayer.

Although we're about to focus on prayer for ourselves, I feel that before we delve into these absolutely necessary facets of prayer, we need to make sure we have the right order of prayer in mind. Obviously, we should pray for our needs, but as Jesus indicated, when we pray, we want to acknowledge God's holy name, His purposes, and His kingdom before all other things. And all of our needs must be viewed in the context of His will. With that careful reminder, we can continue our study and discover what happens when we ask the Lord, "Teach Us to Pray!"

ELEVEN

"Give Us This Day …"

read represents many things in the Bible. First, "daily bread" means the provisions necessary for sustaining life from day to day. Of course, this is a pattern of prayer, so it doesn't mean that you can't also pray for water, clothing, and other needs. When we pray for our daily bread, we're re- ally asking God to supply the basic necessities of our everyday lives.

Should a wealthy person with their cupboards full still pray "Give us this day our daily bread"? Yes, absolutely. Never take the blessing of basics for granted. Remember Job's full barns were all lost in one day.

God is telling us that we should feel confident to come before our Lord, asking Him to fulfill our needs. Of course, He is already well aware of these needs, but He wants us to know that it is He who provides all truly good things for His children. For instance, when the Jews went through the wilder- ness, they prayed for food, and God rained manna from heaven, showing His continual, loving provi- sion. Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask—He wants you to!

Remember, though, that when we pray, "Give us … our daily bread," it doesn't mean that God expects us not to go out and earn it. Some people think they can pray the Lord's Prayer and then sit back and do nothing, expecting Him to answer. When the Lord rained down manna, the Jews went out to collect it. They didn't lie back with their mouths open, waiting for it to fall directly into their mouths. Notice too that the manna fell outside the camp; it didn't rain on their tents. Part of getting the bread is going out and harvesting it where we work. After that, the Jews had to knead the manna and bake it; only after working could they consume their daily bread. We must likewise invest ourselves in the process and not become lazy with the Lord's blessings. Don't forget that giving us our bread day by day also includes this understood caveat: "six days shalt thou labor."

TWELVE

"… Our Daily Bread"

s food all that is entailed in "daily bread"? As with most lessons in the Bible, "our daily bread" has a very important spiritual application. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus teaches, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" using the word "bread"
to describe all the temporal needs of humanity.

Most important, He would later say, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Christ was not speak- ing only of our physical needs, but instructing us to invite God into our hearts every day. The bread represents Jesus, our spiritual food, which is far greater and more fulfilling than any physical bread on earth.

How often do we need to be spiritually fed?

All through its sacred pages, the Bible speaks of praying daily. "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (Psalm 55:17). Daily bread, daily communion with the Lord, should be our top pri- ority. Why do we not say, "Lord, give me a month's supply"? Most of us don't fret from day to day that the refrigerator is going to be empty, so we don't often appreciate the implications of praying for daily bread. Although those who lived through the Depression may understand such a concept, few Americans today, living in a society of such mas- sive abundance, have ever really struggled from day to day searching for something to eat. In fact, some of us have months of food in the pantry.

But many of us don't have even a few min- utes of spiritual food stored up in our hearts and minds. Which bread is more important, the physical or the spiritual? How many of us have a month's supply of spiritual bread? We need to col- lect some every day. You can't live tomorrow solely on what you've collected today. Some have a few calories stored up, having memorized Scripture, and it's going to come in handy, but if you want your Christian experience to be vital and full of life, you must have daily devotions. You've got to go out and gather that spiritual manna.

One final thought: The Bible doesn't say, "Give me this day my daily bread. Rather, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." It's our bread, friend. It's not my bread. We ought to be as concerned about the needs of others as much as, or more than, our own.

Scripture teaches, "Bear ye one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). We should be doing that physically, assisting the weak by offering our resources and our strength to help them. We should also do it spiritually, by lifting each other up in prayer, offering one another's petitions on our knees. And we must do this daily, persistently. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them" (Luke 18:7)?

THIRTEEN

"And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors"

id you know Jesus makes only one di- rect commentary on the Lord's Prayer? In Matthew, when He finishes teaching the prayer, He adds, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14, 15). Christ reveals a connection between the vertical and the horizontal relationship—right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps we should listen!

