

# Teach Us to Pray

PART 2

by Doug Batchelor



*In the last Inside Report, we talked about the Lord's Prayer in terms of how it relates to our relationship with God. In this issue, we're going to look again at the model prayer, this time in regard to our relationships with others and to ourselves.*

**An Amazing Fact:** *In World War II, a British soldier was seen creeping back in from the front lines. He was captured by his army and accused of conspiring with the enemy as he had not been given permission to leave. He confessed, "I have been out in the woods praying." His fellow soldiers mocked him and immediately ordered him to offer up some evidence. He simply told them he was by himself and that he just needed to pray. His captors threatened to charge him as a traitor, saying, "You're going to be executed unless you pray right now and convince us that you were really praying."*

*The private then fell on his knees and began to offer an eloquent, heartfelt prayer as one who was about to meet his Maker. But by the end of the prayer, the commander in charge said he was free to go. "I believe your story," he said. "If you had not spent so much time at drill, you would not have performed so well during review." He then added, "I can tell, from the way you prayed, you are on regular speaking terms with God."*

**T**he times of our prayers should be frequent and regular, but even more important, the content should be outward. I frequently catch myself beginning with "gimme" prayers: "Dear Lord, give me this and give me that," and near the end, I add, "God, I praise your name." According to the pattern Christ gave us, that's backward. I know I underscored this point in part one, but it's worth repeating. God has convicted me that my prayers are too selfish, and I need to keep Him and others first in mind when I pray.

Although we're about to focus on prayer for ourselves, I feel that before we delve into these absolutely necessary facets of prayer, we need to make sure we have the right order of prayer in mind. Obviously, we should pray for our needs, but as Jesus indicated, when we pray, we want to acknowledge God's holy name, His purposes, and His kingdom before all other things. And all of our needs must be viewed in the context of His will. With that careful reminder, we can continue our study and discover what happens when we ask the Lord, "Teach us to pray!"

## **"Give Us This Day ..."**

Bread represents many things in the Bible. First, "daily bread" means the provisions necessary for sustaining life from day to day. Of course, this is a pattern of prayer, so it doesn't mean that you can't

also pray for water, clothing, and other needs. When we pray for our daily bread, we're really asking God to supply the basic necessities of our everyday lives.

(Should a person with their cupboards full still pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Yes, absolutely. Never take anything God has given you for granted. Remember, Job's full barns were all lost in one day.)

God is telling us that we should feel confident to come before our Lord, asking Him to fulfill our needs. Of course, He is already well aware of these needs, but He wants us to know that it is He who provides all good things for His children. For instance, when the Jews went through the wilderness, they prayed for food, and God rained manna from heaven, showing His continual, loving provision. Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask—He wants you to!

Remember, though, that when we pray, "Give us ... our daily bread," it doesn't mean that God expects us not to go out and earn it. Some people think they can pray the Lord's Prayer and then sit back and do nothing, expecting Him to answer. When the Lord rained down manna, the Jews went out to collect it. They didn't lie back with their mouths open, waiting for it to fall directly into their mouths. Notice too that the manna fell outside the camp; it didn't rain on their tents. Part of getting the bread is going out and



harvesting it where we work. After that, the Jews had to knead the manna and bake it; only after working could they consume their daily bread. We must likewise invest ourselves in the process and not become lazy with the Lord's blessings. Don't forget that giving us our bread day by day also includes this understood caveat: "Six days shalt thou labor."

### ***"... Our Daily Bread"***

Is food all that is entailed in "daily bread"? As with most lessons in the Bible, "our daily bread" has a very important spiritual application. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus teaches, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" using the word "bread" to describe all the temporal needs of humanity.

Most important, He would later say, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Christ was not speaking only of our physical

needs, but instructing us to invite God into our hearts every day. The bread represents Jesus, our spiritual food, which is far greater and more fulfilling than any physical bread on earth.

