

JESUS' BLUEPRINT FOR PRAYER

One of the biggest problems in our relationship with God is thinking that we can depend on Him on our own terms. This independent dependence often shows up in the way we pray. While most people do pray, relatively few people pray to God on His terms.

Praying the way God wants us to pray is something this booklet addresses. The Lord's Prayer, one of the most familiar of all prayers, has been much repeated but little understood. Haddon Robinson, former president of Denver Seminary and well-known Bible teacher, cuts through the confusion and shows us that Jesus gave us a blueprint for prayer that is just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago.

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I admire men and women who give prayer high priority in their lives. Frankly, prayer has proved to be the most demanding discipline of my life. At different times I have found it strenuous, boring, frustrating, and confusing. Over the years a solid prayer life has been more intermittent than persistent. Occasionally I have grabbed hold of the hem of the garment, only to discover I could not sustain the grip. Out of my experience I have learned that you cannot simply "say your prayers." Prayer, real prayer, is tough, hard business.

To admit my lifelong struggle with prayer is something I do with great uneasiness. In the life of Jesus, prayer was the work, and ministry was the prize. For me, prayer serves as preparation for the battle, but for Jesus, it was the battle itself. Having prayed, He went about His ministry as an honor student might go to receive a reward, or as a marathon runner, having run the race, might accept the gold medal.

Where was it that Jesus sweat great drops of blood? Not in Pilate's Hall, nor on His way to Golgotha. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane. There He "offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death" (Heb. 5:7). Had I been there and witnessed that struggle, I would have worried about the future. "If He is so broken up when all He is doing is praying," I might have said, "what will He do when He faces a real crisis? Why can't He approach this ordeal with the calm confidence of His three sleeping friends?" Yet, when the test came, Jesus walked to the cross with courage, and His three friends fell apart and fell away.

In Luke 11, after Jesus had spent time praying, one of His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Two things are worth noting about the request. First, one section of John the Baptist's curriculum in disciple-making focused on teaching his followers to pray. Second, that was what Jesus' men asked Him to do for them. They had been with Him now for over 2 years. They had front seats when He taught and preached. They witnessed His miracles. Yet, as far as we know, they never took Him aside and asked, "Lord, teach us to preach," or "Lord, show us how to minister." They did come and request, "Teach us to pray."

We usually ask an expert to give us the best he has to offer. When we're with a successful banker, we ask, "Teach us to invest." From a gifted scholar we request, "Teach us to do research." To a professional golfer we say, "Teach us to putt." Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Teach us to pray."

Because prayer was central to His ministry, He wanted it to be vital in theirs, so He responded by giving them what is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." Actually, the prayer is misnamed because the Lord Himself could not have prayed this prayer. As the Son of God without sin, He could not have joined in the petition, "Forgive us our sins." Perhaps the prayer should be labeled, "The Disciples' Prayer," since it is a primer on prayer for people like us. It serves us in praying as an outline serves a minister when he preaches a sermon or as a blueprint serves a builder when he constructs a building. It guides us as we go.

The skeleton of the prayer given to us by Luke opens with an address to God: "Father." The prayer then has two major sections. First, we are to talk to the Father about the Father--His person, His program, and His purpose: "Hallowed be Your Name," "Your kingdom come," "Your will be done." Then we speak to the Father about His family--the children's need for provision, pardon, and protection: "Give us day by day our daily bread," "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us," and "Do not lead us into temptation."

While I still have courses to take in the School of Prayer, this model prayer of Jesus has ordered my prayer-life. Of course, you may deserve high grades in the subject. But if not, perhaps you can pick up some pointers that will teach you to pray.

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GOD'S PATERNITY: "Our Father"

At the outset we need to know who it is that we are praying to. According to Jesus, when we come to the God of the universe in prayer, we can call Him Father. Bound up in the word *Father* is a compact summary of the entire Christian faith. It is the answer to the philosopher Lessing's question, "Is the universe friendly?" When Christians bow before God and call Him Father, they are acknowledging that at the heart of the universe there is not only ultimate power but ultimate love.

