

The Gift of Prayer

Copyright © Charles M. Garriott, 2007
Washington, D.C.

WHEN 37 I became aware of the need to devote more time to prayer. I had always believed in it; yet, I was not accustomed to spending significant portions of time in the early morning before God's presence.

Circumstances caused me to be concerned about the Lord's way and its impact upon my future. I was finding His will personally challenging, and in the Oklahoma City ministry His will tormented me. The circumstances resulted in an intense need to pray. I grew in my understanding and longing for the Lord. It was not discipline that caused me to pray, but a desperate soul, needy for God. Often I was confronted with my sin, along with the needs of others. Rarely was I released from the nagging. In a limited manner, I was able to identify with King David whose psalms reveal a passion for prayer. We learn much about seeking God through prayer from this man who reigned some three-thousand years ago.

What we learn about prayer from King David, however, pales in comparison to what we learn from Christ. A segment of His teaching on prayer is found in Matthew's gospel.

5" And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9" This, then, is how you should pray:

" Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,
your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

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

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.^[a]

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

--Matthew

6:5-15

Christ begins with instruction on what we are not to do when we pray. Is that not a warning? Who ever would think that prayer could get a person in trouble? The synagogues and street corners were the usual places of prayer, where the crowds would stop for business and conversation. If the hour of prayer overtook a Pharisee at one of those

places, he would pray so that all might see him. Prayer is not to be for show or an occasion to draw attention to the person praying. By no means does Jesus imply that prayer is not to be offered with others present. Christ himself, on many occasions, prayed before either His disciples or a large crowd of people (John 6:11).

The passage not only warns us what not to do, but also teaches us what we should do when standing before the throne of God, as stated in verses 9-13. In this prayer we are reminded that brevity is very acceptable to God. God knows what we are going to say before it is said.

This specific prayer is often referred to as the "Lord's Prayer." It is not a bad title. Yes, it is the Lord's prayer; yet, you will not find Him using it as such. It is more accurately OUR prayer that He has given us. Many have opined that Christ did not intend to give a specific prayer to be repeated at the beginning of each day. Some use it as such. The frequent mindless repetition of the same prayer has the potential of being an offense to our Lord. Others see this passage as a formula, pattern or model for prayer, given to guide us in our prayer lives. It can be used straight, as given, or as a pattern to guide us in our prayer life.

Christ reminds us that two categories are always to be kept in mind as we pray-- heaven and earth. They are to be remembered in our times of prayer. They are like night and day. The emphasis is very different. Although we can't see the one, it is just as much apart of reality as the other. It should be noted that in all areas of life we are to keep earth and heaven in mind. When we pray we are in both.

What does it mean to keep heaven in mind as we pray?

Heaven

The Scriptures tell us some things about heaven. It is the place that has been prepared for us by Christ (John 14). It is very different than this earth.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. *They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

4 *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

-- Rev. 21:1-4

There is nothing impure. There is never any darkness. There is no longer a curse. It is inhabited by angelic beings. But even more importantly, it houses the throne of God. It is there that we will see His face.

Father

We pray to “Our Father”.

When we think of heaven, we think of our God. As we address Him, it is to be with a most intimate term, "Father."

I have many fond memories of growing up outside of Baltimore in a small farming community called Granite. I am the middle child of five. I have two older sisters and two younger brothers. There are over six billion people who inhabit this earth. Many of them are smarter, wealthier, and better-educated than any of us five. There are many who are more athletic and have accomplished more in life. But none of the six billion have the privilege of calling Charles William Garriott, **father**. All the money and influence in the world cannot give them that right. The five of us have certain rights and privileges that others will never have. When I call my father Dad, it is a reminder of my position of favor and intimacy.

When you pray you should think of your Father in Heaven. His love and favor are much greater than what you will ever experience or give here on earth. His care is beyond what you can imagine. You are presenting your petitions to One who is pleased that you are present and seeking Him. Those who have placed trust and faith in Christ belong to Him as His child. They come into His holy presence dressed in filthy rags that have the aroma of death. Yet they have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. To be a child of God is the greatest position we will ever obtain.

The intimacy a believer has with God the Father, however, is never to be confused with His holiness. Christ emphasizes this in the first petition, "Hallowed be Your name."