How often do we need to be spiritually fed? All through its sacred pages, the Bible speaks of praying daily. "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (Psalm 55:17). Daily bread, daily communion with the Lord, should be our top priority. Why do we not say, "Lord, give me a month's supply"? Most of us don't fret from day to day that the refrigerator is going to be empty, so we don't often appreciate the implications of praying for daily bread. Although those who lived through the Depression may understand such a concept, few Americans today, living in a society of such massive abundance, have ever really struggled from day to day searching for something to eat. In fact, some of us have months of food in the pantry.

But many of us don't have even a few minutes of spiritual food stored up in our hearts and minds. Which bread is more important, the physical or the spiritual? How many of us have a month's supply of spiritual bread? We need to collect some every day. You cannot live tomorrow solely on what you've collected today. Some have a few calories stored up, having memorized Scripture, and it's going to come in handy, but if you want your Christian experience to be vital and full of life, you must have daily devotions. You've got to go out and gather that spiritual manna.

One final thought: The Bible doesn't say, "Give me this day my daily bread. Rather, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." It's *our* bread. It's not *my* bread. We ought to be as concerned about the needs of others as much as, or more than, our own needs.

Scripture teaches, "Bear ye one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). We should be doing that physically, assisting the weak by offering our resources and our strength to help them. We should also do it spiritually, by lifting each other up in prayer, offering one another's petitions on our knees. And we must do this daily, persistently. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (Luke 18:7).

### ***"And Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Forgive Our Debtors."***

Did you know Jesus makes only one direct commentary on the Lord's Prayer? In Matthew, when He finishes teaching the prayer, He adds, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (6:14, 15). Right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, Christ reveals a connection between the vertical and the horizontal relationship. Perhaps we should listen!

Is God saying, "I'll make you a deal: You all forgive each other—no bitterness,



no grudges, no more talking about the bad things you did to each other—and I'll forgive you"? Is that what God means? Is that the gospel? No, that's not what leads to our forgiveness. We're not saved by the basis of our works. Instead, the gospel says that we are to come just as we are to God, and He will forgive us. However, God says, "Now that you're forgiven, I expect you to forgive each other."

However, although you're not saved by your works, if you continue to live in defiance, you will be lost because it's evidence that you're not serious about following Jesus. The mercy and grace of God cannot be cultivated in a heart that's embracing a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Has someone ever talked badly about you? We've all been hurt. And often, we become defensive and start viewing that person narrowly, and we may even wonder if we can dig up a little dirt to even the score. Is that the spirit of Jesus, "who when he was reviled he reviled not again"?

The Bible says that when we realize the high price Christ has paid for our forgiveness, it makes it easier for us to forgive one another. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). We need to be willing to forgive one another, and God points this out to us repeatedly in Scripture. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive

him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25, 26 NKJV).

Can you mentally forgive a person even though you may not feel like it? Yes, just like you can accept forgiveness even though you might not feel forgiven.

It's done by faith.

You can choose to forgive

others who have harmed you. Even though you may not be able to forget what happened, you can say, "Lord, by your grace I am going to forgive them." You make that conscious choice, then God's grace follows.

When you accept the forgiveness of God, His grace naturally follows. You must first have faith that God is going to help you forgive. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). If we can't forgive each other, God can't forgive us, because our hearts are not open either to give or receive forgiveness. That's serious, isn't it? It's going to require an act of grace, a miracle, for us to be able to do that.

### ***"And Lead Us Not Into Temptation"***

This particular petition is the one that is most misunderstood. At a glance, it almost seems as though we're begging God not to tempt us. "Please, Lord, we know you don't want to tempt us. Yet if I don't ask you not to tempt me, you're going to tempt me." That's a really poor translation. In fact, James 1:13 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

