



Bringing Your Needs to God

Matthew 6:11-15

GraceLife: March 25, 2007

© 2007 by Don Green. All rights reserved.

TheTruthPulpit.com

This is a bittersweet day for me as we come to God's word this morning, because we've come to our final message on the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6. And we first started in this whole passage in Matthew 6 about four months ago – it takes a while when you switch back and forth in the pulpit like we do – but I am grateful to the Lord for the encouragement that this passage has been to my own heart and it is going to be hard for me to say goodbye to it. When you preach through a passage, your heart kind of gets knit to it, and when you are there for a while and you contemplate moving away from it, it is a little bit of a tearing effect that takes place even though you have other riches to explore.

Jesus' teaching on prayer and His whole approach to spiritual life in Matthew 6 has released us from many false concerns about prayer.

First of all, He has taught us that it does not matter at all what other men or women think about your prayer life. He specifically condemned the Pharisees who prayed so that they would be noticed by men. And so if you are struggling in your prayer life and you feel that sense of "Oh, I hope no one finds out; I hope no one asks me" or anything – forget about that; it doesn't matter. We don't pray to impress men with our spiritual life; that's not the point at all – it's very liberating.

Secondly, we have seen that how long you pray is at best a very secondary matter. Jesus teaches this model prayer – the Lord's Prayer, and it takes about 30 seconds to recite – and He makes no mention about how long you should pray in the midst of that. It is not that we simply recite this prayer and that's enough. But Jesus says, "Pray after this manner." And He doesn't go into this long multiple-chapter length kind of praying. He gives us something that is very short and condensed.

In fact, He condemned the Gentiles who prayed repetitive prayers, thinking that God would hear them for their many words. He tells us as His disciples – He says, "Don't be like them. Don't be like that because that's not the essence of prayer."

Thirdly, He has taught us that we don't have to spend a whole lot of time rehearsing the details of our specific life conditions with God. He says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

And so, all of those things taken together free us from a lot of the junk that we accumulate over the years as we walk with Christ and as we don't think real clearly about some issues. Those things set us free to be able to focus on the real essence of prayer, which is trust in God and intimacy with God.

There is more that we could say about the clearing away of these false conceptions about prayer. But the glory of Matthew 6, the glory of what the Lord teaches us here, is that He does more than simply clear away false notions. He doesn't just say, "Don't do that," and then move on to something else and kind of leave us with a blank slate.

Let's face it: you and I are spiritual knuckleheads. When it comes to praying and having genuine communion with the living God of the universe He has spoken into existence, on our own, we really wouldn't know what to do – we really wouldn't know what to say. If you suddenly found yourself in an audience with the president or with the king, most of you would start to stammer or your jaw would lock shut. And how much more so with the God of the universe!

Jesus understands that. He knows that we need help; He knows that we are spiritually dull and that we are weak and that we are faltering and that we are consumed with the things of this world. And so in His wonderful grace – in His wonderful, unspeakable, glorious desire that we would enjoy a close intimacy with our heavenly Father, with our Maker, with our Savior and Redeemer – He gives us positive instruction so that we can build a lifelong meaningful prayer life that will stand the test of time, trials, and fluctuating desire.

There is no question about it: that is exactly what this prayer does for us. It is inexhaustible, and the reason that is inexhaustible – the reason that you can plant your roots in this prayer and say, "This will be the foundation for the way that I pray for the rest of my life" – is because this prayer is rooted, in fundamental terms, in the character of God. This prayer is rooted in the goodness of God our Father, who says, "I will reward you when you seek Me. I desire to have you pray to Me. I know what you need when I see you pray and seek and I am going to reward you."

That, beloved, really motivates you to seek out whatever your prayer closet is and to pursue it – far more so, infinitely more so, than saying, "I'm going to pray for 45 minutes today." When you put those two thoughts side-by-side, you see how the detestable that man-centered approach about "I'm going to punch my clock in prayer today" – you see how detestable that is – that you are going to just punch a clock and that's going to somehow mean something in and of itself – that's ridiculous.

When you approach prayer from an entirely different direction – when you say, "This Father in heaven knows me; this Father in heaven sent His Son to redeem my soul from my sin; He loves me; He wants to reward me; He desires that fellowship; He is so good; He is wise and He is faithful and He is omnipotent and omniscient and He is sovereign over all—what kind of glory is this that has been opened up to me that I might be able to

enjoy fellowship with such a One as that—me the creature, me the sinner?” – that, beloved, changes everything about prayer.

If you have gotten nothing else out of this series of seven or eight messages, that is the thing that I would most have you take away from everything that we taught on this. We trust God’s goodness as Father; we bow before His greatness as the King of the universe; we are convinced that He wants to bless us as we seek Him. That revolutionizes everything in your heart and says, “God, I want to pray *now*,” because you are drawn to the extended majesty of God, rather than trying to achieve some artificial man-made standard about what prayer should be like – it changes everything, and bless God for it!

When we start with the character of God in prayer and that is your fundamental starting point, you have established an infinitely better, more godly framework than all of your long prayer lists and all of your clock-watching could ever do, and it is clearly Jesus’ teaching.

And so, beloved, what I want you to see is that what we have talked about in the Lord’s Prayer over these past several weeks – these are the matters, these are the issues that you should train your conscience to respond to when it comes to prayer. You can probably tell, I’d like to say a whole lot more about that, but I’d better move on.

Now in what is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer, in verses 9 through 15 of Matthew 6, what Jesus is doing is He is giving us a fundamental outline of the topics that you should cover when you pray. He knows that we are distracted, as I said earlier, and so He builds as it were a track that the train life of our prayers can run on.

He tells you to take this outline, take these general principles, and then flesh them out in your own words – flesh them out in the midst of your own life’s circumstances on a consistent basis. This is inherent to the whole concept of what it means to walk with God – this is foundational, this is very basic, and yet, in its simplicity, its depth cannot be thoroughly explored. If you only knew how much I have cut out to be able to present this to you... but there comes a point where you have got to keep moving.

Anyway, let’s take a look at the text – Matthew 6, verse 9, reading down through verse 15 this morning. Jesus, after He had just condemned the way the Pharisees and the Gentiles pray, tells you as His disciples – He says:

Pray then in this way: Our Father, who is 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 lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Let me just make a little simple point, there in verse 15 about that doxology “Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” – I want to address that upfront just briefly. For a lot of you you will see that text in brackets in your English Bible. What that is indicating is simply that that phrase was probably not part of what Jesus originally taught about in this section on prayer. It doesn’t appear in the oldest and the best Greek manuscripts that we have that support our English translations.

And so most scholars believe that it was something that was added at the later date, by a copyist who felt like he wanted to round out the nature of the prayer. That doesn’t mean that it is bad; it doesn’t mean that it is not true; and that’s why our translators have kept it in there. But just to recognize that that’s why those brackets are there in your Bible – Jesus probably didn’t include that part when He first taught His disciples here on the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, with that set aside, let’s look at the text as we have it here. In these first five verses, verses 9 through 13, this prayer breaks down into two basic sections. Last time what we saw was that Jesus taught us, both in the nature of the grammar that He used and in the priority that He gives to this prayer in sequence, that your first fundamental duty in prayer – when you pray, your first fundamental duty is to seek the glory of God, quite apart from anything about your desires or circumstances.

He tells you to seek God’s glory in His name, in His kingdom, and in His will. We looked at all of that last time and I’m not going to review it any more than just mention it here this morning. Your priority in prayer, your first priority, is the glory of God. When you think about anything that we just talked about in terms of the majesty of being able to approach this great God in prayer, His great goodness – His good greatness, if you want to put it that way – then it is obvious that He should be the center of attention. He should be the starting point – that’s only right that we would pray that way.

But now as we move into this second section of the Lord’s Prayer, beginning in verse 11, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are seeing another dimension of the unfathomable goodness and greatness of God from an entirely different perspective. Here in this second section of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to bring the physical needs of our lives before God, the forgiveness of our sins before God, and the spiritual protection as we look forward to the future with God.

It is really hard for us to step outside of ourselves to think about this, but we need to think outside of ourselves for just a moment to appreciate the majesty of this. God in His transcendent glory, God in His matchless worth – His intrinsic worth as the Creator of all things, dwelling in heaven with the power to speak a universe into existence by His mere spoken word – from that position of unassailable sovereignty, God says, “I care about what is happening in your life” – that’s amazing!

Now you care about what happens in your daily life – we all tend to be a little self-centered in our focus – but to step back and say, “This transcendent God is concerned

about the niggling details of my transient life?” Wow! I mean, come on, what kind of God is this! What kind of great condescension is it that, after He sent Christ into the world to die for our sins, that He would continue on and be involved in every detail of our lives – so much so that He says even every hair on your head is numbered. How inexhaustible is His concern, how inexhaustible is His love, for those that He has brought into relationship with Himself!

