

“A Model Prayer”

There was this fly and a praying mantis. The fly looked at the mantis and said, “What are you doing?” The mantis responded: “I’m praying.” “Don’t be stupid,” the fly said, “insects don’t pray.” With that, the mantis swooped down, grabbed the fly in its grip, whereupon the fly began, “Our Father, who art in heaven...”!

Most people, at some point in their lives, pray. How often do we Americans pray? In 2014 the Pew Foundation released its findings from their research on the prayer habits of people in the U.S. 55% of the people said they pray every day. 16% pray at least once a week. 6% at least once a month. And 23% seldom or never pray. 1% said they were not sure!

Anything surprise you in those results? For me, the fact that 55% of the people in our country say they pray every day really is surprising. In our secularized society where more and more people are claiming no religious affiliation, that seems a surprisingly high percent who maintain that they pray every day. (Those figures are about four years old, so the percentage could be lower now, since the results in 2007 were 58% compared to the 55% in 2014, which indicates a downward trend). But the 55% still seems remarkably high to me.

Apparently prayer is still important to many people. But often those who pray wish they could pray more effectively. I’m not sure I have ever met anyone who claimed they are as seasoned and advanced in praying as they could be or would like to be. Many of us are not always sure how to pray.

Wouldn’t it be nice if had pattern of how to pray, a model to follow! Well, there is a good one! Most of us already know it. Some even have it memorized! It’s “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus gave this as a model for our praying! The Lord’s Prayer is found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. The two versions vary somewhat. Luke’s version is shorter than the one we use in our worship services. And in Luke, the Lord’s Prayer is introduced in this way: “(Jesus) was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1). Apparently the disciples saw something authentic and attractive in Jesus’ prayer life. It moved them to make this request: Lord’ teach us to pray as you do! He does what they ask! And this prayer is still a model for our praying. Taken as a whole, this familiar prayer can provide an outline or pattern for how we pray.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The prayer begins with the proper approach to God – “hallowed be thy name.” God’s name is to be hallowed, or revered. His name and character are to be kept holy. A few years ago Nancy and I took a trip to the Grand Canyon. When visiting there it is easy to stand at one of the rims of the Canyon and just be silenced at its vastness and beauty. While we were standing at one of the spots, a young man, perhaps in his late teens or early twenties, quickly sauntered up to the rim of the canyon, took a quick look, and casually said something like, “cool”, then went on his way. Compared to the glory of the scenery I felt his response was a bit underwhelming!

Likewise, when we come before the awesomeness of our Creator in prayer, it's important that we come with an attitude of reverence. God is holy. We are sinful. The only reason we have access to God is because of what Jesus did for us. Thanks to Jesus, we can come "boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

But *relationship*, as well as reverence, is at the basis of prayer. We pray, "*Our Father, who art in heaven...*". What did Jesus mean when He said this? ***To address God as Father means we recognize God's power and authority.*** The culture of Jesus' time was a *patriarchal* culture. Fathers had the power in a family. God the Father has all power and authority over life. We are not equals when we come to God in prayer.

But praying "Our Father, who art in heaven" says more: It means we can have a relationship with this One to whom we pray. God is not just a mysterious force, an impersonal deity, He is our *Father*. Now we have to be careful here. For some, whose experience of an earthly father was not a happy one, and even perhaps a frightening one, to say God is our Father could turn them from God. Perhaps growing up there was little or no love shown by their father. There might have been abuse, or neglect. And even the best of earthly fathers are imperfect.

But, of course, our heavenly Father does not have flaws that earthly fathers have. God loves us unconditionally. His loving care for us is without limit. We can always *depend on Him*. We can always *trust Him*.

This relationship with our heavenly Father is made possible through Jesus! Many believe that we are all children of God. But this is not what Scripture teaches. Yes, God has *created* us all, we are His *creatures*, but we only become God's children when we receive Christ as our Savior. Galatians 3:26 says, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." Notice, we are children of God when we are in Christ, *through faith*. John 1:12 says, "But to all who received him, to all who believed in his name, he gave power (or the right) to become children of God." To receive Christ and to believe in Him are the same.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Real praying can begin when we approach God in reverence, and when we know God as our heavenly Father because we have become God's sons and daughters through faith in Christ Jesus.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus' whole life and message were centered on the kingdom of God. Yet, the idea of a kingdom is foreign to us: we don't have kings! The "kingdom of God" means the rule or reign of God, that realm where God rules and His will is done. His will *is now done* in heaven, but not on earth, because of sin and evil. But when Jesus returns at the end of time and God's new creation replaces this present fallen world, God's will is going to be done completely.

