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A Lesson In Prayer

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You've probably heard about the power of prayer and how prayer can bring about wonderful changes in your life. But have you ever prayed and nothing happened? Have you recited the same words over and over, hoping God would somehow help you make a decision or supply an answer to an unsolvable problem? It's not that God doesn't care. The problem could be that you don't know what Jesus taught about prayer.

Have you ever stood in a church service and like some mechanical drone recited these words: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen."

Then you walk away with no understanding of the kingdom, no power and no glory of God in your life. Sound familiar?

This passage is what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13. Yet what Jesus gave here is actually an *outline* of how to approach God and is more accurately a *model* prayer. Let's consider what it reveals.

Start with proper focus and priorities

Taking a careful look at this model prayer, we see that Jesus says to begin your prayer by honoring God. How many times have you started your talk with God with the "gimmies"? You know—give me a new car, give me a new job, give me a new house...

Jesus said to begin your prayer with praise for God's greatness. Many times we approach the awesome God as if He were a genie in a bottle waiting to grant us our wishes, instead of with an attitude of humble worship that is due the Creator of the universe.

Jesus next said to pray, "Your kingdom come." We must long for God's rule to be established throughout this earth—and in our own lives today.

What are the important priorities in your life? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers not to have anxious worry about their physical appearance or clothing. He told them to look at God's creation and see the power, love and genius of the Creator and trust Him.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus told His disciples not to fret over daily needs but to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." God blesses those who have set His priorities in their lives.

If you don't see God's blessings in your life, you should ask yourself, "Are God's priorities the main priorities in *my* life?"

If you're going to have God fulfill His purpose in your life, then everything you do must be founded on two simple principles. Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). These two commandments must be the basis of all your priorities if you want to receive God's blessings.

A matter of unconditional surrender

In the model prayer we are next told to pray, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

At the Battle of Fort Donelson during the American Civil War, the Confederate general asked for terms of surrender. The Union commander Ulysses Simpson Grant answered, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted." After that it was said that Grant's first two initials, U.S., stood for "Unconditional Surrender."

In your relationship with your Creator, He grants you no terms except unconditional surrender. Unconditional surrender means to give up control over your own life and give your life to God. Handing over control of your life to God is daunting.

How can you have the courage to unconditionally surrender your life to God? Think of the most exciting sporting event you ever watched when your favorite team won. Remember the anxiety and emotional ups and downs as the game hung in the balance.

Now think about watching the highlights of the game later. You experienced excitement, maybe even wanting to see the game repeated over and over, but the anxiety of possible defeat was gone. It's the same players, the same drama, but the difference is that *you know the outcome*.

To accept God's will in your life, you must have *faith in His promised outcome for you*. When you have that kind of trust in God, His power is unleashed in your life. It's not always easy, but God will be with you through all the ups and downs, and He will ensure the final victory.

Next Jesus said to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." It's important that we take our physical

needs to God. But notice, you do this *after* you have honored Him and asked for His will in your life. God wants you to bring your job needs, bodily aches and pains, family problems and financial difficulties to Him for wisdom and counsel. He wants to intervene in your life to make every day a wonderful, spiritual adventure, but first you must acknowledge Him as the source of your life and blessings.

Look again to Matthew 6:33, if we put God and His way first, He will see to it that all our needs are met.

Forgive to be forgiven

Next in the prayer outline Christ gave, we are told to ask God, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” The debt here is what we owe for the sin we’ve committed—essentially personal suffering and death. In a similar passage, Luke 11:4 records Jesus’ words as “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” or, as the New International Version interprets this, “everyone who sins against us.”

Thankfully, God offers us forgiveness for the terrible things we’ve done against Him. In return He expects all of us to extend forgiveness to others.

Forgiveness is giving up the emotional need to punish someone who has treated us in a hurtful way. A disciple of Jesus named Peter realized that to forgive someone seven times was remarkable. Jesus told him to forgive a great deal more than that (Matthew 18:21-22). Forgiving others isn’t easy, but you will never experience true peace of mind until you do.

Jesus explained the need for forgiving others in a parable about a man who owed a king a great amount of money. The man was brought before the king and begged for time to get the money together. The king, out of the goodness of his heart, showed the man mercy and forgave his debt.

This man then went out and found another man who owed him a small debt. The second man begged for time, but the forgiven man demanded payment and threw the second man into debtors’ prison. The king found out and told the man whom he’d forgiven, “Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” He then turned the man over to suffering until he paid what had previously been forgiven him.

Explaining the point of the story, Jesus warned, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:23-35).

When you refuse to give up the desire for revenge, you not only twist your own emotions into anger and bitterness, you damage your ability to respond to God’s forgiveness. Once you become obsessed with the wrong someone else has done, you start down a long road of anger and despair.

What, then, must you do? Consciously decide to not dwell on the offenses of others. You must replace the thoughts of hurtful treatment from others with positive thoughts of God in your life.

