

Many years ago, we were a lot younger; Lori and I were called to a church in the western suburbs of Ottawa called Nepean Baptist. We flew out there for the candidate weekend. We looked a little at houses. But we couldn't make any decision until we knew that we would be coming. The church voted to call us. We needed to find a place to live. We lived in south Edmonton at the time. Ottawa is long drive away to look at houses. So we entrusted our house hunting to someone at the church. We asked them to find us a place to rent.

She found us a townhouse near the church. It was nice and had many of the features we wanted. But there was one feature we did not expect and wondered how it would turn out. That feature was a unique opportunity to get a close up look at trains. The townhouse was three doors and little hill away from train tracks. The first night we spent there, the train came through sometime in the night. We both woke up as the sound of the engines and the weight of the train literally shook our house. We were convinced this would never do.

The next day the train came through again at about the same time. We both woke up as the house shook and the train wheels clacked on the track beside us. But this time we went back to sleep more quickly. Within a week, we already slept through the night or barely noticed the noise of the train. Soon its sound just became part of our everyday lives.

Except when we had visitors. A train would come along. They would jump out of their seats or look wide eyed as the sound and rattling got louder and louder. We would say something like "it's just the train. We've gotten so used to it we hardly even notice it."

Now something similar can happen with the Lord's Prayer. We can get so used to it that we hardly even pay attention to what we pray when we recite it. Tim Keller writes, "The whole world is starving for spiritual experience, and Jesus gives us the means to it in a few short words. It's as if Jesus is saying 'Wouldn't you like to be able to come face-to-face with the Father and king of the universe every day, to pour out your heart to him, and to sense him listening to and loving you?'

We would respond 'Yes.'

Jesus would respond "It's all in the Lord's Prayer."

And we say, ‘In the what?’ How can the Lord’s Prayer address the challenges and realities of my life today? Isn’t that prayer from the 1940’s or something? It’s for the older generation. Yet everything we need is within it.”<sup>1</sup> Now I don’t know where you are at with over familiarity with the Lord’s Prayer. Some of you may not know it. Some may barely know it. Yet many of us have known it since we were kids. We might be so familiar we skip by its depth maybe thinking there’s really no place for it in our lives.

But this is THE prayer the Lord gave to His disciples when they asked for teaching on prayer. A brief examination of each petition or plea reveals how relevant the Lord’s Prayer remains for the needs in our lives and in the world. So we are going to walk through it on this Thanksgiving Sunday. I pray first that we will gain a renewed sense of the deep wisdom of this prayer. I pray that through discovering this wisdom, we will have reason for thanksgiving today even with hard situations in our lives. I also pray God through His Word will renew in us a desire to use the Lord’s Prayer as a solid foundation and springboard to a deeper prayer life and closer connection with Him. So let’s read the Lord’s Prayer again and then examine it before we come to the Lord’s Table.

**Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread

<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

The prayer starts with an address to God. “Our Father in heaven.” Notice it balances the tension that we face in relationship with God. He is in heaven; unequalled, all powerful and the Lord of the universe and yet He’s Our Father, concerned for each of our needs. He desires an intimate relationship with us. So this introduction helps us hold these

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, Dutton, New York, NY, 2014, 109.

two realities about God in perfect balance. We approach our Father like children in 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Palestine and looked to their Fathers as strong providers on whom they could depend. We cry “Our Father in Heaven.”

Then we come to the first request or petition. **“Hallowed be your name.”** Hallowed is another way of saying Holy or set apart. So Halloween is short for Hallow’s Eve or the holy evening before “All Saints Day” in the reformation tradition. Isn’t it both ironic and somewhat tragic that the Holy evening or Halloween has become the night of death and horror and goblins in our culture?

Hallow means holy. God’s name is holy. This reflects who He is – holy. Now why would Jesus teach us to pray “May your name be holy” when God is already holy? It can’t mean “God, I hope your name becomes holy.” It expresses a desire that God’s name which represents God Himself be treated or respected as holy.

So think for a moment what that means for our lives when we pray this. If we sincerely pray for God’s name to be hallowed, that means we want our words, thoughts and lives to hallow God’s name. After all, we are God’s children. This prayer appeals to our Father to keep us from dishonoring his name; to empower us to become good and holy; to change our motives so that we do good not to get praise from others or recognition for our deeds - but we do good so that His name is hallowed. We also pray this out of a desire to see God’s name hallowed in the nations and around the world. It is a prayer for God to be glorified among all the people groups. It focuses our thoughts first on God and His holiness

A few years ago in 2010, I had the privilege of going to the Philippines to teach at our Bible School. I learned a little about Filipino history. One of the countries great heroes was a guy named Rizal. He in some way resisted the Spanish authorities who ruled the Philippines at that time. He wrote about independence for the Filipino people. The Spanish imprisoned him and eventually executed him. Well he became a national hero. And in almost every Filipino town we went to, there was some street or building named after Rizal. The school in Legazpi is located just off of the main street called Rizal. His name is honored throughout that country.