But not everyone can call God Father. It is Jesus who taught us to pray that way. He alone guarantees that we can enter into a relationship with God and become members of His family. He is our Father and we are His children.

There are some who hold to a view called the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." This does not reflect the teaching of the Bible, however. It's true that God is the Creator of all, and in that sense everyone is "the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29). But the relationship that a creature has with his Creator is not the relationship of the Father to His children. The relationship that we have with God as our Father comes only through our relationship with Jesus Christ. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him [Christ], to

them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

It is a wonderful privilege to be able to call God Father--a privilege we easily take for granted. In the Old Testament, the people of God did not individually address Him as Father. The word *Father* for God was rarely used, and when it was it always referred to the relationship of God to the nation of Israel. As far as we know, none of the outstanding Old Testament saints--Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel--ever fell to his knees in the solitude of his chambers and dared to address God as his Father. Yet in the New Testament, at least 275 times, that is how we are instructed to speak to God. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, when we come to the sovereign majesty of the universe, the word that should fall readily from our lips is *Father*.

The address, "Our Father in heaven," as given in the Lord's Prayer, not only recognizes the intimacy that we have with God as our Father, but it also speaks of the awe we should have as we come to Him in prayer. Jesus is saying that this One to whom we come as Father is the sovereign God of heaven, the God of all power, the God of all authority.

To the early Jewish Christians, having a proper awe of God was probably easier than understanding their intimacy with God. Unfortunately in our day, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. God is often referred to in terms that are anything but awe-inspiring. I cannot conceive of the psalmist saying, "I may not know the answers, but I know the Answer Man." I cannot imagine the men and women of the Bible talking about "the big Man upstairs." To say that God is our Father does not imply that God is a great, big, huggable teddy bear.

The Bible keeps the tension between intimacy and awe. The writer of Hebrews said, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16). The fact that we come to a throne should fill us with awe. But because it is a throne of *grace*, it is approachable. The sovereign, almighty God of the universe has allowed us, because of Jesus Christ, to approach Him in prayer and address Him as Father.

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GOD'S PERSON: "Hallowed Be Your Name"

When we pray, Jesus told us to say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Luke 11:2). In Hebrew thought, a name was extremely significant. Parents did not name their children because they thought their initials would look good on luggage. They didn't choose a name because it reminded them of their Aunt Hilda or their Uncle Harry. Parents chose names for their children, hoping that the name would embody the personality, characteristics, or character that they wanted to see developed in the child.

Early American Puritans did that. They gave their daughters names like Silence, Charity, Hope, Love, and Patience. They hoped that the child would live up to her name as she grew up. We also see this in the New Testament. In times of crisis, when some-one's life

or outlook changed, often his name was changed to match. When Jesus got hold of Peter, his name was Simon. He was a shifty, sandy, undependable fellow. But Jesus changed his name to Peter, which means "rock." When Jesus renamed Peter, it took a while for him to live up to his new name--to change shifting sand into rock.

This practice of renaming was seen in more recent days when the cardinal of Poland became the pope. He changed his name to John Paul II because he wanted his life to embody the virtues of his predecessors, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul I. He chose the name to personify what he wanted to be.

In Psalm 9:10 we read, "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You." The psalmist was not claiming that those who could pronounce God's name would trust in Him. He was saying that those who knew God's character and His power would put their trust in Him. So when we pray, "hallowed be Your name," we are talking about the character and person of God. To hallow means "to sanctify, to set apart, to make special." The opposite of *hallow* is "to profane, to disgrace, to besmirch the name." When we say, "hallowed be Your name," we are praying that God may be God to us, that He will be set apart in our prayers in such a way that it will be clear that we reverence God.

Sometimes our prayers are dangerously close to a blasphemous distortion. We often pray as if God were deaf and we have to shout to make Him hear us, as if He were ignorant and we have to explain to make Him understand, and as if He were calloused and we have to cajole to get Him to respond. Our prayers reveal a very inadequate idea of God.

Other times our prayers make it clear that many names on earth are more significant to us than the name of God in heaven. We can be more in awe of an employer, a professor, a loved one, a friend, or a government official than we are of the God in heaven. We can fear a fellow creature of earth more than we reverence and respect the God to whom we pray.

The petitions in this model prayer cover all that we are to pray about. Whether we pray a short prayer or a long one, we will never pray more than what is contained here. We often pray for God to increase our devotion and depth of spiritual life, but none of the petitions found in this prayer are for personal holiness. The first step in spiritual growth is not to pray for inner feeling or inner change but that God will indeed be God in our lives. The focus of the spiritual life is not experience but God.

We have the command to be holy as He is holy because the spiritual life begins when we determine to allow God to be God in all aspects of life--personal, family, business, recreation--and to allow God to set us apart.

This focus on Him should be true not only in our own inner life but also in our prayers for others. We should not pray primarily that others will be delivered from sin but that they will come to know God. The ultimate goal of evangelism is not only that people will be won to Jesus Christ, but that people in the world who profane the name of God will come to understand who He really is--the God of holiness, grace, and righteousness. And

out of that understanding, they will hallow His name. That is the essence of evangelism--people everywhere allowing God to be God in their lives.

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GOD'S PROGRAM: "Your Kingdom Come"

The second request that we direct to the Father about the Father is not only devoted to the person of God but also to the program of God. The second request is "Your kingdom come." Jesus was speaking here about His future messianic reign on the earth. All through Scripture, the story of the Bible looks forward to the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will rule in righteousness when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15).

This concern for God's rule on the earth is basic to our view of history. Joseph Wittig once noted that a person's biography should begin not with his birth but with his death. He argued that we measure the contribution of life not by its beginning but by its end. That's how we should think about history. Any thoughtful person wonders, Is history going anyplace? Is it simply a wheel that moves round and round and never touches the ground? Is it simply a cycle of repeated events headed for no destination except perhaps oblivion? Some people shrug off history as a tale told by an idiot, scrawled on the walls of an insane asylum. Edward Gibbon referred to history as "little more than the register of crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind." Henry Ford summed up history as "bunk." Ralph Waldo Emerson dismissed history as "the biographies of a few great men."

In the witness of the Bible, however, history is "His story," and history is headed somewhere--the return of Jesus Christ. The Bible anticipates that day when the angels and the redeemed will sing together. Before us shines that light, and the darker the age, the brighter seems the glow.

So, when we pray, "Your kingdom come," we look toward that glad time when God's messianic kingdom prophesied throughout the Old Testament will be established by Jesus' return to earth. As we pray, we direct our gaze to the day when the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. We look forward to the climax of history when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," though, we also ask for something else. We plead that on the small bit of earth we occupy now, we shall submit our will to God's will. If we long for the time in the future when Christ's kingdom will be established on earth--enough to pray sincerely for it--then we must be willing that all of the little kingdoms which matter too much to us will be pulled down. If we want God's rule over all men and women at some future time, then it follows that we desire that He will work His will out in our lives now.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we acknowledge God's right to rule all people, including us. Unless I am sufficiently concerned about God's sovereignty to make my life His throne, and make it my daily purpose to bring every individual whose life I touch into

willing and glad submission to Him, I cannot pray these words with integrity. We dare not pray for His rule over others unless we honestly desire His rule over us.

When I was in my twenties, I used to hear sermons in which I was exhorted to desire the second coming of Christ. Well, I wanted Him to come, but not immediately. I had some things I wanted to do before He came back. I wanted to get married, to have children, and to establish a ministry. After I got all that done, it would be all right for Him to return. As I was thinking about this recently, it occurred to me that I no longer have any plans that the coming of Jesus Christ would interrupt. Nothing now takes precedence over His coming. And that is as it should be in all of our lives. That is what it means to pray, "Your kingdom come."

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GOD'S PURPOSE: "Your Will Be Done"

We are to pray for the person of God, that His name will be hallowed; for the program of God, that His kingdom will come; and for the purpose of God, that His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Praying for His will to be done provides a foundation for our prayers. We are basically asking that God's will be done in our lives and in the world. We often get it upside down, though, and pray as if we expect God to change the way He is running the universe because we have given Him our petitions. At our worst, we treat God like a genie in a lamp. When we rub it and make a wish, we expect God to change the universe to give us what we want.

