

I can imagine that many of you can remember the time... when you first learned how to ride a bicycle. Perhaps you had friends and/or siblings (or even a parent) who was egging you on: “*Common... It’s easy!... There’s really nothing to it!*” But you simply could not see the merit of potentially skinning your knees... because you had several prior attempts that ended in tears.

Then suddenly... one day... after you outgrew your fears of another try... nearly instantaneously... the mechanics of balancing... steering... and simultaneously pedaling came together and became almost easy. ... The fears and tears dissolved... and **now** ... you have long since forgotten that riding a bike had ever been hard. ... [P A U S E] ...

When it comes to prayer... many believers still feel clumsy. They don’t recall someone running alongside... shouting instructions as they learned. Probably most of us found our balance by a hodge-podge of imitation and experimentation. ... (You know) once we finally learned to ride a bike... we *instantly* knew that we’re doing it right. ... Nothing could hardly be more obvious. ... We stayed up. We rode faster and faster. We became more confident. ... (The same might be said about swimming.) ... But can anything remotely similar be said about prayer?

Do you ever suspect that you may *not* be doing it right? That you have so much more to learn. ... I do. (And... in fact) I don’t ever want to believe that I have *nothing else* to learn about prayer. I want to get better and better at it... until the day the Lord takes me home when I can be face-to-face with Him.

Last week we began a two-part series on prayer. We had been studying through the Gospel of Luke... when Luke made the point through his narrative about Mary and Martha... that spending time with the Lord is even more important than the VERY IMPORTANT responsibility **of loving others**. Martha was busy showing her love for Jesus by being an excellent hostess... while Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him. Jesus rebuked Martha and commended Mary. He said that Mary selected the more important thing.

Right after this... the Gospel writer (Luke) began showing us how we can select this most important responsibility. Luke presented Jesus' teaching His disciples how to pray. ... He didn't give them a formula that is to be strictly followed (word-for-word.) Instead... Jesus gave us all a pattern... a model. ... But as we learn more about prayer (today) lets all acknowledge something together.

Prayer depends on both grace and effort. (Listen!) there are no perfect prayers or perfect pray-**ers**. All prayer is impure (corrupted by our ignorance and willful sin.) That is why we need to keep perfecting it until Jesus takes us to be with Him forever. We will forever try... and yet can fail at prayer. ... But remember that grace will always be there to sustain us.

And it is normal that sometimes you won't feel that you're making any progress at all. Your fellowship with God may be sporadic (irregular). During the time you set aside for prayer... your mind may wander... or sleep may overtake you. But when your focus returns... lift your prayer

toward a God of grace. At just the unexpected moment... you will find that you know how to pedal... and that you are off and headed toward home.

Now let's continue to learn more about praying...

Last week I noted that the way Jesus taught His disciples to pray showed three essentials. The time that we regularly set aside to be with the Lord should incorporate these three things.

1. Give reverence to God the Father.
2. Submit to God's agenda for the world.
3. Do not hesitate to ask for your needs to be met

Last week... we spent time on the first two ("Give reverence to God the Father"... and "Submit to God's agenda for the world.")... and left the third for today ("Do not hesitate to ask for your needs to be met.")

Now one of the things that I failed to mention - in part one of this message (but I will now)... is that we should not feel enslaved or obligated to always follow this pattern that FIRST focuses on God. Not every prayer does... or should.

Just imagine... when Peter cried out: "*Lord save me...*" after he got out of the boat... looked at the waves... and began to sink (as Matthew 14:30 describes.) If he had begun first with "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come ...*" he would have been blowing bubbles before he got to the point! ... There are times when a quick "*Lord help me!*" can be the most appropriate. But at the same time... the structure and logic of this model for prayer are valuable for all disciples. It should inform and shape our regular (set aside time) – the bulk of our prayer life... of daily

coming to Him. By the way... do you have a regular time of doing this? (It is a higher priority than the extremely important responsibility to love others. We need to do BOTH – but especially to choose what Mary chose... to spend time with the Lord.)

When we looked at Luke 11:2... it was brought out that the term “Father” denotes a loving and close relationship with One Who has our best interests at heart. ... Because God is our Father... we do not need to live in fear... but in the comfort of His love and concern for us. ... As our Father... we can boldly bring our needs before Him knowing that He loves and cares about us.