It’s kind of like honoring or hallowing God’s name. I don’t know how many Filipinos get their motivation and purpose in life to honor Rizal. I think many go on with their lives, thankful maybe for Rizal’s stand. But they don’t live to honor his name. We can do the same thing with God’s name. We are thankful for what He did through Jesus 2000 years ago. But we might not live each day to honor His name. This prayer calls us back to that. To pray it sincerely expresses

the desire that God's name be hallowed in the world and in our lives. "O Father in heaven, may your name be hallowed more in our lives, our church family and this nation".

### **Your Kingdom Come**

To pray your kingdom come means to pray for God's reign to spread. Now God reigns over the universe. But Satan has some sort of reign or power over the fallen world. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God". So Satan refuses God's reign. He blinds people from the gospels light. There are people who refuse God's reign in their lives.

When people refuse God's reign, it leads to all human problems. The corrupt power structures and those who oppress people under them do this because they have not submitted to God's reign. When we sin against others and God it goes back in some way to a refusal to acknowledge God's reign. So to pray "your kingdom come" is also a prayer that God would overthrow the oppressors and those who abuse their power. It is a prayer that God will one day restore the world to the way it was in paradise. It is a prayer of hope.

But it's also a prayer of submission. How willing are you and I to pray "may your kingdom come over my life?" When it comes to someone reigning over us, most of us have a skeptical view with good reason. Many human rulers have done a poor job of reigning. They have misspent taxpayer monies or they have been corrupted by power. We consider a good ruler someone who governs in a way that we can get on and do what we want with our lives. We want a government to ensure law, order and positive economic conditions and then get out of our way. We can translate that attitude toward God. But this prayer invites God's kingdom to come over the world and over all of our lives.

That means we would have to submit our kingdoms to His reign. Guys especially love to build their own kingdoms – whether that be in our work – or our homes – or our financial status or even as pastors – our kingdom – our empire, are you willing to submit your kingdom under His kingdom? If you are empire building for yourself, you might have trouble with this phrase. Do you really want God's kingdom to come and reign over your kingdom? Do we really want God to reign over our finances?

But the sooner we submit our kingdoms to His reign, the better. The reign of every human king, prime minister, CEO, pastor, president, owner, family leader and emperor comes to an end. Yet God's reign will never end. He's the perfect king. Therefore, it's a much wiser investment to pour ourselves into His kingdom.

To pray "your kingdom come," shows we are not content with the way things are in the world. You don't pray for someone else's kingdom to advance into a realm where everything is good and right. We live in a world where a lot seems to not be right. There's injustice out there that hasn't been addressed. There's bad stuff happening to people and nations and vulnerable groups. But we have our God the King to whom we can appeal for action. "Oh God, may your kingdom come into more of our lives and reign over more of our world."

**Your Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven** - Just as God's will is perfectly done in heaven, Jesus prays that it will be experienced on earth. I think most of us can affirm this prayer when it comes to society and our nation. We believe God's will is better than the will of any human ruler. But do we really want God's will to be done on the part of the earth where we live and call home? What if it is God's will that a loved one dies? What if God's will includes going through tough times? What if God's will means we don't get what we want in that situation? Do we really want God's will to be done?

Martin Luther seemed to grasp the challenge of this prayer. One purpose of prayer is to conform our will to God's will. So Luther expands on this phrase by writing "Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will."<sup>2</sup> This is a tough calling. Yet the earlier part of the Lord's Prayer helps us with this. We pray to "Our Father in heaven." We pray to the all-powerful God who also looks upon us as His dear children. Therefore, we can gain confidence that with God as our Father, His will for us will ultimately be the best for us.

Tim Keller writes, "If we can't say 'Thy will be done,' from the bottom of our hearts, we will never know any peace. We will feel compelled to try to control people and control our environment and make things the way we believe they ought to be. Yet to control life like this is beyond our abilities and we will just dash ourselves on the rocks." Luther writes, "Without trust in God, we will try to take God's place and seek revenge on those who have harmed us. But by trusting God and His will, we will be protected from the 'horrible vices of character assassination, slander, backbiting

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<sup>2</sup> Keller, 112.

and condemning others.”<sup>3</sup> Calvin goes even further. He states “to pray thy will be done is to submit not only our wills to God but even our feelings, so that we do not become despondent, bitter and hardened by the things that befall us.”<sup>4</sup>

So maybe there’s something in your life today that you’ve been struggling with. You’ve been trying to control everything or you’re bent on revenge. You’ve been fighting against this and it’s just not happening. “Your will be done” may be the key phrase in this prayer for you today. This is not a prayer of resignation. “Oh well God. Your will be done and my life is just going to be terrible.” It is a prayer of faith to the trustworthy Father in heaven who has infinitely more power, wisdom and resources to deal with the situations we face. “So Father in heaven, may your will be done in our lives, in those situations we struggle with, in our church family with the challenges before us and in our nation.”

