



PASSIONATE LIVING 6

“Praying as a Way of Life”

This, then, is how you should pray;
*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this today, our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*
Matthew 6: 9-13

I don't know about you, but I could stand more prayer in my life...you? I most often associate guilt with prayer, because I don't get up at 4 in the morning to pray like John Wesley and Martin Luther did. I don't spend even 30 minutes every day praying like so many of the prayer warriors throughout history, and some saints that I know even in this church. My prayer life has been hit and miss throughout most of my Christian days! If you find yourself in a similar boat regarding prayer, then today's message might not be just for me...it might also be helpful to you.

You see, I've studied any number of prayer manual's, prayer journals, prayer books, the theology of prayer, the necessity of prayer, how to pray books; but few of those have been as helpful as the chapter under discussion from Kallestad and Breen's book on Passionate Living. Praying as a way of life uses the model prayer Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him how to pray, and it might serve as a good, even great reminder to us who struggle with our own praying. The basic premise of Jesus' model prayer is that prayer happens as a natural part of living as a follower of Jesus. You don't have to set time aside, or apart to just simply pray; you can pray anywhere, at any time, and use this prayer as a model.

It's like I always say to the guy giving me excuses about not attending church while playing golf: "Well, I can just as easily worship (or pray) on the golf course as sitting in a stuffy church." I try to respond graciously with this comeback: "Yes you certainly can worship God on the golf course, or river, or at the mall; the real question is... do you?" You can pray anywhere, anytime, without any prescribed words or ritual, but the real question is; do you?

Today our shape is a hexagon, a six sided orb designed to help us remember the 6 different parts of this simple prayer Jesus taught his disciples. Let's look a bit deeper. The first phrase describes:

1. THE FATHER'S ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

There are two essential truths about this simple, most well known, most beloved opening phrase of this humble model prayer. He begins the prayer by using the collective adjective, "Our": to remind us that we are uniquely connected to each other. We are not alone in our relationship with God; God does not belong to us individually, but to us collectively. But he also uses a very unusual 'name' for God in this model prayer: "Father." The Aramaic word Jesus used, 'Abba', is an informal name we often translate as 'Daddy'. Jesus used an intimate word for our intimate God. This is a shock to the disciples who were used to a formal salutation in addressing God. What little experience these fishermen and tax collector ragamuffins might have had with God; was from observing the tall hats and long robes of the temple priests praying loudly on the street corners and in the temple with their "*Gawd*" type references to Jehovah, Yahweh, and the like. Here comes Jesus telling them if they really want to get God's undivided attention, call him 'daddy'. I would offer the same to you.

If you are having trouble connecting to God, as this far away, untouchable, distant, deity; start calling God, 'Daddy', and see if your prayers don't change.

The second truth to note in this first phrase is the reference to God's name being 'hallowed', or 'holy', or 'full of glory'. When we pray 'hallowed be your name', we are recognizing and admitting, confessing even; that God's chief purpose is to be hallowed, or glorified, in all that **we** do. We are in a submissive sense, wanting God to know that we are willfully aligning ourselves with the will of God, our father. It's all in that first little phrase. Now here's phrase #2.

2. THE FATHER'S WILFULL KINGDOM

"Your kingdom come, your will be done."

And this is not just any king, but THE King. The King of the universe, the King of Creation, the King of our world, and the next. The king of all. Did you notice that Saddam still thinks he's the King of Iraq? What a rude awakening when he is tried and punished. What an even ruder awakening when he discovers (in eternity), he never really was the "king" of Iraq or anywhere else! God alone is our King!

What we mean when we pray 'your kingdom come, your will be done', is that our desire is the same as the king's desire...to see everyone come out of this world of sin and into God's kingdom of forgiveness. When we pray this phrase, we're praying for the future to break into the present so everyone can see it.

This is, however, no academic, or idealistic, 'hope for the future coming of the kingdom', kind of prayer event. No...As we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer, we are inviting the king (the king of the universe...) to come and rule in our lives! It's one very noble action to pray for God's kingdom to reign on this earth...it is quite another to pray for God to reign in our lives. We often fail to realize what the full expression of this prayer might mean.

God's kingdom reigning in the world might be everyone's prayer, but God reigning in our lives is not quite so easy...is it? Think of this; can God's kingdom reign in this world until it reigns in our lives? I'm not sure! I do know that God is able to act according to his will regardless of our motives or actions, but God's kingdom will not be fully realized in this world, until all men and women, all boys and girls, all creatures willfully submit to His authority, His will, His reign. It may affect the whole world, but it begins in here...in me...in you! That's what we have been praying for 50 years!

3. THE FATHER'S GRACIOUS PROVISION

"Give us today our daily bread."

The key word here is today, daily. Notice that we are not told to pray for everything we will need for the rest of our lives, but only for today. Why? So we are compelled to return to him over and over again. That's why I write a check every week containing our tithe; to be reminded, weekly, that all I am and all I have; are on loan from God. This prayer began even before the daily manna lessons the Hebrews learned in the desert. Collect only what you need for today, any less; and you'll go hungry; any more, and it'll grow full of maggots. God's provision for us is abundant, but not extravagant. I like the root thought of this prayer found in the book of Proverbs, chapter 30; verses 7-9;

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; Do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

Wouldn't you love to hear a sermon on the big hair channel from this text? #4.