Break the bonds

We are next instructed in the model prayer to ask, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” The wording in the first part of this verse can be misleading, since God tempts no one (James 1:13). Instead, “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (verse 14).

The Greek word translated “temptation” here would be more accurately rendered as “trial” or “test” – as in the New Revised Standard Version, which words this as “do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.”

The intent of Christ’s words is twofold: first, that we should understand we have an unseen spiritual enemy, Satan the devil (1 Peter 5:8), from whom we need to ask God for His protection and help; and second, that we might be humble and teachable enough to learn our lessons now so we won’t have to be put through sore trials to be corrected.

We must be aware that Satan will use our weaknesses against us. Perhaps your weakness is an uncontrollable temper, sexual lust, resentment toward your spouse, envy, alcohol abuse or – you fill in the blank. Satan wants to enslave us to sin, but God wants to break whatever bonds tie us down. Take your weakness to God and ask Him to protect you from situations that will tempt you to sin and from the tricks and temptations of the devil.

Jesus ends His prayer outline with an expression of confidence in God’s ability to answer the prayer: “for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” thus, your prayer is to end by once again praising God.

This model prayer isn’t a magic formula where you recite the special words and power is released in your life. It is an outline teaching you how to have a personal relationship with your Creator. When you have trouble praying, use this outline to personalize your talk with your Creator. Learn to pray as Jesus prayed!

The Lord's Prayer with God's Response

This is a clever rendition of The Lord's Prayer. The author of this dialog is unknown, but the Scripture (in *italics*) is from Luke 11 and pertains to Jesus teaching His disciples how to pray. This prayer is done in two parts. The person praying is in normal print while God's response is in **bold** print. See if this person sounds like you.

Our Father Who Art In Heaven.

Yes?

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

But – you called ME!

Called You? No, I didn't call You. I'm praying.

Our Father Who Art In Heaven.

There – you did it again!

Did what?

Called ME. You said, “*Our Father who art in Heaven.*” Well, here I am ...

What's on your mind?

But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like fulfilling a duty.

Well, all right. Go on.

Okay, *Hallowed be Thy name.*

Hold it right there. What do you mean by that?

By what?

By “*Hallowed be Thy name*”!

It means, it means ... good grief, I don't know what it means. How in the world should I know? It's just part of the prayer.

By the way what does it mean?

It means Honored, Holy, Wonderful.

Hey, that makes since ... I never thought about what 'hallowed' meant before.

Thanks.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

Do you really mean that?

Sure, why not?

What are you doing about it?

Doing? Why, nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if You got control of everything down here like You have up there. We're kinda in a mess down here you know.

Yes, I know; but have I got control of you?

Well, I go to church.

That isn't what I asked you. What about your bad temper? You've really got a problem there you know. And then there's the way you spend your money - all on yourself. And what about the kind of books you read?

Now hold on just a minute! Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those people at church!

Excuse Me ... I thought you were praying for My will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you - for example.

Oh, all right. I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that You mention it, I could probably name some others.

So could I.

I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I would like to, You know, be really free.

Good. Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together - you and Me. I'm proud of you.

Look, Lord, if You don't mind, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

You need to cut down on the bread ... you know you are overweight.

Hey, wait a minute! What is this? Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden You break in and remind me of all my hang-ups.

Praying is a dangerous thing. You just might get what you ask for. Remember, you called Me - and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep praying. (pause...)

Well, go on.

I'm scared to.

Scared? Of what?

I know what You'll say.

Try Me.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

What about Ann?

See? I knew it! I knew you would bring her up! Why, Lord, she's told lies about me and spread stories. She never paid back the money she owes me. I've sworn to get even with her!

But - your prayer - What about your prayer?

I didn't - I didn't mean it.

Well, at least your honest. But, it's quite a load carrying around all that bitterness and resentment isn't it?

Yes, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even with her. Boy, have I got some plans for her. She'll wish she had never been born.

No, you won't feel any better. You'll feel worse.

Revenge isn't sweet?

You know how unhappy you are - Well, I can change that.

You can? How?

Forgive Ann. Then, I'll forgive you; and the hate and the sin, will be Ann's problem - not yours. You will have settled the problem as far as you are concerned.

Oh, You know, You're right. You always are. And more than I want revenge, I want to be right with You ... (sigh). All right, all right ... I forgive her. There now!

Wonderful! How do you feel?

Hmmmm. Well, not bad. Not bad at all! In fact, I feel pretty great! You know, I don't think I'll go to bed uptight tonight. I haven't been getting much rest, You know.

Yes, I know. But, you're not through with your prayer, are you? Go on.

Oh, all right. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Good! Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

What do You mean by that?

You know what I mean.

Yeah. I know.

Okay. Go ahead. Finish your prayer.

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Do you know what would bring Me glory - What would really make Me happy?

No, but I'd like to know. I want to please You now. I've really made a mess of things. I want to truly follow You ... I can see now how great that would be.

So, tell me ... How do I make You happy?

YOU just did.