So, in the meantime, we are praying for that Day to come, and for God's will to be done, *in every person and in every situation of life*. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done: in our home, in our neighborhood, in our churches, in our schools, in our country, in the hearts of world

leaders, *in me*. I pray regularly for people. Family members. Friends. The church. Our nation. Sometimes I will just pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, Lord, in our children and their families. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, Lord, in Doug’s search for a job, in Arlene’s illness, in our worship service this coming Sunday...”. Get the point? I’m not sure we can pray any more powerful prayer than that!

Of course, if I pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done,” I should make every effort to try to please the Lord in what I do, and work for His will in every situations that I am involved in. Some day, God’s kingdom will come fully, and His will shall be done fully, but in the meantime, we can pray for that and work for that in our little slice of life!

Give us this day our daily bread. At other times Jesus taught us that we should ask our heavenly Father for our needs. The word here translated “daily” is interesting. It is a Greek word hardly ever used. It suggests that we are asking God to provide bread (or our physical needs) *enough for today*. Give me bread, provide for my physical needs, *just for today*.

God is a very practical God. He knows we have to buy groceries, pay the rent or mortgage. He knows we need a car, and clothes. Can we pray for these needs? Of course we can! Can we ask for a new Mercedes or that somebody will give us million dollars? Well, we can *ask* for anything, but it doesn’t mean we will get it, or that God is going to give in to our selfish requests!

Then too, if our prayer is, “Give us *this day* our *daily* bread...” then that kind of rules out prayers like, “God, please make sure my son has his job 5 years from now”, or “Lord, please let me be in good health for the next 10 years.” Lord, just provide what I need *today*.

Let’s remember, too, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread”, that this prayer represents a life and death matter for millions of people who are hungry or starving. We should pray not just for our own needs, but for others’ needs too. And if I am asking God to feed the hungry of the world, we ought to do what we can to make that prayer come true.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. We just prayed for bread, the needs of our physical body, now we’re asking for forgiveness. Do you need to be forgiven of anything? I do! Both the Old and New Testaments are concerned with the fact of sin, and how sin spoils our relationship with God, and our relationships with other people. Forgiveness is the great restorer. Asking God to forgive us heals our broken relationship with God. Forgiving others can overcome differences and hurts.

To be honest, this phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is the scariest part of the prayer. I am actually asking God to forgive me *to the degree* that I have forgiven those who have hurt me. A young boy went to church on Sunday with a friend. In his own church they prayed “forgive us our trespasses...”, but in his friend’s church they prayed: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” When the boy got home, he told his parents, “They pray a different Lord’s Prayer at Scottie’s church. They pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead set against

us.” It’s hard, isn’t it, to forgive those who are “dead set against us.” But for God to forgive me, I must be willing to forgive those who have done wrong against me. Remember, forgiveness is a *process*. For a deep hurt, it can take a long time to let go. But Jesus said it is something we need to do. And He is there to help us!

Every one of us needs forgiveness, because all of us have sinned, and do sin. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus is teaching us to ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is possible because Jesus died to cleanse us from every sin.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. In the Lord’s Prayer, we are praying with the past, present and future in mind. We pray for daily bread (our needs) for the present; we pray for forgiveness for past sins; now, we’re praying for the future, that we may not be led into temptation

Most of us, when we think of the future, and what to pray for, would not put this as a #1 priority: to be saved from temptation. But think of how different our life would be, how different the world would be, if we just could be steered away from temptations, and giving in to them. Alan Redpath once wrote, “Much of our praying is just asking God to bless some folks who are ill and to keep us plugging along. But prayer is not merely prattle, it is warfare.”

“Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from *evil*”. In the Greek that could be translated “the evil one.” In the Lord’s Prayer, we are praying that God will give us victory over Satan, to win the battle over the evil that’s in the world and the evil that’s within us!

There you have it – a model of simplicity for our praying, straight from the of Jesus. When we pray, always reverence God and come *humbly* to Him. Pray for the day to come when God’s kingdom fully arrives, and in the meantime pray to have God’s will done in every person and situation of life. Ask for daily bread, not just for ourselves, but for others too. Ask God to forgive us, and then be willing to forgive others. Pray that we will not be led into situations where we are tempted.

You may be thinking, wait a minute, you left off the ending! ***For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*** Here’s the thing: This part is not in some of the ancient manuscripts of the Bible. Scholars believe one of people in the middle ages copying the Scriptures got so caught up in the splendor of this prayer, that he added this note in the margin – “thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever!” This is really a doxology!

I hope we too can capture something of the glory and power of the Lord’s Prayer! Maybe the things Jesus said we are to pray for in this prayer are different from the things we are inclined to pray for. Hopefully, this prayer stretches us to be less narrow and selfish in our praying, and broaden the scope of who and what we pray for! So now, with all this in mind, let’s pray slowly and thoughtfully the prayer we call the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven...”