God's name is to be held in reverence because it is a declaration, revelation of Himself. There are many appropriate

ways to refer to God according to both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. God's names are a revelation of His person and works. In some cases His name may be a reference to His strength or power. At other times it is a reference to grace and rule.

Kingdom

"Your kingdom come"

We believe that a republic or democracy is the preferable form of government. I would agree. We have constitutional freedoms and rights. But no one believes that these kinds of governments are without faults or problems. A government will reflect the desires and will of the people. If the people of a nation are spiritual and moral, then the laws and the leaders will reflect their positions. If at the same time the people of a democratic country have no concern for spiritual matters and lack moral integrity as understood in the Scriptures, we should not be surprised to find that those in office reflect the same. Often we see this played out in our own country. Frequently the governing factors in a politician's decisions are the poll results.

When you think of heaven, remember that a kingdom is connected to it. In the New Testament the term "Kingdom of Heaven" is mentioned 32 times, all of which are in the gospel of Matthew. It is a spiritual kingdom. Christ's coming to live and die was His means of establishing the Kingdom of Heaven here on this earth. King Jesus was penetrating the hearts of men and women, boys and girls. It is God's agenda to establish His reign in the lives of all those whom He has chosen before the foundations of the world (Ephesians

1). He is working out His will to bring heaven to those who have surrendered to Him.

We know that the establishment of the Kingdom will take place under God's sovereign control. There is nothing "iffy" about it. The means by which this will take place is through prayer. This reminds us that there are certain aspects of prayer that we don't fully understand on this side of heaven. Prayer is a priority in God's Kingdom.

Will

"Your will be done..."

It is important that we define what Christ means when He uses the word "will." What portion of our lives or world events happen outside of God's control, His will?

The Bible teaches us that God, who is in total charge of all that takes place, is not passive when it comes to the events of our personal lives and of the world. The things that will take place and that have taken place in history have happened according not to chance, but the decrees of God. Be it good or bad, nothing takes place outside His sovereign control.

When you consider the birth and life of Christ, there are many different people and events that make up the account that we are given in the gospels. Which parts of the account were left up to chance? Was Herod or Pontius Pilot working outside God's decree? Perhaps when the male children 2 years old or younger were killed, according to Matthew's gospel, God was somehow distracted? Or perhaps when Christ was going through suffering on the cross, God the Father was being detained? Certainly no

loving heavenly Father would stand by, much less plan, for such a thing to happen? Yet, we know that many of the details of Christ's life, death and resurrection were described through the prophets over the course of prior hundreds of years. They were declaring not just what was going to take place, but what was God's will, what He determined would take place.

22"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,^[4] put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

– Acts 2:22-23

This aspect of God's will is not what Christ is referring to here in Matt 6. Christ is referring to God's revealed will that is given to us within the Scriptures.

"10 **Teach me to do your will**, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. –Ps 143:10.

"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." Ps 40:8

When considering this petition of the Lord's prayer we are given some insight into heaven itself. One truth about heaven is that God's will is carried out there. The heavenly host and the redeemed are free from the effects of sin.

God's revealed will is given to us in the Old and New Testament. The Moral Law or 10 Commandments are for us today just as they were for the apostles Peter and John. We do not need to wonder if it is God's will if feeling the

need to steal, or covet, or dishonor our parents. To steal or covet is against His will.

There are times when in anger you are tempted to get even with a friend who offended you at work. Your mind is consumed with the hurt that now has developed into un-checked bitterness and hate. Christ says that to hate someone in your heart is the same thing as murder- Matt. 6:21. You know your Heavenly Father's will. What you do need is prayer that you will think and live according to it.

Earth

Is it easier to pray for what we know and experience? We know well what life is like on planet earth. There are many aspects to it that we greatly enjoy and pursue. It is tempting to think that there is nothing else to life but what we experience. Christ expects what takes place in life to be the focus of our prayers.

Bread

"Daily bread..."

Most of us will wonder why we need to pray for what is readily available. Is it possible that we have little understanding of the world in which we live? Poverty is horrific, but many of us know nothing of its impact. Is it an indication that we are taking for granted our circumstances based upon the past? "I have never gone without a meal before," you say. Perhaps the lack of motivation to request food or other basic necessities may be an indication that you have no need for God's help. You say, "I have worked hard for it," "I don't

need God". Perhaps the greatest benefit for us, when it comes to prayer, is that it works on our pride.

