

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one.

(Matthew 6:9b-13)

Today we continue our Base Camp series by exploring the practice of prayer. Prayer is fascinating because it is a mystery in which we persistently participate. It's a mystery because prayer doesn't always make sense. We've seen God give what we prayed for, not give what we prayed for, and give what we never prayed for. We've watched God respond to others while we still struggle with prayer. Prayer, at times, doesn't seem to make sense; it's a mystery. Yet we still pray.

Church people pray. If church people receive news of a friend in trouble, they pray for God to act. Non-church people pray. There was a study done a few years ago in which 60% of people who aren't connected with a church still pray. Whatever they may or may not believe about God they believe that prayer makes a difference. A number of years ago, I was performing a wedding for a couple at a beach. I arrived a few hours early to dark clouds, overcast skies, and the threat of rain. The bride, who was not a particularly religious person, walked up to me with the tears in her eyes and a plea in her voice, saying, "Can't you do something about this?" In my head I thought, "I think you misunderstood my role here today." She believed that my role as pastor meant that I have a connection with God that can change reality. In some ways, maybe she had more faith than I did. (By the way, I did pray and the sun was shining bright in time for the wedding!) Regardless of what else we may believe, we believe that prayer makes a difference.

What I want you to take away from our time today is this: Prayer is the pathway for what God is doing in the world and in you. I want you to participate by praying in a renewed way. If

you do, you can participate in how God is at work in the world and in you.

We're going to read a prayer that Jesus taught His first followers. Often referred to as the Lord's Prayer, it is a common prayer. In fact, if you are a church person, you likely have said this in various forms contexts. It is common across cultures and languages. I've been in many settings in which this prayer has been said in multiple languages. I want to make some observations on the prayer that will hopefully help you see prayer—and this particular prayer—with fresh perspective.

Our Father Who is in Heaven

The prayer begins with the word, "Our." We are reminded that this is not about us alone but about us in community. In the 6th century there was a monk named Benedict (later became St. Benedict). In his day, there were three traditional values of monasticism: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Arguments developed among monks on how to best practice those values. As result, monks moved from spiritual community to spiritual community looking for the "right" place for their particular practice. In response, St. Benedict developed a fourth vow: stability. He understood that the spiritual community had value for the individual spiritual life. In community, theology is formed. In community, spiritual formation takes place. David Timms wrote about St. Benedict: "He knew very well that grace could only flourish when it encountered offense; forgiveness requires conflict; healing emerges from hurt; and strength arises from struggle. Thus, the pathway to true spiritual formation demands long-term engagement with others in community. When times get tough, we don't run. Neither do we simply battle it out. Rather, we learn to resolve and reconcile."

The second word of the prayer is equally as challenging as the first word: "Father." It is challenging because we face the chaos of non-father fathers. We live in a world in which fathers don't often act as fathers should act. Maybe your earthly father brings images of neglect, sorrow, and pain. Maybe you've cringed a bit whenever someone describes God as "Father." Maybe you've never prayed because you can't get past the second word.

If you put your faith in Jesus, you are adopted as a child of your heavenly father (cf. John 1:12). You experience the father-child relationship as you were designed to experience. Your heavenly

Father is a father who gives good (cf. Matt 7:11), and lavishes love upon you (cf. 1 John 3:1).

When we pray, "Our Father who is in heaven," we locate ourselves in communion with with one another and our loving Father.

Hallowed be Your Name

"Hallowed" refers to the sacredness of God. We pray not that His name would become holy (as if it weren't), but that it would become holy (where it isn't). The ancient Jews would pray several times a day in the temple. This was such a sacred act that there were some pious people who would spend an hour preparing their heart before they would begin the prayer. The ancient rabbis said of this prayer that it was so sacred that even if the king greeted you, you should not stop praying. Moreover, even if a snake were to curl itself around your ankle while you stood, you should not cease praying. Prayer was a holy act of communion with God.

