

THE LORD'S PRAYER - PROVISION

Normally all of people who sang in the choir of West Side Baptist Church in Beatrice, Nebraska were on time for their Wednesday night practice. In fact, most of them tended to be early. However, on March 1, 1950, they all had excuses for being late. Marilyn, the church pianist, overslept on her after-dinner nap, so she and her mother were late. One girl, a high school student, was having trouble with her homework. That delayed her, so she was late. One couple couldn't get their car started. They, and those they were to pick up, ended up being late. All 18 choir members, including the pastor and his wife who were delayed by a dress that needed ironing, were late. All had good excuses. At 7:30 PM, the time the choir rehearsal was to begin, not one soul was in the choir loft. This had never happened before.

Now for the rest of the story. That night, the only night in the history of the church that the choir wasn't starting to practice at 7:30, was the night that there was a gas leak in the basement of the West Side Baptist Church. At precisely the time at which the choir would have been singing, the gas leak was ignited by the church furnace and the whole building blew up. Was this just a fluke that no one was injured or killed? Was it just coincidence that made everyone late for choir practice that night? That's what some people would say. But we know better. We know that God was watching over the members of West Side Baptist Church that night and as Jehovah Jireh, he saw the need before it was there and he provided.

Today we are continuing in our series looking at the Lord's Prayer. Last week we talked about the first 2 verses which answered the questions; who am I, who is God and what is the purpose of life? Today we are looking at the next 2 verses which talk about God's provision.

Matt 6:9 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

We serve a faithful God who meets all of our needs – both physical and spiritual. When we come to God in prayer we seek to recognize His faithfulness and pledge our own faithfulness in return.

1. PHYSICAL NEEDS - give us today our daily bread

God is faithful in that He provides everything that we physically need from day to day. The children of Israel understood this provision when they wandered in the wilderness. Every day they would wake to find the manna that God had supplied again and again for their needs for that day.

In prayer, we recognize our needs and acknowledge God's provision of those needs. Jesus prayed these words not to remind God of His duty to us but to remind us of His love. It is a reminder that God knows what you need and has promised to supply all of those needs.

Dr. Helen Roseveare, missionary to Zaire, told the following story. "A pregnant mother with a young daughter came to the mission station and died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. Therefore, we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded, 'Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won't feel so lonely.'

That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, 'If God sent that, I'm sure He also sent a doll!' And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child's sincere requests, and 5 months earlier He had led a ladies' group to include both of those specific articles."

Matt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

This is one of the reasons that tithing is so important. It teaches us to trust. God says that He will provide for our needs. If you do not tithe, you are telling Him that you do not trust Him. If you do not think that you will have enough money to make ends meet then there is either a problem with your faith or a problem with your spending habits. We need to learn to trust.

It is important to always acknowledge and reflect on God's provision. This is why we teach our children to say grace before meals. We all need to be reminded frequently that what we have is a gift to us from God and that we need to be careful that we never take it for granted.

Alex Haley, the author of "Roots," had an unusual picture hanging on his office wall. It was a picture of a turtle on top of a fence post. When asked, "Why is that there?" Alex Haley answered, "Every time I write something significant, every time I read my words and I think that they are wonderful, and I begin to feel proud of myself, I look at the turtle on top of the fence post and remember that he didn't get there on his own. He had help."

2. SPIRITUAL NEEDS - forgive us our debts

In prayer we not only remember God's provision for our physical needs but also, more importantly, for our spiritual needs. When we, because of our sins, were separated from God, He provided the way. He provided the sacrifice that our sins required. This is where we get the name Jehovah Jireh from. We see this name first appear in the story of Abraham and Isaac:

Gen 22:7-14 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 Do not lay a hand on the boy, he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

God provided a ram to take the place of Isaac. It died in Isaac's place. This is the idea of substitution and it points forward to the coming of Jesus who was the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). On the cross God dealt with our sins. He provided for us a way to be forgiven.