Is this God saying, "I'll make you a deal: You all forgive each other—no bitterness, no grudges, no more talking about the bad things you did to each other—and I'll forgive you"? Is that what God says? Is that the gospel? No, that's not what leads to our forgiveness. We're not saved by the basis of our works. Instead, the gospel says that we are to come just as we are to God, and He will forgive us. However, God says, "Now that you're forgiven, I expect you to forgive each other."

However, although you're not saved by your works, if you continue to live in defiance, you'll be lost because it's evidence that you're not seri- ous about following Jesus. The mercy and grace of God cannot be cultivated in a heart that's embracing a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Has some- one ever talked badly about you? We've all been hurt. And often, we become defensive and start viewing that person narrowly, and we may even wonder if we can dig up a little dirt to even the score. Is that the spirit of Jesus, "who when he was reviled he reviled not again"?

The Bible says that when we realize the high price Christ has paid for our forgiveness, it makes it easier for us to forgive one another. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). We need to be willing to forgive one another, and God points this out to us repeatedly in Scripture. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25, 26 NKJV).

Can you mentally forgive a person even though you may not feel like it? Yes, just like you can accept forgiveness even though you might not feel forgiven. It's done by faith. You can choose to forgive others who have harmed you. Even though you may never be able forget what happened, you can say, "Lord, by your grace I am going to forgive them." You make that conscious choice, and then the grace of God follows.

When you accept the forgiveness of God, His grace naturally follows. You must first have faith that God is going to help you forgive. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). If we can't forgive each other, God can't forgive us, because our hearts are not open either to give or receive forgiveness. That's seri- ous, isn't it? It's going to require an act of grace —a miracle—for us to be able to do that.

FOURTEEN

“And Lead Us Not into Temptation”

his particular petition is the one that is most misunderstood. At a glance, it almost seems as though we’re begging God not to tempt us. “Please, Lord, we know you don’t want to tempt us. Yet if I don’t ask you not to tempt me, you’re going to tempt me.” That’s a really poor translation. In fact, James 1:13 says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

We’re not pleading, “Lord, please don’t tempt me.” So what is this really saying? Well, because we are naturally prone to walk toward tempta- tion, we’re asking God to lead us away from it. Translated more precisely, the prayer would go more like this: “Lead us away from our natural bent to temptation.”

Do we need to pray that prayer? You bet! We are prone to playing too close to the edge. One minister says that when the Lord says to flee temptation, we often crawl away hoping it catches up with us. It’s like gravity inside our hearts, pull- ing us toward sin. So we have to plead with God to help us resist that force.

The devil likes it when we crawl, because it’s easier to catch us with those little compromises. The convicted spy Aldrich Ames said that he didn’t wake up one day and say, “I think I’m going to be a spy. I think I’m going to turn everything over to the Russians for money.” One day, very innocuously, he met a Russian who asked, “Could you give me a phone directory? I’ll give you a lot of money.” It was just a phone directory, but then little by little, he gave them more and more until one day he sold them nuclear secrets. This is how the devil works with temptation—little compromises. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered Uriah, and lied to his people. And it began with a small, lingering, lustful look. We should pray, “Lord, lead me away from even the little things, because that’s how the big things start.”

FIFTEEN

"But Deliver Us from Evil"

really like the seventh petition, which says, "but deliver us from evil." We live in a world drowning in the murky blackness of sin. The only thing that really gives Christians long-term hope is that God promises things aren't always going to be this way. We're looking for ultimate deliver- ance, and when we utter "deliver us," we're talk- ing about Christ coming on the white steed—the King of kings and the Lord of lords establishing His kingdom and wiping out every last vestige of evil reigning in the world today.

"Deliver us" takes us away from evil and sepa- rates us from it eternally. Another way to phrase it is, "deliver us from the evil one." And we ought to be praying not only that God keeps us from temptation, but that He also delivers our broth- ers, because the devil is powerful and cunning, far greater than we are by ourselves. That's why we so desperately need God to lead us.

