

The Four Most Important Prayers – Prayers #2 and #3

1. Warm-up question: What's one of the most wonderful or uplifting answers to prayer you've ever received?
2. We're in the midst of a study of The Lord's Prayer, a prayer Jesus offered as a model for how we should pray. The prayer consists of four key petitions – what Jeff is calling THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT things we can ever pray. Last week we looked at Prayer #1, "Thy will be done." This week we're exploring Prayers #2 and #3. Let's reread The Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6:7-15 and printed on p. 3.
3. The second great petition in The Lord's Prayer is found in verse 11, "Give us this day our daily bread." At first blush, this prayer doesn't feel particularly relevant since few of us have ever had to worry about having enough to eat. But 85% of the people in Jesus' culture lived at a subsistence level. For them, whether they'd have enough food for themselves and their family was their greatest source of stress. So, understood in context, the second petition in The Lord's Prayer is meant to teach us to ask God for help with the greatest source of stress in our life, whatever that may be.
 - a. In your life right now, what is your greatest source of stress?
 - b. It's important to note the exact wording of verse 11. The verse doesn't say, "Give us bread." It says, "Give us **this day** our **daily** bread." In other words, ask for what you need to address your greatest source of stress TODAY. Or to put it more precisely, ask God to help you figure out what you can do TODAY to address your greatest source of stress and ask for the strength to do that. Why is it so important that we keep our heart, mind, and prayers focused on what needs to be done today?
 - c. Jeff gave an example of how freaked out he feels about getting his home and his Dad's home both ready to go to on the market in the next two weeks. The list of things to do is overwhelming. Life's challenges are often like that, i.e., so big they can cause us to freak out and become paralyzed by stress. Tell us about a time when you felt so overwhelmed that you freaked out and froze up.
 - d. Based on what verse 11 teaches, Jeff suggested that each of us approach our most stressful current challenge in three steps. First, make a list of everything that needs to be done in that area of challenge. Second, prayerfully ask God to help you figure out what you can and should do TODAY in response to that challenge. Third, ask God for the strength to do what needs to happen TODAY and to stay focused on that. How do you feel about that three-step approach? What do you like or dislike about it? If you were apply this approach to your own greatest stressor right now, breaking it down into bite-size steps, what do you sense in the right next step or steps for you to take in the next 24 hours?

- e. A recent Harvard University study found that people typically spend about 47% of their waking life thinking about the past or the future. In other words, we tend to spend only about half our time focused on the only thing we can really control, i.e., TODAY. Of course, a certain amount of time reflecting on the past or planning for the future is healthy, but if we take that too far, we fail to be present in the day in which we find ourselves. What percentage of your time would you guess you spend thinking about the past or the future? Does that feel about right to you or do you need to dial back? Why is it so hard to live in the present?
 - f. In Matthew 6:34, shortly after giving us The Lord's Prayer, Jesus said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." What do you think he means? Put it in your own words.
4. The third great petition in The Lord's Prayer is found in verse 12, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." When you think about it, that's a strange way to ask for forgiveness. Note that this third petition doesn't say, "Forgive my debts," period, end of sentence. Instead it says, "Forgive my debts, **as I forgive my debtors.**" In other words, forgive me to the same extent and in the same way I forgive those who've sinned against me. Jesus reemphasizes this exact same point in the verse that immediately follows The Lord's Prayer. Matthew 6:14, "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Abba will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Abba forgive your trespasses."
- a. In your own life experience, what person has been the hardest for you to forgive? Why was (or is) it so hard to forgive that person?
 - b. Do you think it's literally true that God will not forgive us of our sins unless we forgive people who sin against us?
 - c. Jeff offered two theories as to why God's willingness to forgive us is conditioned on our willingness to forgive others. First, for the sake of others – forgiveness is the greatest gift we can ever share and God wants to incentivize us to share that gift far and wide. Second, for our own sake – we will never be able to live a free and full life if we're weighed down by the bad things people have done to us. What do you think of these two theories? Do they make sense? Why or why not?
 - d. Tell us about a time someone forgave you in a full and free way. How did that feel? Does that experience cause you to want to share that same gift with others?
 - e. Studies show that those who struggle to forgive tend to have higher blood pressure, higher heart rates, lower immune response, more trouble sleeping, and even less vertical jumping distance. Why do you think that is?
 - f. Who is someone God is calling you to forgive? And what are some suggestions for how we can get better at forgiving and letting go?

Matthew 6:7-15

⁷And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

⁹In this manner, therefore, pray: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.