

**Women's Bible Study Winter/Spring 2010**  
**The Heart's Cry: A Look at Heartfelt Prayer**  
**March 3, 2010**  
***The Heart's Cry to a Loving Father***  
**Matthew 6:11-15**  
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One of the great things I've taken away from our recent study of the Lord's prayer is the *dailyness* of it. These six petitions remind us that each day, we need to ask God for all that is truly important in life.

I got a different perspective on prayer recently as I was driving to school in the morning. The Steer carpool is famous for never arriving exactly on time, but anywhere from ten seconds to five minutes late. It doesn't matter what the weather conditions, or really even what the cause is on that particular day, since there are four people in the car, each of whom makes us late at least some of the time. All I know is, on the days when we hit all the green lights, (and have a strong tailwind) we are on time. And usually, we're not. So every morning I ask myself, irritably, "Why do I always hit the red lights?" ignoring the fact that I have made it through thousands of green lights during my commuting career over the past fourteen years. It dawned on me that I only remember the red lights...the times when I wasn't getting what I wanted. And it seems to me that we treat prayer in that same way, with complete disregard for all the times that God quietly answers Yes, Yes, Yes, remembering only the one time he says No.

Then I read Psalm 68: 19-20: **"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death."**

Daily, we escape from death. And yet danger is all around us, because of this fallen world we live in. Daily, we enjoy the protection of God. I enjoy the pleasure of green lights, over and over again each day, yet all that I ever notice is when I DON'T hit them. We are so blind to God's daily burden bearing in our lives that we don't even notice it unless it appears to be missing – the time when he says No to us. So as we approach the Lord's Prayer this morning, with its wonderful emphasis on the daily provision of God, let's open our eyes to what he is providing all the time, whether that is escape from death or just a green light when we need to be somewhere on time.

Jann took us through the background and the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, which are particularly God-centered. The second three petitions speak to man's needs. