

"The Lord's Prayer" (Part 3) - The needs of People

It is good to pray for the physical and spiritual needs of people - in fact, it is necessary. But it must be done within the context of the first three (God-centered) petitions. We must remember that "people-centered" petitions are our *second* focus.

Note that, in all three of these petitions, the emphasis is on "us" as a *group*. The corporate focus is predominant.

"Provide for our 'daily bread' (physical needs)!"

This is the first of our needs - without it, we cannot live. Without sustenance for life, there wouldn't be any "people of God" on earth! There would be no one to pray the first three petitions. (We couldn't even pray the last two petitions about forgiveness and protection!) This petition acknowledges our dependency on God for these things. Note also that the focus is on the group, on giving "daily bread" to *us*, rather than just to *me*.

"Daily"

This is a unique word, not found elsewhere in the New Testament (or in other ancient writings); so there is some uncertainty as to meaning. Does it mean "give it for *today*," "give it for *tomorrow*," or simply "give it as *needed*"? Most evidence suggests a combination of the last two ideas, with a focus on the *future*. "Give us what we need for tomorrow."

- Many of the church fathers compared this petition to Israel's experience with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-36). Each day, they had enough for "today." (God had already provided.) During the night, God would provide all that they "needed," for "tomorrow."

"Bread"

This would include *anything* that affects our ability to survive. It involves not only food, but economy, jobs, money, the political situation, good government, transportation, justice, labor, and anything else related to survival.

However, this does *not* mean asking for a luxurious lifestyle. This "bread" refers to basic provisions, not steak; and it refers to "just what we need," not to a massive stockpile, laid up for the future!

- We can compare it to what Jesus did when he fed the 5000 (Matthew 14:15-21). The bread and fish were very basic provisions.
- Many of us have difficulty understanding the significance of this petition. We don't have the problems of obtaining "daily bread" that most people in the world have.

What if "daily bread" doesn't seem to come?

We live in a world characterized by pain, suffering and death. These will *not* be totally (and permanently) gone until Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom on the earth (Revelation 21-22).

Until then, there will be times when things don't go the way we desire or pray. How should we respond in such times?

- We trust "our Father," who understands all things.
- We remember his promises to us, such as Romans 8:28, which tells us that God uses all things to accomplish good in the lives of those who love him.
- We look forward to the day that all pain, suffering and death will be forever gone. After all, any trial we experience today - any lack of "daily bread" - is only temporary.

"Forgive us, the same way we forgive others!"

"Forgive us" - release, pardon, let go

We are constantly getting ourselves indebted to God, so we have a constant need for forgiveness. We are asking God to release us from our debts, our sins.

- Asking is a "shameless" act, because we not worthy. We ask like beggars because we *are* beggars who don't deserve it.

What type of forgiveness do we want? We want it *unconditionally*, not based on what we deserve! We want *grace* - God's "undeserved kindness" given to us.

Note again the focus on "us." We (as individuals) can't ask for a forgiveness that we aren't willing to share with others!

"The way we forgive others" (or "as we herewith forgive others")

There is one requirement or condition for forgiveness: It is not to be hoarded, but shared! We cannot ask forgiveness for ourselves, without offering it to others. Otherwise, we will *not* be forgiven by the Father.

- Consider the parable of unmerciful servant - Matthew 18:23-35.
- How can we pray for God's name, kingdom and will to be displayed on earth (the first three petitions), if we are unwilling to let them be seen in the way we treat others?

Offering forgiveness is *not* the same as "making others ask for it." Don't wait until they ask! Simply release them from their debt.

We cannot demand that people do something to "deserve" our forgiveness! We need to forgive *others* the way we want God to forgive *us*. (Does God make *us* earn forgiveness?) Don't expect or demand anything back!

"Don't let us give-up when we are tested; protect us!"

Evil (in whatever form it may come) wants to create desires within us, which go against the name, kingdom and will of God. By ourselves, we have no power to resist; and when we pray this petition, we are admitting our weakness. We know that, without God's help, we will give in to the pressure of temptation. We are asking, "Don't allow us to reach our breaking point!"

