



# Central Peninsula Church

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Mark Mitchell  
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## Talking to My Father (Part 2)

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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Two weeks ago we began looking at the Lord's Prayer. One day, while Jesus was praying, his disciples approached him and said, "Teach us to pray." So Jesus taught them. He said, "When you pray, say..." You may have noticed that Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's, but it still contains all the essential ingredients. This reminds us that Jesus is not teaching us to simply parrot these words as if they were some kind of magic formula, but instead he is giving us a broad outline to guide us.

One of the things that we couldn't help but notice about this prayer is that Jesus tells us to start with the vertical rather than the horizontal. In other words, start with God. As you come to him recognize that he is your heavenly Father who welcomes you into his presence and deeply cares about you. Remember what we said: talk to the Father about the Father. Talk to him about his name ("hallowed be your name"); and talk to him about his reign ("your kingdom come"). Start by reaching to the very top and asking for things that pertain to his highest purposes.

Remember the analogy I used? When you pray, imagine three shelves. On the top shelf are only those big things which have eternal significance. There are only a few of them. These are things you have to reach for in prayer. It's not always easy or natural to pray for these things because they don't appear to meet our immediate needs. But Jesus says to start there.

A little bit lower is the middle shelf. These are the really important things in life. Like when I pray for my kids I want them to marry well and find a calling in life that allows them to do meaningful work. I want them to learn to be a friend and have friends; things like that. There are a few more things on this shelf than the top shelf. You still have to reach a little bit for them. They're not always the first things on our list.

But then a bit lower than that there is a third shelf. The third is cluttered with all the everyday stuff of life. It's all about circumstances. I talked about my daughter two weeks ago who we dropped off at college up in Spokane. Three days before her first soccer game she sprained her ankle. So the next three days we were praying like mad that her ankle would heal, and thank God it did, at least enough for her to play. Now I realize that God could have said, "You know, I have something better for you. I'm doing something up on the top shelf that can't happen unless her ankle is sprained." Sometimes he does that and that's hard because we can't

always see what's up there on the top shelf!

Having said that, it's important that we don't go to the opposite extreme. You see, if he's our heavenly Father he cares about all of our needs. And he doesn't want our prayers so removed from the realities of life that we never get to really experience his work in our lives in a tangible way. That's why in the last half of this prayer Jesus moves down to the middle and bottom shelves. He says, first, when you pray talk to the Father about the Father. But then he says talk to him about yourself; talk to him about your needs. What father wouldn't want to hear what's really going on in his child's life; what his child's daily needs really are? The last three requests deal with real needs that we confront everyday.

### I. When you pray, talk to the Father about your needs.

**A. Talk to him about your provision.** The first one deals with our provision. "**Give us each day our daily bread.**" When Jesus speaks of "bread" he's talking about the basics of our physical existence – food, clothing, shelter, health and safety. It's amazing, isn't it, that this heads the list of the things we're to pray for regarding ourselves. God is concerned about the physical side of our lives. He cares about our body. He cares about the smallest details of our existence such as keeping warm at night and being fed.

Someone might ask: Doesn't God already know our need for these things? Of course he does! But, Jesus teaches us to daily pray about these things so that we would foster a sense of our dependence upon him. The purpose of prayer is not to inform God of something he's unaware of, but rather to keep us in a vital, dependent relationship with the Father. When we fail to ask God for these basic necessities a drift takes place in our lives. We move from dependence to independence. We begin to think that WE'RE responsible for these things.

Asking God for these things keeps us in touch with reality. The fact is, we are dependent upon him. Whether we have a little or a lot, God is the One who provides. Most of us will go home today to a refrigerator that is full of food. With food for a month why pray for food for today? We're more prone to pray, "Lord, don't let me eat another thing," than "Give us this day our daily bread." But the reality is that if for one moment God withdrew his hand we would have nothing!

Part of living in that reality is just being grateful for what God provides. When was the last time you

thanked God for your house or apartment or even your ability to get out of bed in the morning? Most of us pray before we eat, but often that becomes so routine that we may as well skip it. But that's a critical time of thanking God and affirming that we're dependent upon him for our very survival.

Often we don't live gratefully for God's provision of these basics because we want MORE than our daily bread. The word translated "daily" is one found nowhere else in the NT. A literal translation of this would be, "Give us this day our bread for tomorrow." The idea seems to be, "Give us today what is needful and sufficient for the new day." We're not told to pray, "Give me this day a weekly feast." We're not told to pray for chocolate cake. The focus is on what is essential.

I received a letter from a young girl in our church that reflects the spirit of this prayer. She started out by introducing herself, giving me her age and thanking me. She then says, "I am writing to you because my mommy needs money to pay the rent and buy food for us. My sisters and I will pay you back. I go to your church and I like the way you preach." (This girl is smart!). But I read that because it's such a beautifully simple request for basic necessities. She's not asking for anything more than she should. She's asking for the very thing Jesus teaches us to ask for.