We must recognize the importance of conforming our will to His will. We shouldn't pray for something and then at the end say, "if it be Your will," if we don't really mean it. These words aren't something to tack on to the end of a prayer as a loophole, as an "out," so that if God doesn't give us what we want we won't be embarrassed. Prayer is not getting God to do *my* will; it is asking that *God's* will be done in my life, my family, my business, and in my relationships, as it is done in heaven.

When the Bible gives us glimpses of heaven, we see that the angels stand ready to do His bidding. In heaven, all the hosts of glory respond to His will. In the universe, all the galaxies and all their stars and planets move according to His design. It seems that only here on this third-rate planet, this dirty little tennis ball that we call earth, is there a pocket of rebellion.

For us to live according to God's will on earth as it is done in heaven is to do so in enemy territory. To live in a realm that is controlled by Satan is to recognize that this world is no friend of God's. For us to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven, we must go against the current. When we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are praying for our friends, our families, our society, but above all for ourselves.

When Beethoven's body was exhumed 42 years after his death, he was found with his arms up and his fists clenched in defiance. Apparently, someone had buried him in a way

that revealed his attitude. At the age of 30, Beethoven had become deaf and remained that way until his death 26 years later. He died an angry and bitter man because he felt that God had hemmed him in. Although he might have prayed for God's will to be done, he would have done so in grim resignation. It is possible to pray for God's will while resenting that God is God. Many people despise God because He has not made them master of their fate, captain of their soul, or rulers of their own destiny. But those of us who know God as Father and have a relationship with Him, who know that the heart of the Almighty is not only righteous and holy but also gracious and kind, can know that all things will work together for good to those who love God.

And so we can pray that His name will be hallowed, that He will be God to us, that His kingdom will be established on earth, that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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GOD'S PROVISION: "Give Us Our Daily Bread"

When Jesus taught us to pray, He gave us a comprehensive blueprint to follow. The first three requests deal with God's glory. The last three requests deal with the family. While the petitions to the Father talk about "Your Name," "Your kingdom," and "Your will," the last three requests have to do with us: "Give us," "forgive us," and "lead us."

German theologian Helmut Thielicke points out that the whole of life is captured in the rainbow of these requests. "Great things and small things; spiritual things and material things; inward things and outward things--there is nothing that is not included in this prayer."

Adlai Stevenson once remarked, "Understanding human needs is half the job of meeting them." Perhaps the other half is the ability to meet them. God scores on both counts. Because God understands our needs and can truly meet them, Jesus said that we are to pray to the Father about them. After praying about that which is cosmic and eternal, we are to pray about that which is temporal.

When Jesus said, "Give us today our daily bread," He was not suggesting a trip to the supermarket for Wonder Bread. He was making the point that it is okay and right to pray for our daily needs. After all, we cannot really serve His kingdom and do His will unless we have the strength we need for today. So it is proper to ask God for a job in order to have money for food. It is appropriate to appeal to God for the clothes we need to work on the job in order to have the food. It is okay to ask for transportation to get us to the job so that we may earn the bread. God knows our needs, and He is concerned about them.

We are often tempted not to bother asking God for food. "Don't pray for groceries," we insist. "Get out and hustle." In fact, some of the church fathers spiritualized the bread to refer to the bread served at communion. They did this, understandably, because after praying for God's glory, it seemed too earthly to switch to something as mundane as groceries.

Yet, "daily bread" means exactly what it says. The word *bread* refers to the food that sustains our bodies. In the larger sense, of course, bread refers to all that we must have to live. Our Father in heaven concerns Himself with the items on a grocery list. Food for our next meal matters to Him.

The focus of the request is for *daily* bread. The word translated *daily* bewildered scholars for centuries. This is the only place that word occurred inside or outside the Bible. Then a few years ago, an archeologist dug up a papyrus fragment that contained a housewife's shopping list. Next to several items the woman had scribbled this word for *daily*. It probably meant, "enough for the coming day." The phrase should be translated, "Give us today bread enough for tomorrow." When prayed in the morning, it is a prayer for the needs in the hours ahead. Prayed in the evening, it is a request for the needs of the next day. The implication is, of course, that God will supply what we need to honor Him and do His will.