"Testing / temptation"

This term is a broad concept, including *any* type of "pressure" that would try to get us to turn away from godly conduct. This is not a prayer to *escape* pressure, but for protection *in the midst* of it.

- Think about what happens when grapes are squeezed to the point that the pressure bursts the skins. In a sense, we are asking God, "Don't bring us to the point that we burst!"
- We need forgiveness (the previous petition), because we too often *choose* to give-in to temptation.

Temptation or testing is not always sinful. It can have a neutral connotation and simply refer to being "tested" or "proven" in some manner. But some types of testing *are* negative, the result of sinful inclinations (as seen in James 1:13-15).

"Don't lead us into it!"

"Leading" has to do with guidance. "We're in the middle of a mine field (of temptations) and need your guidance through it!"

- Without his leading, the *opposite* of the first three petitions will occur. God's name will be defamed; and we will act contrary to the kingdom and will of God.

"Show your grace (undeserved kindness) by sustaining us; don't bring more than we can handle!"

- 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that God will *not* allow us to be tempted beyond our abilities, but will enable us to endure it. If we *do* give in, it is because we chose to do so (James 1:13-15).

"Deliver us"

We know our weakness and admit that we are in danger of committing evil. We are asking God to rescue us from our precarious situation. It's like crying out, "HELP!!!!!"

- The word "evil" can refer to *either*: 1) the evil we are tempted to commit, or 2) the "evil one" (Satan) who is tempting us. We need deliverance from both.

The conclusion to the prayer

"Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

This is found only in some translations of the Bible. Originally, there was no specific ending attached to the prayer, but one was implied. (It was normal practice for a person to conclude his prayer the way he thought appropriate.) As time progressed, early church began to end the prayer in a uniform manner; and eventually the standardized ending was added to the text.

- Some of the common prayer endings that were used at that time are: 1) "For the kingdom is thine," 2) "Thou shalt reign in glory for ever and ever," and 3) "Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom, for ever and ever." Note the similarities of these to the ending that was eventually adopted by the church.

Final comments: We can trust God!

Immediately after answering the disciples' question about prayer (Luke 11:1-4), Jesus gives two parables to teach them about trust in God. Similar thoughts (stated in a different way) are also seen at the end of Matthew 6. Also, Matthew 7:7-11 parallels part of the Luke passage.

Here is a summary of what Jesus said, as described in both the Luke and Matthew passages:

The "friend" who was unwilling to help - Luke 11:5-10

Who would have such a friend? In the typical Jewish community of that day, *nobody* would have had such a friend! *All* would have been willing to give the person what he needed. To not do so would have resulted in shame and disgrace for the whole community!

- This is *not* a parable about *persistence*, but about *boldness*. The neighbor had to ask only once, and he didn't have to pound on the door (which would have scared those who were inside)!
- What does this teach us? The Father is even *more* willing to give, when we have a need.

The human father who gives good things to his children - Luke 11:11-13

Even human fathers, who are by nature sinful, tend to give good things to their children, rather than harmful things.

- Each pair of items mentioned in the illustration shared some basic visual similarity. When looking down from above, the fish and the snake both looked long and thin. A coiled-up scorpion would have looked somewhat round, similar to the small loaf of bread.
- What does this teach us? Human fathers give *good* gifts; but our Father in heaven is eager to give us the *best* gift, the Holy Spirit. There is *no* greater gift possible. (Receiving the Holy Spirit is equivalent to receiving salvation.)

Putting trust in God, not in the false security of riches and possessions - Matthew 6:19-34

After teaching about personal piety, with prayer being the main focus (the first part of Matthew 6), Jesus warns against trusting in the temporary "treasures on earth" (v. 19-21). We are to be "single-focused," and trust (and serve) God alone (v. 22-24). The Father takes care of the plants and animals, and he is even more eager to take care of us (v. 25-30). We don't need to be preoccupied with our needs, like the pagans are (v. 31-32), but can trust God. We are to focus on his kingdom and the righteous things he desires; and let *him* "worry" about the rest (v. 33-34)!