You should look at this second section of this prayer and say, “God, why?” And answer that question by understanding that it has nothing to do with you. The fact that God would invite that kind of prayer from His disciples is all a testimony about how good He is and how pervasive is the extent of His absolute sovereignty over all things.

It should make you love Him all the more. It should make you just melt on your knees before Him and say, “God, I have trouble caring about my next door neighbor that I see from day to day, and yet You in far surpassing glory care about these little details. Thank You, Father, for that kind of unsearchable goodness!”

We see it first of all in verse 11 – I’m going to give you three points, three hooks on which to hang your prayers for your own needs and the needs of those around you. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us our daily bread,” “Forgive our debts” – using the plural. Your prayer life should expand beyond your own circumstances. But here in verse 11, Jesus tells you to bring your physical needs to God on a daily basis.

1. Physical Needs

Look at what He says in verse 11 – look at the verse with me – where it says, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In contrast to the unsearchable glory of God that has occupied the first half of this prayer, all of a sudden it is right down to the details of right where you live.

Jesus here uses the common word for literal bread. I agree with many commentators who say that they think that Jesus is using this “bread” as a short-hand term to refer to all of the daily necessities of life, and if you think about it, it has to be that way. To be overly literal here would be to say Jesus taught us to pray for bread but not water – that’s obviously not His intent. This is a phrase referring to the daily necessities of life. “God, in all of Your majesty, I still have to live out my life here before You on earth, where I have these day-to-day needs” – and so you bring them before Him.

The word “daily,” in terms of “give us this day our *daily* bread,” is a rare word that appears only here and in Luke 11, verse 3, in the New Testament. It seems to be a word – from the best work that the experts can do on it – that looks forward to the immediate future. Whether it’s the day just ahead as you are praying in the morning or the next day as you pray in the evening, it is looking to life as a walk day-by-day.

And the significance of this in terms of our daily priorities, our daily necessities, is probably lost on us a little bit compared to those who heard Jesus speak these words live

in the first century. But I want you to follow me here: In Jesus' day, many, many people were paid each day for the work on a daily basis – one day's pay basically bought one day's food. And so existence in Jesus' day, for the vast majority of the people, was very much hand-to-mouth – one hand is working and the other one is bringing the food to the mouth – there wasn't a whole lot to draw upon from day to day as you looked to the future. And so Jesus here, looking out on the common disciples that were there in front of Him, was teaching them to pray in a way that expressed – get this – that expressed trusting dependence on the God who was the source of everything in their lives.

Now, in your life and in mine – and in our prosperous society here in the West, where we stockpile food and other necessities, and so many of us have food for the next few weeks in our house – it's kind of hard for this to necessarily take the weight and the power that it had on Jesus' original audience. But what I want you to see is – and I want you to follow me really carefully here because this really goes to the heart of everything in this second half of the prayer – is that you as a Christian have to come back to that spirit of dependence on God on a day-to-day basis.

If you are enjoying prosperity, don't let that cloud you from the fact that every breath that you take is a gift from God. Every good and perfect gift, James says, "comes down from the Father of light." Everything that you have is a result of His giving to you; everything that you will need must come from His hand or you will not know it, you will not see it.

And so, beloved, what you have to do, if you really want to be serious about walking with God and honoring Him in your prayer life, is you have to come back and cultivate that sense of daily dependence on God, cultivate that mindset and the prayer life in which you understand that everything that you need must come from Him or you will not have it.

And that principle of dependence, beloved, extends beyond what you eat to every need in your daily life – your family, your finances, your ministry, your work, your health. Every aspect of daily life, that which naturally assumes and consumes our attention, is something that's intended to be brought under the sovereign hand of God, and you say, "God, I depend upon You for this." And so when a daily need presses on you, you are conscious of what lies ahead – that becomes your opportunity to pray and say, "Father, give me what I need in this situation; I trust You for it."

Now, just a little side note here: Some people have tried to interpret this passage, over the course of church history – some have wanted to try to elevate – as they define elevation – elevate this term "bread" into a spiritual sense, where they are saying, "What Jesus was talking about here is not daily bread. I mean, why do we get messed up – why are we focused on material needs like this? Jesus is really talking about our spiritual needs."

