

# “Sixty-Six Words, Part 2”

Matthew 6:5-15 <sup>1</sup>

As you may remember, this morning is our second look at The Lord’s Prayer. Last week we considered **God’s Name**, **God’s Kingdom**, and **God’s Will**. Today we’ll look at **Our Needs**, **Our Cleansing**, and **Our Protection**. Let’s begin as we did last week, by offering this prayer together:

*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.  
Amen (Matthew 6:9-13).*

The first petition in this second part of the prayer that addresses our own needs goes like this: **“Give us this day our daily bread.”** The writer of Proverbs offered a prayer of this sort long ago when he prayed, “O God, I beg two favors from you before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ And if I am poor, I may steal and thus insult God’s holy name” (Proverbs 30:7-9). Now that’s a worthy prayer, but that’s not how Jesus taught us to pray.

This prayer in Proverbs uses the words, “I,” “me,” and “my” ten times; but “You cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer and even once say ‘I.’ You cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer and even once say ‘my.’ Nor can you pray the Lord’s Prayer and not pray for one another, for when you ask for daily bread, you must include your brother. For others are included in each and every plea; from the beginning to the end of it, it doesn’t once say ‘me.’”<sup>2</sup>

My friends, Jesus didn’t teach us to pray, “Give me my daily bread.” He taught us to pray, “Give us our daily bread.” The scourge of hunger in our world is not the result of there not being enough food to go around. There is enough and to spare.

The problem of hunger has nothing to do with God’s supply of life’s essentials. The problem of hunger has to do with our distribution of them.<sup>3</sup> And so this petition is not simply a prayer that you and I may receive that which we need. It’s also a prayer that we may find ways to share our daily bread with others. In fact, it may be that we affluent and corpulent Americans should rather pray “forgive us our daily bread.”

It’s also worth noting that this is a prayer for bread, not for cake. This is a prayer for life’s essentials, not for life’s luxuries. And it’s also a prayer for daily bread. You and I tend to want enough “bread” laid up for the next ten or twenty or thirty years. What do you imagine that Jesus would say about that?

There’s another dimension to this petition that’s worthy of our attention. Jesus told us that “*People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God*” (Matthew 4:4). I wonder what you and I would discover if our prayers were recorded and played back to

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on March 22, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> This little poem is anonymous. I was given it by my friend, Faye Jones.

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, volume 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p.

us. I wonder how much time you and I spend asking God to nourish our bodies and meet our material needs compared to how much time we spend asking God to nourish our spirits?

Jeffrey Boyd is a psychiatrist in Waterbury, Connecticut, who tells a story about “daily bread” of another sort: “My first wife, Pat, had diabetes, two heart attacks, bypass surgery, two strokes, went on dialysis, went blind, and had both legs amputated above the knee. She and I went every week to a healing service at our church. The clergy would lay hands on us and pray, while Pat and I cried uncontrollably. She was never healed.

“There was no evidence that healing prayer had any positive effect in terms of miraculous cures. But every week this intimate prayer gave us enough spiritual strength to endure another week. Thus my own experience was that healing prayer was like manna for Pat and me. Every Sunday we were given enough to get us through. We were not given more nor less manna than we needed to survive. It was exactly like Exodus 16, and like the Lord’s Prayer, ‘*Give us today our daily bread.*’

“In other words, Pat and I experienced healing prayer to have a curative power not in terms of a change in medical outcome, but in terms of keeping us in touch with the Lord, who spiritually sustained us. Furthermore, other people from our church were more in touch with us by virtue of us all praying for Pat’s healing.”<sup>4</sup>

The fifth petition of The Lord’s Prayer is “***Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.***”<sup>5</sup> Now before you and I can honestly ask God to “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,*” we have to be convinced that we really do need to pray it.

This is a petition that ought to give us pause before we speak it. To pray this prayer is really a dangerous thing, because this fifth petition asks God to forgive us in the same way and to the same extent that we ourselves have forgiven others. Stop and think about that.

The Lord’s Prayer confronts us straight-on with our relationships with other persons. Jesus told us that our claim to God’s forgiveness is based on our own willingness to forgive others.<sup>6</sup> According to Jesus, if you and I refuse to forgive others, then we are actually asking God NOT to forgive us. We ought to think twice—and more than twice—before we dare to pray this prayer. “**Unforgiving = Unforgiven**” is an immutable law of that spiritual world over which our Father reigns.

This petition also reminds us that “*If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth* (1 John 1:8). Daily forgiveness keeps the channel of grace clear once it has been opened, and prevents it from clotting up. Hardening of our spiritual arteries is an ever-present danger for every one of us.

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey H. Boyd, M.D. “A Biblical Theology of Chronic Illness,” *Trinity Journal* (TRINJ 24NS 2003), 191.

<sup>5</sup> While many traditions use “trespasses” in this statement, and while “trespasses” is true to the meaning and intent of the petition, what the text actually says is “debts,” and I don’t think you can find any modern English translation that renders this as “trespasses.” At the same time, this is a minor point, and while I prefer to stick with what the text actually says, either approach is acceptable. The “trespasses” version appears in the 1526 translation by William Tyndale (Tyndale spelling “treaspases”). In 1549 the first Book of Common Prayer in English used a version of the prayer with “trespasses.” This became the “official” version used in Anglican congregations, and it has become popular in many traditions.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s\\_Prayer#Fifth\\_Petition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s_Prayer#Fifth_Petition)

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:7, 23-24, 6:14-15, 18:21-35; see also James 2:13.