These first three petitions or requests of the Lord’s Prayer focus us on God. They direct us to Our Father in heaven; whose name is holy; whose kingdom keeps coming and whose will continues to be carried out. It is to this God we now pray about the specific daily needs of our lives.

**Give us Today Our Daily Bread.** Some of you can relate very well to this prayer. There have been times in your life or times right now where you didn’t have certainty about the availability of daily bread in your fridge or freezer. When you received it, you cherished the gift of daily bread. But others of us can hardly relate to this prayer. We’re used to having weeks of bread supply in our freezers. We have money in the bank and enough food stored and frozen food to withstand the Apocalypse we may think. So how can this prayer have any relevance for people with full freezers?

Well, we need to recognize how prosperity and abundance can threaten our spiritual lives. Proverbs 30:8-9 state: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me lest I be full and deny you and say “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” We need to recognize how God calls us to live one day at a time and we can only live one day at a time. We are tempted to spend so much time on the future or on the past. But life is so daily. It has to be lived one day at a time. Receiving provision and the necessities of life is great and immeasurable gift that over 2 billion people in the world would love to experience today. When Jesus taught this prayer, most of his listeners faced the question of survival on a near daily basis. Most first century workers were paid one day at a time. A few days of illness could spell tragedy for the family.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>4</sup> Keller, 113.

This prayer is not “give us today 3 month’s supply of bread.” It is not “give me today what’s going to happen in the next 3 months of my life.” It’s a prayer expressing satisfaction with just having enough. The pattern of the Lord’s Prayer prepares us to pray this phrase this way. With Our Father in heaven who is holy, advancing His reign and good will, we can honestly pray with satisfaction to receive only what we need.

The battle comes with living in a culture that tells us we never have enough. So Father s give us today our daily bread and help us to remember the immeasurable value and privilege of such a gift. Forgive us where we greedily want more. Grow in us that contentment that comes from having enough.

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.** Many of you may have learned this phrase as “forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Trespass is one word used to talk about sin or violating a law. Debt is the Aramaic term for sin which originally applied to money debt. But Jesus uses it here to apply to our sin debt. When we sin against someone, we owe them in a way. We owe repentance, apology and restoration to them.

When it comes to God, we owe Him a debt we cannot pay. So Jesus paid the debt for us on the cross. But when we sin, we still owe him repentance, apology and that desire to stop sinning against him. So this prayer asks for restoration of personal fellowship with God when our fellowship has been hindered by sin. Since God is willing to forgive and restore that fellowship, we are then required to forgive others their debts.

Now for some of us, we immediately face the challenge of forgiving someone who has hurt us and never repented for it or never admitted doing wrong. I want to remind you of what we learned a few weeks ago. Forgiveness is for some past offense and requires only one person. The offended can forgive the offender whether or not the offender seeks forgiveness. Reconciliation refers to the present. It requires the offender to come to the offended to confess, repent, apologize and promise to stop that sinning. Trust refers to the future. It also involves two people. The offender must prove their repentance by living and acting in a way that rebuilds the trust of the offended. So that means we can forgive a person without being reconciled with them. We can reconcile with a person yet withhold trust from them because that trust must be rebuilt.

So I hope that relieves the concerns of some of you who think forgiving others debts means you have to reconcile and trust a person who either hasn’t repented or keeps breaking their promises. If you have sinned against someone and equate forgiveness with reconciliation and trust, you need to rethink your expectation. You need to ask for

forgiveness and admit wrong doing. But you can't expect or demand trust with that forgiveness. You must walk day by day in the strength of the Lord to change and grow.

With all that in mind, I think we can wrestle a little more with forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Yes, this is a prayer for restoration with fellowship with God. So if you find confession and repentance traumatic or demeaning or beneath you, you might need to examine if you've really received Christ and God's Gospel. If we have unresolved bitterness in our lives, that likely means we are not right with God in some way. If we think it's okay to hold a grudge, something is not right. It may be that we have not really seen our sin and the depth of our depravity and then sought the radical forgiveness of God. If that's the case, we will find it hard to forgive and seek the good of those who have wronged us. "So Father in heaven, we ask you to forgive our debts. We ask for a greater understanding of the massive nature of our debts to you. Then we ask upon receiving that forgiveness that it will spill over from our hearts to others who have sinned against us. Help us as your forgiven children to grow as a forgiving people."

**Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** If we're paying attention to this phrase, it presents difficulties at first. We understand the deliver us from evil part. We realize there are times when we are in a situation where evil reigns and we're threatened. So deliver us from that evil.

But God does not tempt anyone to sin. God is not in the business of putting traps in our pathway so that we might rebel against Him. So the English word temptation presents a problem because we equate it with tempting to sin. This problem gains some solution when we understand the word used is better translated "testing."

Yet that raises another problem. God does test us. He allows tests into our lives to reveal the true nature of our faith and to strengthen our faith. One of the clearest examples of this happened in Genesis 22 where the text literally states "God tested Abraham." So if the word means testing and God tests His children for their good, why would Jesus instruct us to pray "lead us not into testing or temptation?"

I think the best and most comprehensive explanation focuses on admitting our spiritual vulnerability in this prayer. Christians can approach the tests of life and the realm of evil with a spiritual arrogance. "Whatever test God has for me, I'm ready. I will pass it with flying colors. There's evil somewhere. Let me at it. I can take it down." One of the greatest examples of this attitude comes in the life of Peter. Remember him the night Jesus was crucified? Jesus announces that he will be handed over to the authorities and killed. Peter announces, he will never let that happen. He will in fact die

with Jesus if it comes to that. Peter was saying “Lead me into any temptation or testing; I’ll deliver you from evil.” Jesus responds with the prophecy that Peter will deny even knowing Jesus 3 times before the rooster crows. Peter’s somewhat arrogant pronouncement and subsequent denial have made their way into our common expression today with the saying “I’m petered out.” That means you’re too tired to continue too exhausted to keep going with what you said you would do.

It’s not just over-confident assertions but over-confident choices or activities. “Oh, I can go to that party or that gathering and I can easily handle any testing that arrives. I can watch that R rated and there’s nothing in there that I can’t handle and fight against sinning. I can go online when nobodies around and I can handle anything that pops. I can travel alone and I can handle my behavior or what I watch on TV in the hotel room with no problem. I can sit in that circle and I know I won’t participate when someone starts gossiping or bad-mouthing someone else.” That’s the Peter like attitude we have to guard against.

Instead of over-confident assertions that “we can handle any testing,” we humbly pray “lead us not into testing – especially the kind where we might fall and deny you.” Maybe it’s “Lord, lead us not into prosperity where we will be tested to deny you or poverty where we will be tested to despair or angrily reject you.” So Lord, we as a people admit our spiritual vulnerability. We don’t want to be over confident. We know any tests you allow are for our good. Help us not to foolishly run towards tests too great for us and deliver us from all the evil.

And that’s the Lord’s Prayer. It can serve as a pattern and a springboard to much deeper prayer and walk with our Father in heaven. Where are you in prayer? In your walk with God? Imagine your soul is a boat with oars and a sail.

Are you sailing - living the Christian life with the wind at your back. God is real to your heart. You often feel his love. You see prayers being answered. When studying the Bible, you regularly see remarkable things and you sense him speaking to you. You sense people around you being influenced by the Spirit through you.

Are you rowing? You find prayer and Bible reading to be more of a duty than a delight. God often (though not always) seems distant, and the sense of his presence is fairly rare. You don’t see many of your prayers being answered. You may be struggling with doubts about God and yourself. Yet despite all this, you refuse self-pity or the self-righteous pride that assumes you know better than God how your life should go. You continue to read the Bible and pray regularly, you attend worship and reach out and serve people despite the inner spiritual dryness.

Are you drifting? You experience all the conditions of rowing – spiritual dryness and difficulties in life. But instead of rowing, you are letting yourself drift. You don't feel like approaching and obeying God, so you don't pray or read. You give in to the self-centeredness that naturally comes when you feel sorry for yourself, and you drift into self-indulgent behaviors to comfort yourself, whether it be escape eating and sleeping, sexual practices or whatever else.

Are you Sinking – Eventually your boat, your soul will drift away from the shipping lanes – and truly lose any forward motion in the Christian life. The numbness of heart can become hardness because you give in to thoughts of self-pity and resentment. If some major difficulty or trouble were to come into your life, it would be possible to abandon your faith and identity as a Christian altogether.

Some things in the Christian life are our responsibility – Pray; read Bible; continue to attend worship. If you continue these in spite of negative circumstances and feelings, you won't be drifting. When the winds come up again, you will move ahead swiftly. If we do not apply these means of grace, you will at best be drifting and if storms come up, you may be in danger of sinking.

Prayer is rowing – sometimes like rowing in the dark – you won't feel you are making any progress at all. Yet you are, and when the winds rise again, and they surely will, you will sail again before them. The Lord's Prayer is a great way to keep rowing or start. Will you join me now as we pray it in preparation for the Lord's Supper?