And these friends would point to a passage like John 6, where Jesus said, "I am the bread that comes down out of heaven," and say that's how we should understand Matthew 6 here – that He is talking about our spiritual needs. Well, I don't agree with that. John chapter 6 has many indications to show that Jesus was referring to bread in a

metaphorical sense. He said, “I am the bread that comes down out of heaven.” Now as soon as He says that, you understand that He is not talking about literal bread – you understand He is using an illustration or an analogy.

But none of those indicators are present here in Matthew 6 where Jesus says to pray for your daily bread. People in an agrarian society who wonder from day to day where their next meal was going to come from would understand this in the plain, ordinary sense of the words. And so, John 6 is not the interpretive bread that we should use here in Matthew 6.

Furthermore, I would say on this point, if you look at chapter 6, verse 25, notice how Jesus goes on just shortly after the Lord’s Prayer and He starts talking about your daily needs, your daily physical needs. Verse 25 – He says:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

So just after He prays this, He goes into an extensive discourse about how we are to deal in our daily lives about physical needs. And so here in the Lord’s Prayer, I believe it is best to look at “our daily bread” and say, “Jesus is teaching me here that it is appropriate for me to bring my physical needs before Him – bring the necessities of life before Him as part of expressing a dependent, trusting relationship on my Father who cares about every detail of my life.”

What that does, beloved, when you understand the prayer that way – please understand – what that does – that doesn’t diminish God to involve Him with such mundane details; that doesn’t trivialize prayer. Quite to the contrary, it is one way to fulfill what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, when he said:

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

What this does, beloved, when Jesus tells you to pray for your daily bread – what that does is it elevates every aspect of your life to a spiritual dimension that has eternal significance. All of a sudden, your needs become the intersection point of which you relate to God – it becomes fundamental because you say, “God, I recognize You as the source of all things. I am dependent upon You to meet every need that I have and I ask You to do so, Father, because I trust You.”

So your daily needs become the stage upon which the glory of God is displayed, and all of your life is vested with eternal significance when you view it from that perspective. So Jesus says, “Give us this day our daily bread” – just take Him at its simple ordinary nature of what He says here; don’t spiritualize away that which would vest every moment of your life with eternal significance. This is glorious; this is God condescending to your level to meet you right where you are at – that’s worthy of His praise!

So what do you do with that kind of opportunity? What do you do with that spirit? How should you approach this kind of prayer? Here is how I would encourage you to think about expressing that trust in God: On my dresser at home, I keep a basket full of coins, just the loose change from the day and the things that accumulate fairly quickly – I just toss it in there like many of you probably do. And periodically what I’ll do is I’ll just grab a handful of those coins and give them to my five-year-old daughter, Marisa.

She kind of knows what’s going on when I look at that basket. And so I do that just to make her happy; I just want to give a little, small slice of joy to her heart. This past Wednesday – and I almost never use my kids as an illustration; I don’t like to do that, but it’s just too fitting – on Wednesday she was in my bedroom, and I said, “Marisa, how much do you want?” And she gave the perfect reply – she said, “How much do you want to give me?”

Now think about that – there is a genius in that that says, “Father, I trust you, whatever you think is best” – I’m not saying she thought it out this well; she may have been pretty calculating, I don’t know – but it was so spontaneous, I don’t think so. But Marisa was expressing there that she was trusting me for whatever I wanted to give her out of my abundance, what she knew of my abundance. I ended up giving her about four times as much as I’d planned, simply to reward her trust.

Beloved, what I want you to see here is that’s how I would encourage you along those lines to approach your heavenly Father when you pray about your daily needs. God knows your needs before you ask Him. Without question, anything that you ask – the best that you could do when you ask Him for anything really specific is to simply manage to get your request up to what He has. You are never going to ask for something better than what God would give you – right?

Because we trust Him, He is our Father, He is good, and so what I would encourage you to do, when you go to God in prayer for your daily needs, is to say, “Father, You know my needs; I don’t need to rehearse them before You. You know what is good; You know what is best. Would You just give to me whatever You want? Would You just fill this need as You see fit, because I trust You.” And you let God answer that prayer out of His abundant generosity that is tempered by His wisdom for what is good for you.

What that does is it changes the whole dynamic of prayer. Rather than being a selfish pursuit of what you think you want or need, it becomes the means of you saying, “Father, I trust You. I trust the fact that You know about this; I trust You to give what is best. So just give what You think, Father, and I will be content.”