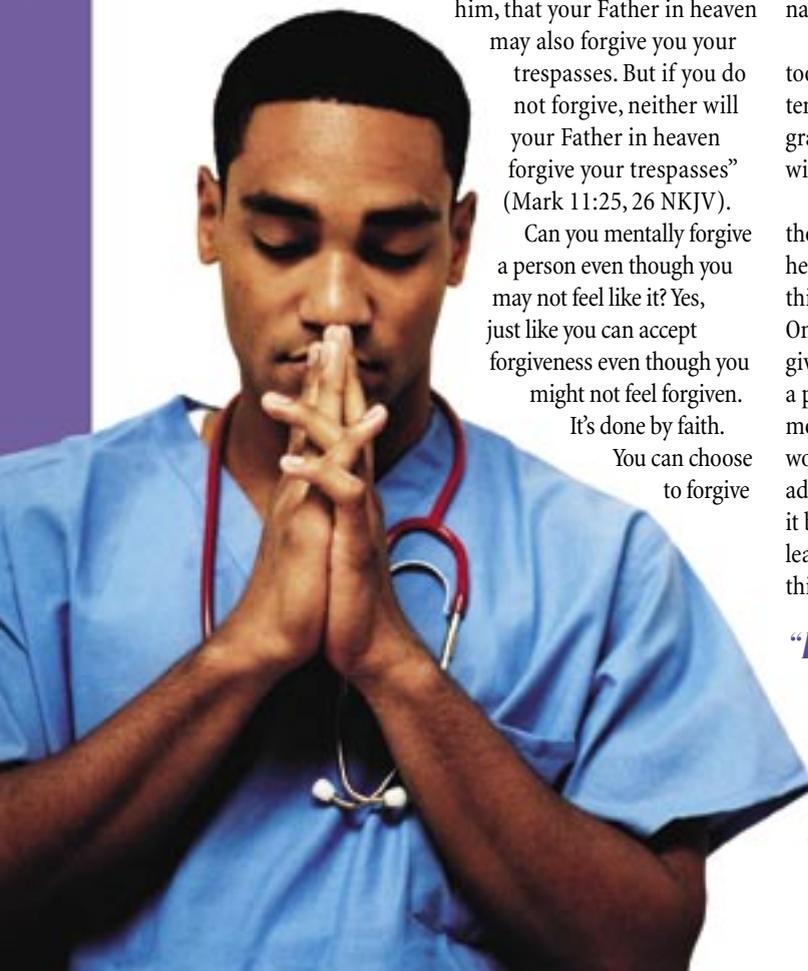
We're not pleading, "Lord, please don't tempt me." So what is this really saying? Well, because we are naturally prone to walk toward temptation, we're asking God to lead us away from it. Translated more precisely, the prayer would go more like this: "Lead us away from our natural bent to temptation."

Do we need to pray that prayer? You bet! We are prone to playing too close to the edge. One minister said that when the Lord says to flee temptation, we often crawl away hoping it catches up with us. It's like gravity inside our hearts, pulling us toward sin. So we have to plead with God to help us resist that force.

The devil likes it when we crawl, because it's easier to catch us with those little compromises. The convicted spy Aldrich Ames said that he didn't wake up one day and say, "I think I'm going to be a spy. I think I'm going to turn everything over to the Russians for money." One day, very innocuously, he met a Russian who asked, "Could you give me a phone directory? I'll give you a lot of money." It was just a phone directory, but then little by little, he gave them more and more until one day he sold them nuclear secrets. This is how the devil works with temptation—little compromises. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered Uriah, and lied to his people. And it began with a small, lingering, lustful look. We should pray, "Lord, lead me away from even the little things, because that's how the big things start."

### ***"But Deliver Us From Evil"***

I really like the seventh petition, which says, "but deliver us from evil." We live in a world drowning in the murky blackness of sin. The only thing that really gives Christians long-term hope is that God promises things aren't always going to be this way. We're looking for ultimate deliverance, and when we utter "deliver us," we're talking about Christ coming on the white steed—the King of kings



and the Lord of lords establishing His kingdom and wiping out every last vestige of evil reigning in the world today.

“Deliver us” takes us away from evil and separates us from it eternally. Another way to phrase it is, “deliver us from the evil one.” And we ought to be praying not only that God keeps us from temptation, but that He also delivers our brothers, because the devil is powerful and cunning, far greater than we are by ourselves. That’s why we so desperately need God to lead us.