In speaking of the second coming, Christ said, "Pray always" (Luke 21:36). I'm not sure how often that really means, but look at your own prayer life and see if it measures up. The full text reads, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of man." Are you praying always? Jesus also said that we ought to pray that our flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day (Matthew 24:20). Have you prayed that prayer? Every day, every hour, we should be praying to be delivered from evil so that we can escape what is about to happen in this world. Pray that we will be ultimately delivered and saved from evil within and around us. You can't be saved from an evil world until you're first saved from an evil heart.

SIXTEEN

“For Thine Is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for Ever”

his powerful culmination is found only in Matthew, and what it speaks about is riveting. We are in the midst of a great controversy. The devil says he is the rightful king and that he has the power. Yet Christ, before He ascend- ed to heaven, established His preeminence: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). This prayer reinforces that we should never forget who is in charge of this uni- verse. The prayer doesn’t say, “Thine will be the kingdom,” rather “Thine is the kingdom.” Indeed, all the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer are only pos- sible because Christ is the power. He has control over all things now.

The devil lives for pride, to bring glory to himself. The Christian’s motive is to bring honor to God, to give Him the glory. That’s why Satan hungers to be a god. He wants the glory he doesn’t deserve. The end of this prayer sets the record straight in our own minds and hearts, confessing before God that we know His character and goodness will be soon vindicated.

SEVENTEEN

“Amen”

esus said, “In this manner pray.” It’s not so much His prayer, but our prayer. It’s the prayer of those who want to follow Him. That’s also why this prayer must be something that flows from a truly converted heart. It ought to be a defini- tion of your spirit and attitude. One author put it this way:
“I cannot say ‘our’ if I live only for myself. I cannot say ‘Father’ if I do not endeavor each day to act like his child. I cannot say ‘who art in heaven’ if I’m laying up no trea- sures there. I cannot say ‘hallowed be thy name’ if I am not striving for holiness. I cannot say ‘thy kingdom come’ if I’m not seeking to hasten the blessed hope. I can- not say ‘thy will be done’ if I am disobedi- ent to his word. I cannot say ‘in earth as it is in heaven’ if I’ll not serve him here and now. I cannot say ‘give us this day our daily bread’ if I am selfishly hoarding for the future. I cannot say ‘forgive us our debts’ if I harbor a grudge against anyone. I cannot say ‘lead us not into temptation’ if I delib- erately place myself in its path. I cannot say ‘deliver us from evil’ if I do not long for ho- liness. I cannot say ‘thine is the kingdom’ if I do not give Jesus the throne of my heart. I cannot attribute to him ‘the power’ if I fear what men may do. I cannot ascribe to him ‘the glory’ if I’m seeking for my own honor. I cannot say ‘forever’ if I’m living only for temporary earthly rewards.”

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, it must be in a spirit of complete surrender. And if we’re going to be ready when Jesus comes, we need to learn to pray the way Jesus taught. The essence of prayer is bound up in loving God with all our hearts, for we cannot really love Him if we aren’t getting to know Him. If we’re not communicating our sorrows and our joys, even our most intimate secrets, how can we love Him?

I urge you to invest more time on your knees, but if you can’t be on your knees, I urge you to just pray. Recognize that it is essential to spend quality time with Christ in your personal and corporate prayers and devotions, so we can implement those changes in our lives that will glorify God. Take advantage of the “daily bread” of God’s Word, and communicate to God your desire to be trans- formed from selfish to selfless. Let’s pray for one another more than anything else. Let’s stand to- gether and lift our voices to heaven so that we are more united in the brotherhood and sisterhood of Jesus.

One of my favorite studies in the Bible is read- ing the great prayers of the Old Testament. I hope you will read them too. Read Hannah’s prayer found in Samuel 2. Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9 is also very special. You can also find Solomon’s moving dedication prayer in Chronicles. You’ll find that many of these prayers have elements of the Lord’s Prayer in them. They are about God’s glory, God’s provision, and God’s deliverance, and they’re really about how all of us as Christians are in this together, praying for one another.

Like the British soldier whose prayer set him free, we’re soon going to be reviewed by our Commander in heaven. We need to spend time in drill practice, preparing for the main event. We need to say, “Lord, teach us to pray.” He’s given us the pattern in His Word, so let’s be sure to abide in it. My hope is that you will never see this prayer the same way again.

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