When you do that day after day after day, you cultivate that trust and dependence that is the foundation of the walk with God – you feel your need and you ask God to supply it; it is not that complicated. That’s what I love about Jesus’ teaching on prayer here, beloved: it is not that complicated! You know, how many times have you heard people say something like this: “I just don’t know how to pray in this situation. I don’t know what to pray for the right result to be”? Why did you even worry yourself with that? Of

course you don't know – you don't know the future. Your mind is limited by sin; you are limited by selfish desires.

A Christian should never say, “I don't know what to pray for” – never! You always know how to pray in those puzzling situations when you come right back to what Jesus said. He meant what He said when He said, “Pray then in this way: Father, give us this day our daily bread.” “Whatever is needful for my immediate situation, Father, give it according to Your will.”

Don't try to help God out, like He needed your assistance to figure out what to do here. Take that burden off of your mind and replace it with a trusting dependence on the goodness and wisdom of God, and prayer will become much simpler and much more powerful and much more satisfying – without a doubt! Because all of a sudden, as you cultivate that and pray that way, what your soul is saying is, “God, I'm just satisfied with You. You are aware; You love me; I'm done. Praise God; praise Your name, Father.”

But as we continue on in Jesus' prayer here, we recognize that He teaches us about more than our physical provision, more than our daily needs. There is a whole spiritual dimension to Christian life that should also be the subject matter of our prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray for forgiveness of our sins.

2. Forgiveness

Confession and seeking forgiveness from God for our sins is an inherent part of a healthy prayer life. Look at verse 12 with me, where Jesus says:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Here in this passage, Jesus is looking at sin as though it were a debt that needed to be repaid. We are debtors to God in the sense that we owe Him an obedience to His moral law, and even as Christians we do not give that obedience as we should. This prayer asks God to release us from the debt of our disobedience so that we don't have to pay it.

I realize that there are some theological issues wrapped up in that and hopefully I'll be able to clear those up. Understand this: that the efficacy of this prayer – what gives this prayer power and assurance that it will be answered – ultimately flows from the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary. That is where forgiveness of sins was forever purchased for those who believe in Him by His shed blood.

Now, at the time Jesus taught this in His earthly ministry, the cross was still future in a chronological sense. Now as we look back on it, we understand that it is only through the death and resurrection of Christ that we can pray this way. Now follow with me here: Once you have first put your faith in Christ – you repented of your sins, you put your faith in Him, and His righteousness has been counted to your account – your salvation is permanently established, eternally established, never to be taken away.

This is not a prayer that unless we pray, God would withdraw our justification from us – that’s not at all what’s in mind here. What is in mind here is that daily walk of the Christian life, as we go through the day and we sin – with our words, with our looks, with our looks in terms of our eyes, with our actions and all of that – we are still liable to sin. We are still subject to sin; we still sin.

Now in a positional sense, those sins are wiped away and forgiven. However, from a daily walk with God, at daily communion with God, we come to God and we confess those sins and we ask Him to cleanse us from them so that they do not interrupt our fellowship with him. We confess our sins to cleanse our conscience, to acknowledge God’s authority, and to restore the joy of our salvation with Him.

Now, I realize that in the evangelical world that term is used loosely. There are some people who teach that Christians should not confess their sins. They say that is the denial of the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice: “Your sins are already forgiven; therefore, you don’t need to confess them.” What should we say about that?

Well, if they want to teach that, I guess it is their business. The main one who disagrees with them is Jesus, because Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray as part of their righteous life. This whole Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, presupposes someone who is already in the kingdom of God – this is righteous life in the kingdom. But *of course* it applies to disciples; of course you should confess your sins when they come to mind.

You need to do this on a consistent basis so that you do not harden your heart, stifle your conscience, and somehow become comfortable with sin – because that accumulated sin has that effect where you just increasingly get indifferent to the righteousness of God. And if you have been here throughout our teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, you know how impossibly inconsistent that is with everything that Jesus said, because the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount is that the true salvation produces in the heart of the believer a desire for practical righteousness. And so that which would make you comfortable with sin has to be eliminated. One of the gifts that God has given us is the gift of confession so that that would not happen.

And again, beloved, notice that just as with your dependence on God for your physical needs in the first request, you are still expressing dependence upon Him. You are expressing trust in Him: “Father, I sinned against You, but as my Father, I trust that You are not casting me aside here. So I just ask You to forgive me; I ask You to release me from the accountability that You would rightfully bring on that, and I do so because the price is already paid at the cross.” So that even your sins when you respond to them rightly become a way for you to deepen your walk with God – it’s *amazing* how good God is!