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior – Max Lucado

Back in 1986 I saw a movie called *The Mission*. Does anyone else remember that movie? The story is about Jesuit missionaries in Brazil who were seeking to bring Christ to the native peoples. Others seek to conquer and capture the natives and make them slaves. The worst of the slave traders is a soldier called Mendoza played by Robert De Niro. He is a vile and ruthless man. Mendoza ends up murdering his brother in a drunken rage. He is overcome with guilt and seeks God's forgiveness but feels that he is unworthy of receiving it. As penance to make up for his sins, he takes all his old armor and swords, everything he used to use in the slave trade, and drags them through the mountains of the jungle following the Jesuits. Eventually he meets the tribal people that he had once killed and sought to enslave. This is what happens:

Our greatest need in life is for forgiveness because our greatest problem in life is sin. When you accept Jesus as Savior He paid for your sin. However, sin continues to come between us and God. Forgiveness is something that we must constantly seek because we daily sin. Our salvation does not depend on it but our ongoing intimacy with God does.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

3. EMOTIONAL NEEDS – as we have forgiven our debtors

As important as it is to seek forgiveness from God we need to also seek to offer forgiveness to others. Jesus specifically addresses this right after He had taught the disciples this prayer. Forgiving others is a primary focus of the prayer.

Matt 6:14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

These are sobering words. If we fail to forgive others then we ourselves will not experience forgiveness. Remember the story that Jesus told:

Mat 18:23-35 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master

turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

You may be wondering why God does not forgive us our sins if we fail to forgive others. The issue is not that God withholds forgiveness from us. Jesus dealt with our sins on the cross. The issue is not LEGAL forgiveness but EMOTIONAL forgiveness. In this story the man was released but, because of unforgiveness, he returned to a place of bondage. Those who do not forgive others place themselves in a self-imposed prison so that they never are able to experience personal forgiveness.

Forgiving others is an essential part of being a Christian because unforgiveness is a cancer in our spiritual lives. Everyone in life gets hurt to some degree. While we often do not have a say in what is done to us we do have a say in what we do with our pain. Because of the forgiveness we have received in Jesus we can extend forgiveness to others.

What is the cost of unforgiveness?

a. It hurts our relationship with God

John tells us that it is impossible to love God and at the same time hate another person (made in the image of God). Unforgiveness sets us against God and gives the enemy a foothold into our lives.

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

b. It hurts our relationships with one another

Unforgiveness becomes bitterness which eventually if unchecked becomes a driving force in our lives. Bitterness destroys the heart. No one likes being around bitter people.

Heb 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

c. It hurts us personally (emotionally and physically)

Unforgiveness is sin, and sin in our lives always has consequences. Harboring unforgiveness in your heart leads to all sorts of emotional and physical problems.

Psalms 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

Community plays an important part in helping us deal with forgiveness. That is why we believe in the importance of small groups. They are not an optional extra – they are a core requirement of living the Christian life. In small groups you can deal with issues of hurt and forgiveness. Small groups are the primary way that we as a church provide pastoral care. Our small groups leaders are shepherds. If you are not in a small group you are missing out!

I have had people ask me “how can you expect everyone to be in a small group.” The same way I can expect everyone to pray, or read their bible or tithe. Community is an essential part of the Christian life. If you do not have an hour and a half every two weeks to attend a small group then I am afraid you have some messed up priorities in your life!

Hudson Taylor had a plaque in his room while he was a missionary in China. On it were these words: Ebenezer and Jehovah Jireh, which means, “The Lord has helped us” and “The Lord will provide.” One looked back and the other looked forward. One reminded him of God’s faithfulness and the other of God’s provision.

Tonight we are meeting again at 7:00 here at the church for prayer. We had a wonderful time last week and I know that tonight will be just as good. Prayer works.

There was a pastor who had a parrot. All the parrot would say was, “Let’s pray, let’s pray.” The pastor tried to teach him to say other things but to no avail. He learned that one of his deacons had a parrot. That parrot would only say, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.” So the pastor decided to invite the deacon and his parrot over to his house. When the deacon arrived they put the parrots into the same cage to see what would happen. The deacon’s parrot said, “Let’s kiss, let’s kiss.” The pastor’s parrot said, “Thank you, Lord. My prayers have been answered.” There’s great power in prayer.