The famous preacher, George Buttrick, once wrote that “An unforgiving spirit in us shuts the door in God’s face, even though His compassions still surround the house. God is ready to forgive, but we are not ready to be forgiven.”<sup>7</sup> Is it any wonder that God sometimes seems very far away?

So how do we forgive? I suggest beginning by taking down the marker over the offense. Quit ringing the bell. Quit pulling on the rope. Pray that God will enable you to act toward the offender once again in courtesy, and eventually in love. The truth of the matter is that nothing you or I will ever be called on to forgive even *begins* to compare with what God has already done for us. We forgive others, because God has first forgiven us—on Calvary’s Cross. When General Oglethorpe told John Wesley, “I never forgive,” Wesley wisely replied, “Then I hope, sir, that you never sin.”<sup>8</sup>

The last petition in The Lord’s Prayer has to do with our protection, and it has two parts. The first of these is “**And lead us not into temptation**” If “*Forgive us*” has to do with past sins, “*Lead us not*” has to do with future sins. And once again, we need to be careful here. The Bible tells us emphatically that “*God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else, either* (James 1:13).

So what is temptation, anyway? Temptation is a situation in which we’re exposed to the seductions of evil. Each of us has flaws that are the marks and results of sin, and if we’re not on guard, Satan can use these weak places to defeat us. These inner fault lines are quiet evidence that you and I are not yet fully redeemed.

While you and I must be ever alert to these fault lines, we’re frequently in greater danger in our areas of strength. If there’s anything in your life or my life about which we’re inclined to say, “Well, at least I’m in good shape there,” it’s precisely at those points that we need to be especially watchful. History is filled with accounts of fortresses and great cities that were infiltrated and conquered at those very places where the defenders thought them so strong that no guard was posted.<sup>9</sup>

In thinking about temptation, I think Rick Warren was right when he reminded us that “Every temptation is an opportunity to do good. On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block when you realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing. Temptation simply provides the choice. While temptation is Satan’s primary weapon to destroy you, God wants to use it to develop you. Every time you choose to do good instead of sin, you are growing in the character of Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

There is a sense, then, in which temptation is not so much our penalty for being morally fallen as it is our glory. If metal is to be used in a great engineering project, it is tested at stresses and strains far beyond those it is ever expected to bear in service. Athletes train with weights and situations far harder than those of the actual competition. So, too, you and I have to be tested before God can do much with us in Kingdom work. This world is organized, not for our comfort, but for our training.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup>George Buttrick, “Exposition on the Gospel of Matthew,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1951), p. 314.

<sup>8</sup> Buttrick, p. 314.

<sup>9</sup> Barclay, p. 230.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Schuller has pointed out that forgiveness is much more than justification and the removal of sin. This is the negative meaning of forgiveness. The positive meaning of forgiveness is that God trusts

The final phrase of The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for God's protection in times of spiritual danger: "**but deliver us from the evil one.**" This raises the interesting question, "If God doesn't tempt us, then why does God allow Satan to tempt us?" That's actually a very good question.

God allows us to be tempted, not to make us fall, but to make us strong. God allows us to face temptation, not to make us sinners, but to make us good. We may fail the test—and we often do—but we're not meant to. Elmer Towns noted that . . .

"God is like a school teacher. In the first grade you were tested to see if you could print letters. In the middle grades, you were tested to see if you could write sentences, paragraphs, even a short paper. By the time you got to college, you should have been able to write a term paper, supporting your arguments by using quotations from authorities. So a teacher tests the college student on college material, not on first-grade material. In the same way, 'Lead us not into temptation' is a way of praying, 'Lead us only into temptations that we are able to withstand.' A loving God, like a conscientious teacher, gives tests we are able to pass."<sup>12</sup>

So now we've come to the end. We've looked at God's Name, God's Kingdom, God's Will, Our Needs, Our Cleansing, and Our Protection, but the truth is that this prayer is not an excursion into theology so much as it is the adoration of the soul.<sup>13</sup> In The Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to come to God saying, "Dad, I love you, and I need your help."

Yet as wonderful as all this is, not everyone can pray the Lord's Prayer.

- ☞ If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, you can't pray, "**Our Father.**"
- ☞ If you're all about glorifying yourself, you can't pray, "**Hallowed be Thy name.**"
- ☞ If you reject God's Law, you can't pray, "**Thy kingdom come.**"
- ☞ If you refuse to submit to God, you can't pray, "**Thy will be done.**"
- ☞ If you live only for the here-and-now, you can't pray, "**On earth as it is in heaven.**"
- ☞ If insist on trying to be self-sufficient, you can't pray, "**Give us our daily bread.**"
- ☞ If you refuse to forgive, you can't pray, "**Forgive us our debts.**"
- ☞ If you revel in sin, you can't pray, "**Lead us not into temptation.**"
- ☞ If you are a friend of evil, you can't pray, "**Deliver us from evil.**"
- ☞ If you're building your own kingdom, you can't pray, "**Thine is the kingdom.**"
- ☞ If you crave earthly power, you can't pray, "**Thine is the power.**"
- ☞ If you always take the credit, you can't pray, "**Thine is the glory.**"<sup>14</sup>

I don't know about you, but when I think about the Lord's Prayer this way, I see plenty of room for personal improvement. What's your situation this morning? Are you able to pray this prayer in all of its fullness? How do you need to respond to God in this moment?

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us by entrusting to us his daring, divine dream for our world. The deeper meaning of temptation, then, is not that of sins, but that of Sin—of rejecting God's plan for our lives (Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* [Waco: Word, 1982]).

<sup>12</sup> Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), p. 176.

<sup>13</sup> Buttrick, p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> Towns, p. 141.