Now, some people have gotten a little bit worked up and said, “Well, why does Jesus tell us to seek forgiveness ‘as we have also forgiven our debtors’?” They say, “Well, isn’t that kind of like a *work* that you are saying, ‘Because I have forgiven people, therefore,

God forgive me’?” That’s not Jesus’ teaching here at all. What this prayer does is that it guarantees the integrity of the request. The person, who understands that God has forgiven him, will necessarily become a forgiving person toward others – it has to be that way. Go to Matthew 6:14 and 15 here. Jesus says:

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Here is what He is saying in this passage – He is saying if you persistently refuse to forgive someone – if you persistently and stubbornly refuse to let go of an issue that you have got with another person – you may very well be showing that you are not a Christian at all.

If you refuse to forgive someone for a wrong that they have committed against you, you don’t want to pray this prayer that Jesus prayed here, because you are saying, “Forgive me, Father, just like I forgive other people.” And God looks at you from heaven and says, “You don’t forgive that person, therefore, maybe I won’t forgive you either.” Not in a permanent, justifying sense, but in terms of the fact that you have not really cleared accounts with God when you are asking for forgiveness, but are harboring resentment against someone else.

When you continue as a Christian to bring that kind of resentful, bitter attitude and ask God to forgive you, what you are really doing is you are asking God to discipline you until you will learn to forgive and therefore bring the same kind of forgiving heart to the prayer table that you want God to give to you. This is very searching. In these little bits of words that Jesus has given us here in the Lord’s Prayer, He is telling you to examine all of your relationships as you come to God in prayer.

See, one of the marks of true conversion is that you are willing to forgive others and be reconciled, because you recognize that God has forgiven you much more and achieved a greater reconciliation with you through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Father, You forgave me a debt of ten million dollars; that guy owes me fifty” – parallel in Matthew 18. I’m not talking about finances here; I’m talking about relational stuff, just so you understand my analogy.

But here is the point: Jesus isn’t contradicting the whole rest of scripture that says “salvation is by grace through faith” in this passage. What He is saying is, “This is a mark that you genuinely know God as your Father and can rightly appeal to Him to forgive you.”

So, don’t come to God’s throne with a bitter heart. Don’t come to Him full of resentment towards somebody else. Resolve that in your heart first; resolve those conflicts where you can and then come to God and say, “Father, forgive me because forgiveness is what I am aiming as the pattern of my life as well. I’m praying with integrity, God.” And when

we come that way, Jesus says, “Your heavenly Father will also forgive you” – the grace of God.

Final point here – we talked about physical needs and forgiveness; point number three, just to try to keep the phonic alliteration of this, is prayer for...

3. Fortification

And I would dare say that of all of the things that Jesus mentions in this prayer; I would say that this is the one we probably neglect the most. Look at Matthew 6:13, where Jesus says:

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil...

Now that you have confessed your past sins, in the second part of this section of the prayer, Jesus now tells you to be proactive in your prayer life – to anticipate what is going to happen. He says, “Look to the future and seek God’s protection from sin.”

Here is what this prayer is doing: this prayer is looking reality square in the face, and with the heart that desires righteousness, you look at the future in all of its uncertainty and you say, “God, evil lurks in this world. I am a fallen creature, subject to temptation. God, I desire righteousness so much that I will ask You in advance to preserve me from anything that would detract from it. It’s not just that I’m content to deal with my past failures. I look to the future and say, ‘God, I want to succeed spiritually; I want to live righteously,’ so help me do that.”

Sinclair Ferguson said:

The final petition of the Lord’s Prayer assumes that the children of God realize their weakness and vulnerability, and therefore, seek the protection of God from evil.

Now, this is another verse that people have stumbled on and gotten stuck in their throat, because someone says, “Now I understand from the book of James that ‘God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone’ – why this prayer then?” Think through this with me for just a moment. First of all, notice that Jesus’ prayer here is not “Father, do not tempt us.” That’s not what Jesus says; God is never going to tempt you directly and entice you to evil.

Rather, what this prayer is doing is it recognizes that God is in sovereign, providential control of the direction of our lives – God leads us. This prayer also recognizes the reality of sin and temptation, that there is a world system and evil desires in our hearts and the adversary of our souls – all of which would conspire together to draw us away from righteousness.