In speaking of the second coming, Christ said, “Pray always” (Luke 21:36). I’m not sure how often that really means, but look at your own prayer life and see if it measures up. The full text reads, “Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” Are you praying always? Jesus also said that we ought to pray that our flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day (Matthew 24:20). Have you prayed that prayer? Every day, every hour, we should be praying to be delivered from evil so that we can escape what is about to happen in this world. Pray that we will be ultimately delivered and saved from evil within and around us. You can’t be saved from an evil world until you’re first saved from an evil heart.

### ***“For Thine Is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for Ever.”***

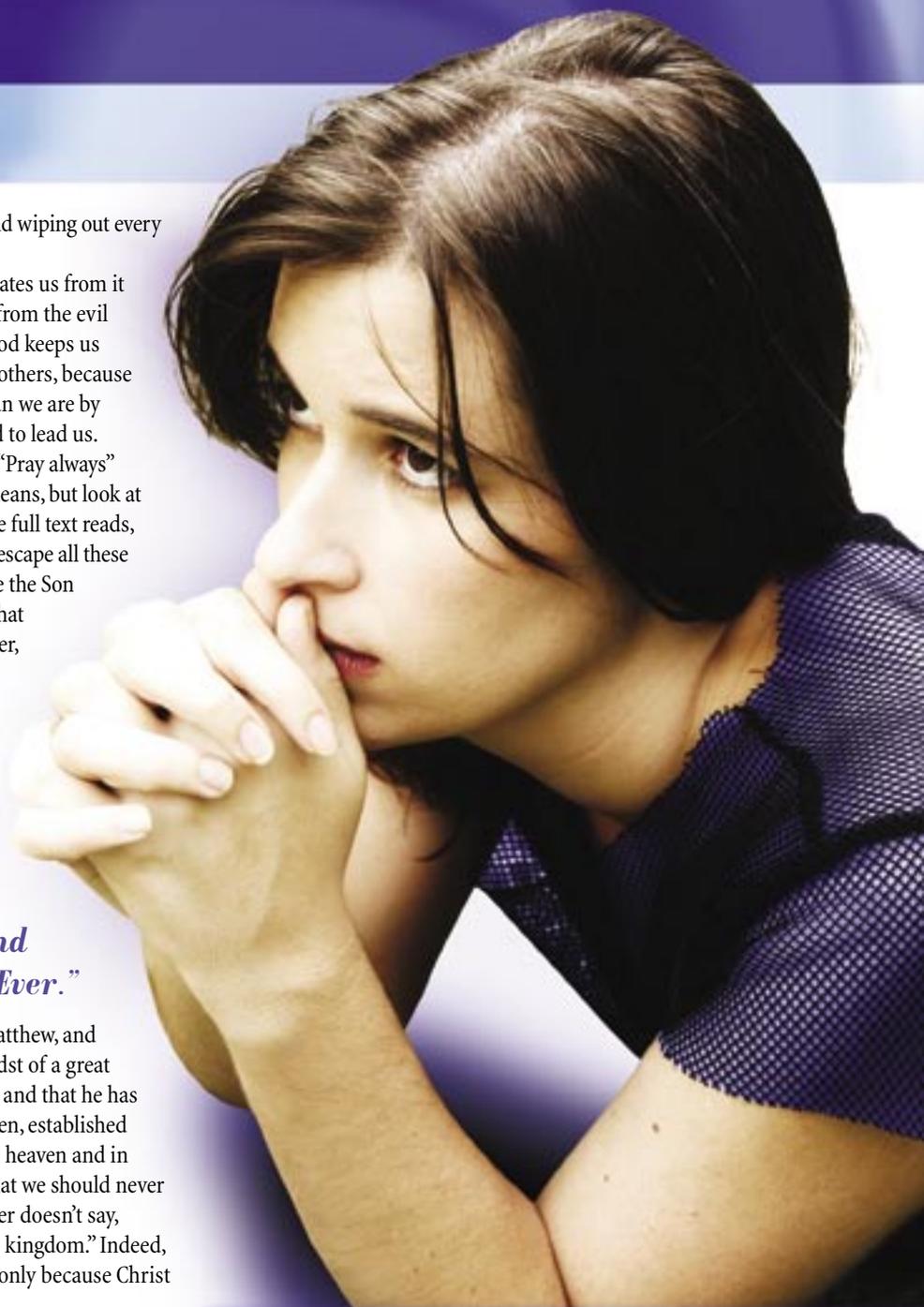
This powerful culmination is found only in Matthew, and what it speaks about is riveting. We are in the midst of a great controversy. The devil says he is the rightful king and that he has the power. Yet Christ, before He ascended to heaven, established His pre-eminence: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). This prayer reinforces that we should never forget who is in charge of this universe. The prayer doesn’t say, “Thine will be the kingdom,” rather “Thine is the kingdom.” Indeed, all the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer are possible only because Christ is the power. He has control over all things now.