(And) when we pray “*hallowed be Your name...*” we are saying: “*Let God’s name be treated differently from all other names. ... Let God’s name be given a special position which is absolutely unique.*” ... We are asking God to establish and show His exceptionality... (His utter matchlessness.) ... “*Father... establish and show Your exceptionality to me... and to the World.*”

When we pray “*Your kingdom come*”... we are praying for God’s rule... through the enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ... which will come to pass at the end of the Tribulation. ... But... we are not simply praying for His future rule. We are also praying that He would presently rule – in our heart. ... (You see...) praying “*Your Kingdom come*”... demands a commitment from the person praying it (the commitment of living for... and serving Him... until He comes.) We commit ourselves to make a difference by actively following and obeying Him - until He comes.

So... we give reverence to God (the Father) ... and we submit to God's agenda for the world. ... Now it is time for us to continue with the **third** essential of our regular prayer time – “Do not hesitate to ask for your own needs to be met.”

There are three broad categories of our need that Jesus encourages us to pray for. They are: basic physical needs... daily spiritual renewal... and protection from temptation. We should ask the Lord for these every day. Our model prayer shows us how to pray for these important things.

Give reverence to God (the Father) ... Submit to God's agenda for the world... and then ask God to supply you with your basic physical needs... your daily spiritual renewal... and your protection from temptation.

Luke 11:3

Notice that we are invited to pray for **bread** - not **dessert**. ... Bread is a general term denoting nourishing and filling food. So the request is for food and any other necessity that is necessary to sustain life for the day.

This petition seems to say: “*give us day by day our daily bread*” ... But there has been some uncertainty about its meaning. The hesitation was increased by the fact that there was considerable doubt as to the meaning of the word ***epiousios*** {*ep-ee-oo'-see-os*} translated “**daily**.” ... The extraordinary fact was that (until a short time ago) there was no other known occurrence of this word in the whole of Greek literature. ... The earliest Bible scholars knew this... and they believed that Matthew had invented the word. It was therefore not possible to be sure what it precisely meant... but not very long ago... a papyrus fragment turned up with this word on it.

The papyrus fragment was actually a woman's shopping list and against an item on it was the word *epiousios*. ... It was a note to remind her to buy supplies of a certain food for the coming day. ... So (very simply) what modern scholarship (linguists today) tell us the word ***epiousios*** {***ep-ee-oo'-see-os***} means... is "*today's bread*"... and also "*tomorrow's bread.*" ... "*Give us today - tomorrow's bread.*" ... It is a prayer for God to meet our daily physical needs... and at the same time... it is praying for the bread of the ultimate tomorrow — the bread of eternity. ... "*Meet the daily needs we have right now to sustain life... and... our bread of tomorrow... give us today...*" In a single phrase... it requests both ***physical*** life-sustaining needs... and ***spiritual*** life-sustaining needs.

But perhaps the primary focus should be how it expresses only a ***daily*** dose (what is needed for today.) Jesus is instructing His disciples to keep a ***daily dependence*** upon the Father. No other line in the Lord's Prayer so directly challenges the times in which we live. ... [P A U S E] ...

The average person worries too much about achieving financial security. There is nothing wrong with planning for future rainy days... but it is wrong to allow such a goal to consume us. ... For some (even in the church) their goal seems to be to have their obituary read: "*He died financially secure and independent with no need of anything or anyone - even God!*"

This is a spiritual tragedy. Jesus is telling us... whether rich or poor... that God wants us to depend upon Him daily. ... It honors Him! ... He wants us to pray for our daily spiritual and material needs.... And to realize the truth of how dependent we are on Him.

Luke 11:4

How good God is to put it this way. ... It requires no elaborate reasoning process to determine where we are — no special knowledge. ... All it requires is honesty. ... Is God's grace at work in your heart? This petition of the Lord's Prayer is indeed "a terrible petition" but also a gracious one. It cuts through all the evangelical jargon and monitors our spiritual health. Are we healthy... forgiving people?

The question is... is this forgiveness petition in the Lord's Prayer a curse or a blessing? ... The Scriptures are so conclusive on this matter that the Puritan Thomas Watson said, "*A man can as well go to hell for not forgiving as for not believing.*" ... And the nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "*Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death-warrant when you repeat the Lord's Prayer.*" ... St. Augustine called Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer "*the terrible petition*" because if we pray "*Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors*" with an unforgiving heart... we are actually asking God **not** to forgive us.

Robert Louis Stevenson in his *Picturesque Notes of Edinburgh* tells the story of two unmarried sisters who shared a single room. ... As people are apt to do who live in close quarters... the sisters had a falling out... which Stevenson says was "*on some point of controversial divinity*" — in other words... they disagreed over some aspect of theology. ... The controversy was so bitter that they never spoke again to one another. ... There were no words... either kind or spiteful. Just silence.

One would think they would have separated... but whether because of lack of means or of the innate Scottish fear of scandal... they continued to keep

house together in the single room. They drew a chalk line across the floor to separate their two domains... even dividing the doorway and the fireplace... so each could go in and out and do her cooking without stepping into the territory of the other. ... For years they coexisted in hateful silence. ... And at night... each went to bed listening to the heavy breathing of her enemy.

Thus... the two sisters (apparently daughters of the church who cared about theology) continued the rest of their miserable lives. No doubt when they attended church they “said” the Lord’s Prayer... but they obviously never truly prayed it... because that would have meant their reconciliation. How could they truly pray “Our Father” and remain estranged? ... Or “Forgive us *our* sins just as *we* also forgive everyone who sins against *us*.” “Forgive us ... for we also forgive.” There is no way they could have remained bitter and unforgiving if they truly prayed those words.

Are our most tightly held possessions our grudges? ... Do we pride ourselves on the fact that we never forgive? ... If so... we are probably not believers in Christ at all.

The importance of being forgiving cannot be overstressed. We do this for the health of *our own souls*. ... Bitterness causes innumerable ailments—emotional... physical... spiritual — within us.

But we (also) need to forgive for the health of the *church*. The church is weak and defeated because of refused forgiveness among its members. We should do it for the sake of the *world*. The world has not yet discovered what Christ is like. But it can... if we will truly forgive.

Do you need to forgive your spouse? Covenant to do it right now. Have you been unwilling to forgive your parents? Promise God right now that you will do it. Have you forgiven your employer who wronged you? You need to do it now—and you can, with Christ’s help. Do you have a grudge against your last church? Its pastor, its elders? Forgive today!

Without the daily maintenance of forgiveness... we inevitably become bitter... vengeful... burdened... self-loathing souls... destructive to others... poisonous to ourselves... and damaging Christ’s church.

True believers forgive and are forgiving. That does not mean they do not wrestle with forgiveness. It does not mean that forgiveness comes naturally to real Christians. Many Christians’ bitterness and hatred recur even though they have forgiven the offender. It is hard to maintain a forgiving spirit. But actually the struggle is evidence of God’s grace in the believer’s heart, because otherwise he or she would just give in to the hatred. The warning here is for those who claim to be Christian but *will not* forgive and have no desire to do so.

The question is... is this forgiveness petition in the Lord’s Prayer a curse or a blessing? ... [P A U S E] ...

The request “*lead us not into temptation*” bothers some people because it seems to imply that God **might** lead people into compromising situations. But Greek grammar experts identify the phrase “*lead us not*” as a permissive imperative: “*Do not permit us to be led into temptation.*”

One might argue: *Why ask God for what He’s already promised to provide?*

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God*

is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

So... I ask again... *Why ask God for what He's already promised to provide?* ... [P A U S E] ...

In response... I ask: *Do you really think the purpose of prayer is to convince God to do something He wouldn't otherwise do?* ... We don't pray to bend God's will to ours. ... We pray to make His will alive in us and to conform to His agenda. ... Prayer is a meeting of the minds... in which we adopt His way of thinking in practical terms. ... In this spirit... Jesus said: "*Don't hesitate to ask for your needs.*" These includes protection from temptation.

The wise disciple knows that the only way to avoid falling into sin is to follow where God leads... and to (daily) be dependent upon Him and His protection. "Lead us not into temptation" reflects a spirit of dependence on God... as does this *whole prayer*.

But before leaving this section about temptation... let me point out that Jesus' recommended prayer regarding temptation is not that we be delivered from **all** temptation. (And I would like to propose to you a reason why.) ... Certain temptation... trials... and testing are *necessary* for the health of our souls. ... So the proper prayer asks God to deliver us from *overpowering* temptations... recognizing that we are liable to fold under certain enticements and assaults.

The operative inner quality here is a humble awareness of our weakness. The very best person is (at his or her best) vulnerable and easily stumbled -

apart from God's gracious provision of strength. ... And we are never so vulnerable as when we think we are past certain temptations.

(LISTEN!) The strongest believers are sure that they cannot stand - apart from the grace of God. Those who doubt their ability to withstand temptation (those who plead: "*Lead us not into temptation that is beyond our capacity to withstand*") will grow into strong believers. .. **[P A U S E]** ...

As I close this morning I am going to close in prayer (like I normally do)... except this will be an extended time of prayer. I invite you to join me... as we use this model prayer that Jesus gave to us. I am not simply going to recite the words and the cadence of what the Gospel writers have written. Instead I will follow it as a pattern.

As we pray together... I hope that it will give you an idea how to use this wonderful tool that Jesus has placed in our hands.

- **PRAYER** -