By teaching us to pray that God would not lead us into temptation, Jesus is reinforcing the desire for righteousness that marks the true believer described in the Sermon on the Mount. The person who prays this recognizes the weakness of his flesh – “we all stumble in many ways.” And so in reality, what this prayer is – this is not a prayer that does not trust God because you are afraid that He is going to lead you astray – that’s a blasphemous thought, totally unnecessary even from the contents. Get this: the reality of this prayer request is that this prayer does not trust *self*.

It says, “Lord, if I am exposed to temptation, I am likely to fall, so lead me away from it so I can maintain a righteous life. And if perhaps, Father, I fall – in Your wisdom I fall into difficult trials, I find that I am being exposed to these temptations...” – then the last part of the request is just a flip side of the coin: “Father, deliver me from the evil one so that I would not sin against You and I would maintain a righteous life before You.” There is more I could say about that, but time is getting a little fleeting here on it.

Just understand, thinking through some biblical examples here: The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness and Satan tempted Him there. Job was a righteous man and Satan demanded permission to try, and God granted the permission. Satan demanded permission to sift Peter like wheat. I want to tie all of that together in the next couple of minutes with this thought. Recognizing that the temptation and the assaults come from the devil, this prayer is another dependent prayer on God that says, “God, protect me from this.”

I want to close with just a couple of thoughts here. Don Carson said this:

As Christians grow in holy living, they sense their own inherent moral weakness and rejoice that whatever virtue they possess flourishes as the fruit of the Spirit... ” – he asks this question – “When did you last pray such a prayer? Is it not a mark of spiritual carelessness, and insensitivity to the spiritual dimensions of the human existence, that such prayers are neglected?”

There is a tendency that you sometimes encounter among young Christians – and I did the same thing myself many years ago – that sounds noble, and I want to use this as an illustration to kind of wrap this up and close it. You might find some young Christians – maybe even some of you – that say something like, “I’m praying for trials to come into my life.” And the idea that they have is they want to draw closer to God through trials, and so they ask God proactively to bring trials into their lives.

It sounds noble and courageous to pray that way, and you say, “Man, he is really serious – he is even willing to go through trials!” But I want to tell you that that is not a righteous prayer. That is a foolish prayer that is rooted in a proud over-estimation of your own spiritual strength that says, “God, bring the trials. Put me in a position where I’m exposed to the assaults of the devil, and I can take it; I can handle it.”

It’s the same mindset that Peter had on the night before Jesus was crucified, when he said, “Lord, even if everyone falls away, I won’t fall away” – that boastful self-

confidence that completely ignores what the Bible clearly says: “Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”

Rather than seeking trials, the Lord teaches us to ask God to arrange His providence to keep us out of the kind of testing that would overwhelm us. The kind of praying that Jesus is teaching here says, “Father, I value my fellowship with You so much and I so want to live a righteous life that I pray that You would protect me from any kind of test or temptation that would interrupt that fellowship. Father, don’t let anything come between us.” And you round it up by saying, “But Father, trials are necessary; deliver me from evil in the midst of it.”

There is nothing righteous about asking God to bring trials into your life, as if you were man enough to take it. I say that with my hands burned from having prayed that way as a young Christian – that kind of boastful arrogance that says, “God, bring Your trials; I’m ready for them.” And then I tasted a seven-year dark abyss of spiritual night, for lack of better word – as much as a Christian can be in a spiritual night. I never want to go back there again. I never ask God to bring trials into my life.

“God, if You want to sanctify me, do what Jesus said: ‘Sanctify me in Your truth’.” But if trials come, if God nevertheless chooses to bring them, then you respond and say, “Father, I’m going to consider this all joy because I trust You, and I trust that even this arrangement of Your providence is for my good” – but you don’t take the initiative in saying that.

To sum this prayer up and looking at it, we approach our prayers in saying, “Father, I want to be righteous; I value my fellowship with You. I trust Your goodness; I bow in awe at Your greatness. Glorify Your name, provide for me in the process, until one day, Father, I see You face to face and prayer is exchanged for a face-to-face dialogue.”

Let’s pray:

Father, we have been greatly blessed by You and by Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and I pray that we would fulfill the desires that lead to this kind of praying – that You would work that into our hearts so that we would truly honor You and live out a prayer life that is worthy of Your great name and that properly expresses the dependence that is ours as we walk with You day by day. We honor You; we bless You; and we commit all of this to You in Jesus’ name. Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.