God's holiness is not something objective, but God's holiness interferes with our way of living by confronting the profane. To profane means to treat the sacred with degradation. We live in a world in which the profane is celebrated. David Timms observes, "We live in a time when the lewd, crude, immoral, and profane receive center stage not because of our disgust or shame but because of our fascination." To pray "hallowed be Your name" is to plea for renewal of our world.

God's holiness also confronts the profane in us. It is a plea for renewal of us. We have participated in the profane. We have entertained sin, living life outside of the design of God. We have contributed to the destruction of God's peace in the world. Holiness shines a light on the good that could be. Holiness is a dissonant echo against the way of the profane, but a resonate chord with the way of God.

When we pray, "hallowed be your name," we long for the sacredness of God to conquer the profane in the world and in us.

Your Kingdom Come

The kingdom of God is the rule of God. It is life as God designed it to be. The ancient rabbis said that to not mention the kingdom is not to pray. When Jesus started His ministry, one of His first statements was to declare that the kingdom of God was breaking into the world through Him.

We understand kingdoms. We entertain the desire to rule over things and situations, to have power over people. We know the darkness of what it's like to crave dominion over the world. As John Calvin once wrote, "Everyone flatters himself and carries a kingdom in his [chest]." When we pray this line of the prayer we are renouncing our desire to reign as authority in

our world. To say "your kingdom come" is to say "my kingdom done!" (David Timms).

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we seek God's rule of life and we renounce our claims of dominion.

Your Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

God is at work to bring His kingdom today. We tend to think of "the will of God" as something future, but God is at work here and now.

The danger is that we can worship at the idol of tomorrow. When we doubt God is at work today, we can idolize tomorrow. We stop living today in our pursuit of tomorrow. We miss out on today because tomorrow has won our affection. The book of Deuteronomy is a fascinating book in this regard. Moses gives instruction to the people of God as they face tomorrow. What is fascinating is how much Moses focuses on today. The word "today" appears 59 times in the book of Deuteronomy. Today matters. Today, the Psalmist writes, is the day that the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad today. God is at work all around you today.

When we pray, "Your will be done," we set our attention on what God is doing today to shape life on earth as it is in heaven.

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

We ask for God to give. It seems bold, almost arrogant. But it is not. It is a plea for grace. We can ask for God to give to us because that is what our heavenly Father does—He gives good to His children (cf. Matthew 7:11).

Then comes the phrase, "daily bread." The ancient writer Origen said that the word was coined by the gospel writers. It carries the idea of daily provision. When I was in France, I went to the boulangerie whenever I need bread. If you needed bread for lunch, you waited until lunch and bought bread. If you needed it for dinner, you waited until dinner. If you needed it tomorrow, you wait until tomorrow. The reason is that the bread only lasts for a short time. It goes stale overnight. You don't buy bread ahead of time, but you buy it when you need it. To pray for daily bread is to believe that what God gives today is good enough for today.

The problem is that we don't think we need daily bread. We don't think that we need for God to provide. Think about money. The money that we have comes from the job that we got because of the interview we received because of the connection that we developed. Or parenting. Your kids turned out the way they did because of the parenting skills that you used because of the book that you read that came from the workshop that you attended. We have a host of situations in our world in which we justify why we are the source for what we have. The danger is that our lack of awareness of our **daily need** could contribute to a **daily**

neglect of our heavenly Father. John Calvin rightly reminds us: “Neither our industry, nor labor, nor hands acquire anything for us, unless the blessing of God be present.” God gives graciously to us. That’s why you shouldn’t discount praying for “the little things.” Every plea for daily bread is a practice of entrusting yourself to God.

When we pray, “Give us today our daily bread,” we ask for our good Father to give to us what is good enough for us today.