**B. Talk to him about your pardon.** But, we're more than just bodies, and so Jesus turns in the next request to our spiritual needs: "**Forgive us our sins.**" The most fundamental spiritual need we have is for forgiveness. Notice Jesus assumes that we've all sinned. He doesn't say, "For those who have sinned, you should say..." His assumption is that every disciple needs to make this request.

And this is an ongoing prayer. When we trust Christ as our Savior he forgives and justifies, once for all, but we don't stop sinning. And while sin doesn't change the fact that he's our Father, it does effect our fellowship with God. A kind of estrangement develops between us. This continues until we confess our sin to him and affirm our forgiveness in Christ. We never grow out of that. The great thing about this is that he's more than willing for fellowship to be restored. The word used for "forgiveness" here means "to leave behind" or "to abandon" or even "to cancel something out." That's a great picture for what God does with our sin. He cancels it out; he leaves it behind.

I recall when I first started using a computer. I had been putting things in the trash icon that I wanted to get rid of. I just assumed that they were gone forever. But something happened and I opened up the trash file and, lo and behold, on the screen

was a long list of things I had put in the trash over the years. All that stuff had been saved and to delete it completely I had to empty the trash. It hit me that God has placed all of our sins in the trash file. Yet somehow we keep trying to bring it all back up. Or Satan, called, "the accuser of the brethren," tries to reopen the trash file of our lives and remind us of what we've done. But, in God's mind, not only has he put it in the trash file, he's emptied the trash. In his mind, it can never be brought up again! As the Psalmist said, "**As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us**" (Psalm 103:12).

Then Jesus adds these words about us forgiving others. That kind of spoils all the fun doesn't it? It sounds as if Jesus is saying that before we can be forgiven we have to forgive others. Or perhaps we use the fact that we forgive others as kind of a bargaining chip with God: "God, you have to forgive me because I have forgiven others." But that's not the point. Forgiveness is free and comes to us on the basis of faith. But Jesus is telling us that to come to God for forgiveness and yet insist on our right NOT to forgive others simply reveals the insincerity of our prayer. You see, the proof that we HAVE been forgiven by God is that we DO forgive others. When we experience God's forgiveness at the core of our being it changes the way we view ourselves and other people. As grace floods our heart we find it breaking forth and overflowing to others. But if we refuse to forgive we have reason to question the reality of our own forgiveness. This is not talking about people who struggle with reoccurring feelings of bitterness and resentment towards those who have wronged them. Remember that forgiveness means to leave behind or to cancel out. That's a choice we make with our will. But to continue to struggle with the emotions of the offense is normal. What we're talking about here is a settled refusal to forgive; a decision that we're justified not to forgive. These are hard words, but they cut to the heart of religious people who have all the right answers, lead a moral life, attend church, but hold a death grip on their grudges. If that is true of us, we have to evaluate if we really know the Lord.

**C. Talk to him about your protection.** When you come to God, talk to him about your provision and talk to him about your pardon. Finally he says talk to him about your protection: "**Lead us not into temptation.**"

What does this mean? We know that God himself would never tempt us to sin. James says, "**Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God himself does not tempt anyone**" (James 1:13). We also know that temptation is a reality we all have to live with. Satan is the one who tempts us. He is called, "the tempter." As long as we're here on earth, we're going to have to deal with temptation. Even Jesus had to deal with temptation. So, when Jesus says, "Lead us not into temptation," he's NOT saying, "Lord, I pray that I'll never be tempted." Instead, we ought to view this as the emotional plea of one who fears being tempted beyond his capacity to resist. He's

saying, "Don't allow me to come under the sway of temptation that will overpower me and cause me to sin." This is the cry of one who senses his own weakness and desires protection from forces that are too great for him to bear; of one who knows that temptations will come, but fears being left alone in the face of a temptation he'll be overwhelmed by.

And God will grant this request. He's like a loving parent who protects her child from situations that their moral capacities can't handle. I think of a mother in a supermarket pushing a shopping cart with her small child in it. It's 5:00 PM and she knows her child is hungry. She turns down an aisle and soon realizes that she is about to pass through the candy section. So what does she do? She turns around and goes the other direction. Why? Because she knows her child and she knows that this would be placing an emotional burden on her child that he couldn't possibly bear. It's in this sense we cry, "Leads us not into temptation. Don't let us get into a situation where we will be overpowered by evil."

Now in Luke's version of this prayer it just ends right there. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to talk about something even more fundamental to prayer than what we pray about: the importance of having an accurate picture of God in your prayer life. Let me ask you, how much of your prayer life is about "want" and how much is about "should"? Can you honestly say that for you prayer is a delight, or is it a chore? I'm not saying that there aren't times when we have to discipline ourselves to pray. But if it's always a "have to" and not a "want to" something is wrong. And the problem is with your understanding of the God you pray to. What's his disposition towards you as you approach him? Is he kind of "ticked-off" at you? Is he looking at his watch and thinking, "What took you so long, knuckle head?" Is he somehow reluctant to give you the desires of your heart? That's what Jesus addresses next, because more important than what you say is your understanding of who you're saying it to.