In our culture, with its freezers and refrigerators, we seldom purchase food for a single day. We store up food in such abundance that we mutter only thoughtless words of thanks as we eat. We hardly acknowledge that the meal we eat or the clothes we wear have come from the Father's hand.

Jesus does not invite us to ask for everything in the Neiman Marcus catalog, or for a Lincoln Continental, or Gucci shoes. Pray for bread--the necessities for life, not the luxuries. Ask for bread, not cake. Nor are we invited to request supplies for years to come. We are to ask for the essentials to take us through tomorrow.

Notice also that when we pray, "Give us our daily bread," we ask for others in the family as well as ourselves. If I pray this prayer in sincerity, it delivers me from selfishness and hoarding. If the Father supplies me with two loaves and my brother or sister with none, I understand that God has indeed answered our prayers. My extra loaf is not for storing, but for sharing.

God wants to free us up. We can bring our small requests to God. We can place before Him our need for bread, a coat, a pair of shoes--all those items that matter to us. If we need them, then they matter to our heavenly Father as well.

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GOD'S PARDON: "Forgive Us Our Sins"

Superficially, men and women don't seem to worry much about their sins. Walter Horton speaks to our condition in his book, *The Challenge of Our Culture*: "Modern man is certainly worried about something--worried nearly to death. And an analysis of his behavior shows him so feverishly trying to avoid looking God in the eye that it must have something to do with the fear of how he must look standing before God in that position." A cartoon in the morning newspaper pictures a psychologist listening to a patient: "Mr. Figby," he says, "I think I can explain your feelings of guilt. You're guilty!"

After we ask the Father for provision, we ask for pardon: "Forgive us our sins." "Forgive" follows "give." Jesus links the two petitions, "Give us our daily bread" with "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." In that way when we think of our need for food, we will recognize our need for pardon as well. Also, as we confess our guilt, we consider how we have handled our relationships with others.

Augustine labeled this request "the terrible petition" because if we pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us," and at the same time harbor an unforgiving spirit, we are actually asking God not to forgive us.

When John Wesley served as a missionary to the American colonies, he had a difficult time with General James Oglethorpe. The general was known for his pride and harshness. One time Oglethorpe declared, "I never forgive." Wesley replied, "Then, Sir, I hope you never sin!"

Think of how the confession of sin works. If I honestly pray for forgiveness, then I revise my estimate of myself downward on the scale, and I admit my own sin and guilt. If I see the pollution of my own life, then I see the sins of others in a different light. Without that, I can regard myself as so important, so dignified, so honorable that it would be unthinkable to forgive anyone who dared offend someone as righteous as I. That is self-righteousness. To squeeze pardon from a self-righteous prig is harder than squeezing apple juice from a stone slab. It's simply not in such a person to forgive.

What an unforgiving person actually prays is this: "Deal with me as I have dealt with others." Kent Hughes spells that out in his study on the Lord's Prayer: "I beseech You, Lord, deal with me as I deal with my neighbor. He has been ungrateful to me (though not one-hundredth as ungrateful as I have been to You), yet I will not overlook his ingratitude. Deal with me, Lord, as I do him."

Or this: "I nurse every little incident in which she mistreats me. Deal with me, Lord, as I deal with her."

Or this: "I cannot wait to pay him back for the hurt he has done to me. Deal with me, Lord, as I deal with him."

If you honestly know God as your Father, you are part of the forgiven fellowship. While you may find it hard to forgive some particularly damaging thing done to you, your own sin against God--for which you ask forgiveness--makes offenses done against you much more trivial. How in the name of grace and common sense can we ask God whose name is holy to forgive us when we, as sinners, refuse to forgive others? Our forgiveness does not cause God to forgive us. It is evidence that we have entered into God's forgiveness. Those who live in the relief of God's pardon find it easier to forgive those who offend them.

To sin is human, to forgive divine. We are never closer to God's grace than when we admit our sin and cry out for pardon. We are never more like God than when, for Christ's sake, we extend forgiveness fully and freely to those who have sinned against us.