Forgive Us Our Debts as We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors

This is perhaps the most challenging line in the prayer. Before we talk about what it means, we need to understand what we are **not** doing and what we **are** doing when we forgive. Here is what we are **not** doing when we forgive: We are not removing the guilt of the offense; this belongs to God. We are not brushing it off as no big deal, we are not ignoring the injustice. What we **are** doing when we forgive is to “voluntarily divest our minds of wrath, hatred, and revenge” (John Calvin).

Forgiveness matters because the result of not forgiving is that we participate in the destruction of God’s peace on earth. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Paul writes that if you don’t forgive, you give the devil a foothold. If you’ve ever been climbing you know that a foothold is used to advance. Moreover, the word in Greek also means bookmark or make note. Just as if you would bookmark or underline a page in the book so that you can come back to it, not forgiving creates a bookmark for the enemy to advance against you and against God’s peace in the world.

Jesus taught that our forgiveness with God is intricately linked with our forgiving of other people. An interesting example of this happens in Matthew 18. In Matthew 18, Peter asked Jesus a question that rabbis were often asked. The question was: how many times must I forgive the person who wrongs me? The rabbis answered that the spiritual person had to offer forgiveness three times. Peter suggests that he is willing to forgive someone seven times. Jesus responds we should forgive 70 times 7 (a massive amount). Jesus then tells a parable to highlight this teaching.

A king had a servant who owed him a financial debt equivalent to 160,000 years of work. The servant begs for relief from the debt. The King, in mercy, forgives the servant of the debt. You would think the servant would walk away overjoyed, ecstatic, grateful. Instead, the servant finds a friend who owes him a financial debt equivalent to 100 days’ worth of work. 160,000 years vs. 100 days. He becomes angry with his friend and demands repayment. The king hears how the servant treats his friend and the king is furious that the forgiveness the servant received was not extended in forgiveness to the friend of the servant. Part of the point of the parable is that it is absurd that we would be forgiven by God but

not forgive others. We are to live in a cycle of forgiveness—we are forgiven by God and we extend forgiveness in the world.

When we pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” we entrust our forgiveness to God and live in the flow of forgiveness.

Lead Us Not into Temptation but Deliver Us From the Evil One

Jesus is not saying that God leads people into temptation. We know that from James 1:13. So what is Jesus saying? I think what Jesus is saying can best be captured in this paraphrase: “Lead us away from anything that would lead us astray.” We are asking God to draw our attention away from the things that would draw us away from his way of living.

What will lead us astray? “The evil”—the person and program of the devil. The aim of the evil one is your destruction (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). But this is not an equal fight. Christ stands victorious against the evil one. The efforts of the enemy will still come, but they are defeated efforts. As Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Every arrow...which Satan might have shot at us is broken.”

When we pray “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” we ask God to lead us away from anything that would lead us astray.

For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever

There is another line that is often said with this prayer. It is not in the earliest manuscripts, but it is often said and worth discussing. This line reminds us what and who will endure. The book of Revelation gives a glimpse of the future. We read descriptions like this from the writer John: *“Then I heard every creature - in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all that is in them - singing: ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and ruling power forever and ever!’”* (Rev. 5:13-14). At the end of everything what will endure is God’s kingdom. Though all things fail, God will not. Though all things will come to an end, God and His kingdom will not.

Amen

We end the prayer with a word that often ends prayers. Amen. It is a word of affirmation. It means literally, “let it be so.” What is interesting is that Jesus Himself is referred to as The Amen. In Revelation 3:14 John writes, *“This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation.”* Jesus is the ultimate affirmation of God’s work in the world.

When we pray, “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen,” we anchor our life in Jesus, the affirmation that God and His kingdom will endure forever.

Prayer is the pathway for what God is doing in the world and in you. I want you to try something. I want you to pray the Lord's prayer every day this week. I want you to pray the prayer slowly and carefully and consider what the line says to you through each of these lines. You now have new perspective on phrases that maybe you have heard frequently. If you do, you can see and

participate in how God is at work in the world and in you. Your heavenly Father is actively at work for your good. I'm calling you to be one who extends His good into the world.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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