

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Part Two

In the first three petitions the focus is upon God's name and His kingdom. The next three petitions deal with our needs.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

There is an important attitude that makes this prayer genuine: a dependence upon God for all that we truly need. This applies not only to our daily needs, but also our general livelihood: our education for employment, our jobs, housing, clothing, and other necessities. This petition recognizes that God is our provider and that we must "put our hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1Tim 6:17).

This prayer is not about asking God for luxuries, like the latest flat screen TV or the best cruise in Europe. It is so different than the so-called "Prosperity Gospel." This request does not concern our greeds, but our needs. So, the basic attitude required is contentment and simplicity. St. Augustine said: "God gives where he finds empty hands." Remember what Paul said: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil 4:12). Or, keep in mind the prayer about money from Proverbs 30:8-9:

Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

But, this petition is also about more than food. It concerns our need for the bread of life, the word of God. When we ask for our "daily bread," we also ask God for guidance and training from His word. We ask Him to help us mature and to grow in wisdom every day. We ask Him to give us food for our soul.

Forgive Us Our Debts As We Have Forgiven Our Debtors

There is an important attitude that makes this request real: It is the awareness that we are sinners in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. We know that we are not totally holy. We know that we sin by commission and by omission. And, we know that God knows that we sin. So, just like our daily dependence on God for bread, we have a daily dependence upon God for forgiveness.

Second, asking for forgiveness and forgiving others indicates that we are not self-righteous. Remember the story about the Pharisee gloating over the tax collector:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'" (Luke 18:10-12).

The proper attitude for this request is like the sinner, not the Pharisee. Remember the famous saying: "Except for the grace of God, there go I."

Third, there is a critical condition to be met to receive God's forgiveness. We must also forgive others. This means that we will not permit the sins of others to separate us, just like God does not allow our own sins to ruin our relationship with Himself. This means, also, that when

something has come between us, we do not use the offense as a weapon, to drive a wedge between us or to hurt the other. Forgiveness means inviting another sinner back into fellowship with us. But, I think this petition also permits us to ask of God for grace to forgive and heal, whenever someone sins against us.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation But Deliver Us From Evil

First, there are two clarifications that we need to understand the text. The word "temptation" means "test." And, the word "evil" probably means "evil one" or Satan specifically. Second, this is a prayer for God to protect us from ourselves, as well as the evil one. The Bible says that the heart is "deceptively wicked" and that we possess a strong capacity to sin. Though we may think we are holy, the truth is otherwise.

There was an ancient Jewish prayer that said: "Lead my foot not into the power of sin, and bring me not into the power of iniquity, and not into the power of temptation, and not into the power of anything shameful." This is request for protection from sin. We pray: "Lord, may there be nothing in me that will force you to put me to the test in order to reveal what is in my heart." It is similar to the prayer in Psalms 139:23-24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" With this petition we are also asking God to protect us from apostasy and dishonoring His name or his people or those we love or even ourselves.

Third, this is petition that recognizes our powerless before the devil. He has supernatural power and he knows how to manipulate the human heart. So, we ask our Father to help us and protect us so that we will not make things worse when we face temptations and tribulations, which test our faith.

And fourth, with this petition we ask God to spare us from bad things that might happen to us. We say to our Father: "If you are willing, remove this cup from me." The truth is that we often cannot hold up under pressure. Sometimes, we sin. Sometimes, we sin in response to others' sin against us. On the other hand, from a positive perspective, this is a prayer for God to be glorified in our trials and testing. And so, we also pray: "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

As we have seen, there is a critical condition to be met for this prayer to be useful. We must have a relationship with the Father. If you do not, please reach out to God in prayer, confession, and repentance. Ask Jesus to redeem you. Do it today. Talk to your pastor or trusted Christian friend. If you do enjoy this relationship with God, the Father, let's ask Him to deepen and broaden our capacity to pray.