## **II. When you pray, trust that God will answer your prayers.**

**A. He is more gracious than earthly friends.** To get his point across, Jesus tells two stories.

**"Then He said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you**

**will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened'"** (vv. 5-10).

Can you imagine for a minute this happening to you? Imagine tonight you get your kids all tucked into bed and you want to get to bed early because you have a big week ahead of you. So you and your wife turn the light out at ten o'clock. By midnight you're sawing some serious logs. But suddenly you're woken up. It sounds like someone is pounding on your front door. You're not sure whether to be afraid or mad. And then you hear this voice. "It's me! It's Mark Mitchell! I NEED some bread! I just had an unexpected guest and my cupboards are empty and I thought maybe you could give me something for him to eat." How would you be feeling right about then? Your wife wakes up and says, "Who is that?" You say, "It's our pastor. It's Mitchell. I think he's drunk!" Your wife says, "Well tell him to keep it down because he's going to wake the kids up!" You say, "But he's our friend." Your wife says, "I don't care if he's the President. Tell him to go to Safeway. It's open 24 hours."

Jesus says that eventually you will get up and give me what I want, not so much because I'm your friend but because of my "persistence." That word "persistence" is a hard word to understand. The NIV translates it as "boldness." Behind the word is the idea of being shameless. Some say that Jesus is teaching that if we're shamelessly bold and persistent in our prayers we'll wear God down and he'll give in and give us what we want just to shut us up. Is that what you think about God? That he is really bugged that you're coming to him? That he's like a tired, grumpy old man that you just woke up from a dead sleep? That smacks against everything Jesus has taught us about the Father.

Many scholars point out that the point is not in the comparison but in the contrast. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Listen, if your friends, who we know are imperfect and selfish, are willing to answer your requests, how much more will God?" You see, he's a perfect friend. He's your best friend. I mean, once in a while I mention up here that I drink Peets coffee. You know what happens when I do that? I get two or three Peets gift cards in the mail. From who? From you. Why? Because that's what friends do. (You know, I love Hawaii. One of the best vacations I've ever had was in Hawaii.) But, you see, Jesus is saying, "He's the perfect friend. He doesn't care what time you knock on his door. He loves to give to you. So keep asking and seeking and knocking. God is more than willing to answer your prayers. Is that how you think of God?"

There might even be an added motivation here. Those who know middle eastern culture know that

hospitality is very important. You just don't turn people like this away, even at midnight. The person at the door would bring shame on his household if he didn't respond. Jesus may be saying that God's character and reputation is at stake here. How could he possibly turn his friend away?

**B. He is more gracious than earthly fathers.** And then to drive home his point he tells another story.

**"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"** (vv. 11–13).

Imagine this. This is even more ludicrous than the first story. Can you imagine this darling little girl in the picture up on the screen asking her father for a fish or an egg and instead cramming a snake or a scorpion in his face? "Oh, you want some dinner, honey? Here's a scorpion. Ha!" What kind of father would do that? And I love what Jesus says here: "If you then, being evil, wouldn't do that... If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children..." In one stroke says we're all evil. But he also knows that even evil people act in kindness and generosity towards their children.

So, he says, "If you, being evil, respond to your kids' requests like that, HOW MUCH MORE will your heavenly Father in kindness and generosity." It is an argument from lesser to greater. You see, not only is he the perfect friend, he is the perfect Father. He is not evil. He is good. He is kind. He is generous. He is merciful.

I've always battled a warped view of God. I struggle with believing that God is for me and not against me. I know that there is much in me that is wrong and unlovable. Deep down I often feel that the very worst is going to happen to me and that God is somehow behind that. Why would anyone want to pray to a God like that? But then I had kids. And I know I love my kids. I know I want the very best for them. And when I think that that is just a faint shadow of how my Father in heaven thinks of me, that changes everything. When I consider that, I WANT to pray. Far from being a chore, prayer becomes a delight. More important than what you say in prayer is your understanding of who you're saying it to.

And I love how Jesus brings us back here to the top shelf of prayer. Did you notice that? "How much more will he give the Holy Spirit to those who

ask him?" You say, but I want more than the Holy Spirit. I have all of these other needs. I have the need for provision and pardon and protection, and so many other things on the bottom shelf. But what Jesus is saying is that the gift of the Holy Spirit trickles down and sort of covers anything else. He may not give you exactly what you ask for every time. When my kids want to eat Skittles for dinner I say no. But I give them something better. Sometimes our Father says no so he can give us something better. Is that how you think of God?

## CONCLUSION

There is a wonderful question in the book of Romans that I want to leave you with. It is found at the end of Romans 8 and it is often overlooked because it is surrounded by some of the most well known verses in the entire Bible. Romans 8:32 asks each of us something about the God we pray to. It asks, "**He who did no spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?**" I want you to think about that, because more important than what you say in prayer is how you think about the One you're praying to. If you mattered enough to him that he would deliver up his only Son, whom he had enjoyed eternity with, just for you; if he did that just so you could be with him forever and ever, how will he not freely (not because you earned it; not because you're good, but freely) give you all things. Not a few things, but all things. When you think of him in that way, your greatest joy will be to pray.

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