In the mid-nineties, I received a letter from a friend, Rev. Andre Dieudonne, pastor of the Pentecostal Church in Croix des Bouquets, Haiti. He said " My dear Rev. Chuck, Please read my letter in your church - Let them know that I got problem for Food."

I had preached in Croix des Bouquets the year before. I was aware of the needs in his community. After the service, a man came up to the front of the church where I was standing. He requested that we pray for him and his family; he was not able to work and had had no food for three days. From what I could tell, many of the people with whom we spent time had perhaps only one meal a day, of rice and beans. They knew the blessing of food. They also know what it means to be dependent upon God in prayer.

Sin

"Forgive us our debts..."

The Old Testament Psalmist said,

3 " For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." -- Psalm 51:3

The Psalmist, David, had not always been able nor willing to make such a statement. He penned that phrase after many months of denial and suppression of his horrific offense. What is it like to have little or no concern for your sin? You simply have no interest in even thinking about your offense, much less dealing with it.

Jesus Christ does not find your sin to be irrelevant. He teaches us that facing our sin is to be a regular part of our

thought life and prayers. Most do not enjoy or find it a blessing to be confronted with our own sin. It is a reminder of our weakness and lack of discipline. If we are honest, we must admit to being helpless and lacking the strength to maintain moral standards. Yet anyone who understands the nature and work of Christ will also appreciate his own weaknesses. In humility he will acknowledge his sin and receive the grace afforded him by the only Savior, given to us by the Father. Because of God's love, Christ, His only son, came to die for sinners. This great sacrifice has brought those who acknowledge this gift reconciliation with God.

The benefit of using Christ's prayer is that it reminds us of the nature of our relationships with others. The request for the forgiveness of our transgressions continues with the added phrase, "12Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors". The petition implies that we are frequently offended by numerous people and that we have extended to them the grace and forgiveness that we are requesting. The blessing of seeing one's own sin is that one is in a much better position to develop and maintain healthy relationships with others who one find offensive. If we cannot extend forgiveness to others, it may be a red flag that we have not received divine forgiveness.

Protection

"Not into temptation..."

The last earthly petition centers upon the future. Do you ever think about the future as it pertains to your relationship with God and to your spiritual health? Some might be tempted to argue that

Jesus taught that we are to be concerned only with the present. After all, He did say, " Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." -- Matthew 6:34 Yes, Christ did indeed say this. He did not imply by it, however, that we are not to take steps to prepare for our future, be it physical or spiritual. In fact, He has specifically told us to be wise when it comes to the future.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."--' Matt. 6:13

The Lord's prayer not only directs our thoughts to the past and present concerns of sin but to the future as well. Most have no trouble understanding when sin has occurred. Yet we sometimes fail to consider what brings it on and how we can avoid it.

The Scripture is not vague on this point. You will experience the harsh and hostile environment of temptation. The hostile environment is governed by a powerful individual. There is some discussion in regards to the proper translation of the text. Some say it should be translated, "Deliver us from evil"; others say it is masculine, therefore, " Deliver us from the 'evil one'." In either case, the presence of Satan was certainly in the mind of Christ as He gave this model for prayer.

Old and New Testaments alike speaks about the reality of Satan. We find him at work in the first few pages of Genesis, and we still find him present in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. He will strike at the most humble person. His aim, at times, will include God Himself. He is not to be taken lightly. The wise will take heed

and prepare properly for such occasions with prayer.

Prayer can be terribly deceptive. It seems so simple. A very young child can recite the “Lord’s Prayer.” He can pray on his own. Anyone can speak to God, give Him praise, and seek forgiveness. We need no one else; we need no education or degrees. Anyone can pray. Can it, then, be all that significant? The teaching of Christ declares that there is little else in life as significant as humbly approaching God in prayer. To pray such a prayer as that which has been given, is to experience the reality of the gospel. To experience the reality of the gospel is to know Christ.

-Reflections-

1. What statement are you making when you pray?

2. Do you find prayer challenging?

3. Who have been significant mentors in your life regarding prayer?

4. Are there any portions of Christ’s prayer in Matthew 6 that you find difficult to apply?

5. Can you recall occasions when your prayers have been answered?

6. Are there people from whom you have withheld forgiveness?

7. Does spending time in this portion of Matthew encourage any changes in your spiritual life?