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GOD'S PROTECTION: "Do Not Lead Us Into Temptation"

A young woman in a shopping mall sported a T-shirt that proclaimed, "Lead me not into temptation--I can find it myself." She wanted people to chuckle as she passed, but her one-liner raised a question. What are we praying for when we ask, "Do not lead us into temptation"?

Why should we have to ask God not to lead us into temptation? To ask Him to keep us out of temptation would be more understandable. Professor D. A. Carson suggests that Jesus is using a figure of speech called a litotes, which expresses something positive by negating its opposite. For example, if I say, "This is no small matter," I mean it is a big matter. When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," then, we are really crying out, "Keep me away from temptation." We are praying, "Don't let Satan ambush us. Don't let the foe of our souls catch us in his trap." We are recognizing that God has the power to lead us past all the lures to sin that threaten us; and we are asking, "If the opportunity to sin presents itself, grant that I will not have the desire. If the desire springs up within me, grant that I will not have the opportunity."

Let's face it. We seldom want to be delivered from temptation. It promises too much fun. Some wag has said, "Don't resist temptation. It may go away and not come back." Temptation stirs the blood and inflames the imagination. If we were revolted by it, it would not be temptation at all. Occasionally we see where temptation will take us and we may cry out for deliverance. Usually, though, temptation doesn't seem very bad, so we play with it, flirt with it, and invite it into our lives. When we pray about our sins, it's not temptation that bothers us; it's the consequence of our disobedience that we want removed.

In the context of this prayer, however, we are not merely asking God to keep us from being naughty boys and girls. The work of Satan threatens more severe danger than that. We are surrounded by seductions to live life apart from God. In our ambitions and in our successes we are tempted to honor our own names, to build our own kingdoms, to take credit for baking our own bread, and to deny our need for forgiving grace. The enemy of our souls wants us to run away from God. Only God can make us see sin for what it is. If temptation brought chains to bind us, we might resist it on our own. Instead, it brings flowers and perfume, offers life and cheer, and promises good times and satisfaction. It bribes us with wealth and popularity and entices us with promises of prosperity and unbounded freedom. Only God can keep us from its charms.

The Lord's Prayer reminds us to fear the strategies of Satan. Years ago Helmut Thielicke said of postwar occupied Germany, "There is a dark, mysterious, spellbinding figure at work. Behind the temptations stands the tempter, behind the lie stands the liar, behind all the dead and bloodshed stands the 'murderer from the beginning.' "

When we pray "Deliver us from the evil one," we recognize Satan's power, affirm our weakness, and plead for the greater power of God.

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GOD'S PREEMINENCE: "The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory"

The Lord's Prayer, as we commonly recite it, concludes with a trumpet blast of praise: "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Since those words seem like an appropriate and fitting way for the prayer to end, it is somewhat unsettling to discover that the sentence does not appear in the earliest and best manuscripts of either Matthew or Luke. Evidently, the doxology was not part of the prayer as Jesus originally gave it. In fact, it appears for the first time in the second and third centuries.

Yet the prayer demands a conclusion. Otherwise it stops with the threat of temptation and the warning that the evil one has set his snares for us. When Christians in the young church offered up this prayer to the Father, rather than finish on a cold and frightening note, they added this affirmation of praise.

While this doxology may not have been given directly by Jesus, it can claim broad biblical support. After King David assembled the building materials for the future temple, he declared, "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; . . . Yours is the kingdom" (1 Chron. 29:11). Echoes of this doxology vibrate at the end of time in the chant of the four living creatures, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). The affirmation makes a fitting conclusion to the prayer: "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matt. 6:13).

But is that true? Does the kingdom belong to God? Not according to the newspapers. There the capital of the kingdom may be in Washington or London or Moscow, not in heaven. Is His the power? Not according to Rabbi Harold Kushner, who argues in *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, that while God is all-loving, some evil events lie beyond His control. Is His the glory? Not according to the builders and shapers of technology who sing, "Glory to men on earth as we see whose buildings can go the highest."