4. THE FATHER'S CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS"

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

The intimate relationship between God and humankind contains some boundaries, not to fence us in, but to set us free.

When we intentionally cross those boundaries someone usually gets hurt. When we transgress against another we are saying, 'God what you have given to me is not enough.' And for this we must ask forgiveness. When other people stray from their path onto ours, hurting us and abusing us and causing us pain, then we need to forgive them as God has forgiven us.

Another way this phrase might be translated is; "Keep us, Lord from being indebted to you by withholding forgiveness from others." The father's forgiveness is never ending, but it is conditional, based on our willingness to forgive others.

Forgiveness is such an illusive act. We ask for it quite easily from our father, our 'daddy'. But we are sometimes stingy with it when others need it, or desire it. Men, do you want to know what 'being the head of the house' really means? It means offering forgiveness...even before it is asked for. Women do you know what being submissive means? It means extending forgiveness, even when you don't feel like it! Christians, do you know what it means to be a follower of Jesus? It means forgiveness flows easily from your lips and hearts as we remember our own sin, and God's own forgiveness, and our collective brokenness. We can be so hypocritical at this point. Another sermon...

5. THE FATHER'S STEADFAST GUIDANCE

"Lead us not into temptation."

The prayer changes now. Previously Jesus' model prayer has been dealing with personal, intimate stuff, but now the focus shifts to our going out into the world with the message of God's love and forgiveness. This going out is rife with strife, full of trials and multiple temptations. I don't think God often 'leads us into temptation', though some trials and tests do originate in the heart of God. But what this phrase reminds us is that temptations are a part of living in this pre-fulfilled kingdom world, and those temptations are just as real for those who know Christ,

as for those who don't; the only difference; those who know Christ have a greater resource to resist and overcome those temptations...Amen?

The trials and temptations in our world are not like a battle, they *are* the battle, one that we must fight every day. One that we must bring to God in our prayers everyday. If we would remember everyday to pray for the guidance to keep us out of tempting places and away from tempting thoughts, and to avoid tempting habits, maybe when the big temptations do come, we'd be more prepared to overcome them? Maybe!

Acknowledge we are all tempted, and pray for the guidance to avoid them, that's the essence of this little phrase. Now; on to the last.

6. THE FATHER'S OVERARCHING PROTECTION

"And deliver us from the evil one."

Jesus is no fool, and doesn't want us to be one either! Jesus is fully aware that there is an evil spirit being that lurks about this worldly kingdom whose primary purpose is to thwart and defeat the will of God. Jesus met him in the desert before His ministry began; remember? This being knows that the best and most effective way to do that is by sidetracking those lovers of God from fulfilling God's purpose for their lives, and in their world. His tactics are indiscriminate; he is like a roaring lion, seeking endless ways to devour those unsuspecting and weak lambs. His means are insidious, deceitful, and demonic.

Believing in Satan, or the Devil, or the evil one, has fallen out of favor in our modern, scientific, skeptical, world; but Jesus told his disciples there was an evil one, and we best be careful to stay away from 'it'! Satan doesn't care if you believe in him or not, probably prefers we don't if the truth be known. I don't believe there is a demon hiding behind every bush or at the end of every beer bottle; but I do believe there is spiritual being that wreaks havoc in our world, and would derail every person who seeks to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

Jesus warned us of his presence, and instructed us to pray for our Father's protection against this evil one. Just remember these other words of Jesus: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world!" "For I have overcome the world." Satan is a defeated foe, he may win a few battles now and then, he may appear poised for triumph, but his end was secured at the end of the darkened tomb, his future has been determined and it ain't pretty. We live in a world oppressed by this evil force, but even this world shall pass away, and this being, this evil being will one day be chained, and another be destroyed! Why wouldn't we want to join our prayers for that to happen sooner rather than later?

This isn't just a prayer Jesus told us to pray now and then, or to pray every Sunday. This is a model. Next time you are out for a walk, or alone in your car, or awake at night; invite Jesus along, and pray this most familiar prayer, and ask God to stop you on the phrase you most need to focus on today. Maybe you have a friend struggling with cancer. You might get stuck on the 'kingdom come, will be done part', as you lift your friend before your father. You might have a child struggling with drugs or depression, and might get stuck on his/her 'daily bread'. Maybe you want a trigger, set your watch or pager to beep 6 times a day, and take a minute to pray each part of the prayer at each prompting. Maybe you want to pray the prayer every time you see a stop sign, or yield sign. Might even traffic signs be used by God to draw us closer...make us more passionate...I think so!

How about each of us, starting tomorrow, pray one phrase per day, this whole next week, for our church, and our future! What might God reveal to us as we pray on Friday, about how God would have us avoid fruitless temptations, and frivolous decisions. Maybe next week we could share what we 'collectively' experienced by praying this model prayer, together, apart.

I'll not likely ever be an hour a day pray...er, as much as I know that would benefit me. But I will begin using this model prayer more intentionally, and see what God might continue to teach me. You? Let us ...pray..."Our father..."



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