The devil lives for pride, to bring glory to himself. The Christian’s motive is to bring honor to God, to give Him the glory. That’s why Satan hungers to be a god, because he wants the glory he doesn’t deserve. The end of this prayer sets the record straight in our own minds and hearts, confessing before God that we know His character and goodness will be soon vindicated.

### ***“Amen”***

Jesus said, “In this manner pray.” It’s not so much His prayer, but our prayer. It’s the prayer of those who want to follow Him. That’s also why

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One of my favorite studies in the Bible is reading the great prayers of the Old Testament. I urge you to read them too. Read Hannah’s prayer in Samuel 2. Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9 is also very special. You can also find Solomon’s moving dedication prayer in Chronicles. You’ll find that many of these prayers have elements of the Lord’s Prayer in them. They are about God’s glory, God’s provision, and God’s deliverance, and they’re really about how all of us as Christians are in this together, praying for one another.

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this prayer must be something that flows from a truly converted heart. It ought to be a definition of your spirit and attitude. One author put it this way:

“I cannot say ‘our’ if I live only for myself. I cannot say ‘Father’ if I do not endeavor each day to act like his child. I cannot say ‘who art in heaven’ if I’m laying up no treasures there. I cannot say ‘hallowed be thy name’ if I am not striving for holiness. I cannot say ‘thy kingdom come’ if I’m not seeking to hasten the blessed hope. I cannot say ‘thy will be done’ if I am disobedient. ... I cannot say ‘in earth as it is in heaven’ if I’ll not serve him here and now. I cannot say ‘give us this day our daily bread’ if I am selfishly hoarding for the future. I cannot say ‘forgive us our debts’ if I harbor a grudge against anyone. I cannot say ‘lead us not into temptation’ if I deliberately place myself in its path. I cannot say ‘deliver us from evil’ if I do not long for holiness. I cannot say ‘thine is the kingdom’ if I do not give Jesus the throne of my heart. I cannot attribute to him ‘the power’ if I fear what men may do. I cannot ascribe to him ‘the glory’ if I’m seeking for my own honor. I cannot say ‘forever’ if I’m living only for temporary earthly rewards.”



When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, it must be in a spirit of complete surrender. And if we’re going to be ready when Jesus comes, we need to learn to pray the way Jesus taught. The essence of prayer is bound up in loving God with all our hearts, for we cannot really love Him if we aren’t getting to know Him. If we’re not communicating our sorrows and our joys, even our most intimate secrets, how can we love Him?

I urge you to invest more time on your knees, but if you can’t be on your knees, I urge you to just pray. Recognize that it is essential to spend quality time with Christ in your personal and corporate prayers and devotions, so you can implement those changes in your life to glorify God. Take advantage of the “daily bread” of God’s Word, and communicate to God your desire to be transformed from selfish to selfless. Let’s pray for one another more than anything else. Let’s stand together and lift our voices to heaven so that we are more united in the brotherhood and sisterhood of Jesus.

Like the British soldier whose prayer set him free, we’re soon going to be reviewed by our Commander in heaven. We need to spend time in drill practice, preparing for the main event. We need to say, “Lord, teach us to pray.” He’s given us the pattern in His Word, so let’s be sure to abide in it. My hope is that you will never see this prayer the same way again. —

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