This doxology, however, is not an assumption that we must accept in order to pray, but rather a confidence to which repeated prayer draws us. When God's kingdom and the dignity of God's name get first emphasis in our lives, then money and bottom lines stop bringing us anxiety and strife. Then, and only then, as we ask for daily bread, we recognize that apart from God full stomachs often come with empty hearts. Through prayer we experience that God actually forgives our sins--not simply shuts His eyes to our disobedience--and provides us with the power to forgive others and lead us away from Satan's traps. In a life of prayer we discover a Father rich and generous and inexhaustible beyond all measure: His is the kingdom and the power and the glory.

Not only do we bless God when we witness what He does through answered prayer, but we praise God because on our knees we can catch a glimpse by faith of what He will ultimately accomplish. We make all our prayers in the light of eternity. In the long-range

view we discover that though wicked men and women fight against Christ's rule, His kingdom waits as the sun waits for the clouds and darkness to melt away. In the eternal perspective, while the Love which lay in a manger and hung on a Roman execution rack looks fragile, we see in it the power which endures and ultimately triumphs. As presidents and kings display their glory, we know they form a passing parade. Yesterday's empires are today's history lessons and tomorrow's archeological digs.

Over the rubble of man's little kingdoms shines the glory of God. When we pray as we ought, we affirm God's majesty, trumpet His power, and, through the answers to our prayer, display His glory.

WHY DO WE PRAY?

Any thoughtful person wrestling with prayer asks, "Why pray at all?" Is the basic purpose of prayer to get things from God? Certainly the Bible assures us that God hears us and, in response, gives us what we need. But is that the basic reason Jesus taught us to pray?

George MacDonald offered this rationale for prayer: "What if God knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God's idea of prayer is a supplying of our great, our endless need--the need of Himself? . . . Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his parents more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other need. Prayer is the beginning of that communion, of talking with God, a coming-to-one with Him, which is the sole end of prayer, yea, of existence itself. . . . We must ask that we may receive, but that we should receive what we ask in respect to our lower needs is not God's end in making us pray. He could give us everything without that. To bring His child to His knee, God withholds that men may ask."

God wants us for Himself. He desires communion with us. His purpose in prayer is not to make us sit up and beg. He wants us to know Him. Prayer is His method to accomplish that.

I used to play a game with my two children when they were young. I would clutch some pennies in my hand and allow them to pry open my fingers to get the coins. My children would sit on my lap and work feverishly to get the money. Once they captured the coins, they would scream with delight and jump down to treasure their prize. I loved having my youngsters laugh and play while sitting on my lap. The pennies were insignificant.

When we pray, we often concentrate on the gifts in God's hand and ignore the hand of God Himself. We pray fervently for the new job, or for the return of health. When we gain the prize, we are delighted. And then we have little more to do with God. If we are only after the coins, God's hand serves only as a way to pay the rent, heal the sickness, or get through the crisis. After the need has been met, the hand itself means little to us.

While God in His grace does give good gifts to His children, He offers us more than that. He offers us Himself. Those who are merely satisfied with the trinkets in the Father's

hand miss the best reward of prayer--the reward of communicating and communing with the God of the universe.

USING THE BLUEPRINT

To really learn about prayer, you must pray. Take it seriously and carve out some time each day to pray. Jesus gave us a blueprint for prayer--use it that way. Begin by praying, "Our Father in heaven." Let your mind focus on what it means to talk to the God of the universe as Father. Then pray to the Father about the Father. Pray about His person, "hallowed be Your name." Pray about His program, "Your kingdom come." And pray about His purpose, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Then pray to the Father about the family. Pray for provision, "Give us our daily bread." Pray for pardon, "And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." And pray for protection, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

If you let this prayer serve as your blueprint, you will discover that its elements have a purifying effect on what you pray for. You won't be able to pray for things that would exalt your name, advance your kingdom, or promote your will. To ask for daily bread if you're living in defiance would be like a traitor asking for strength to betray his country. You won't be able to ask God to forgive you when you are not willing to forgive someone else. And to ask God for His protection from the evil one would be contradictory if you are cultivating temptations.

Prayer is hard work, but our communication with God is as essential to our spiritual well-being as breathing is to our physical life.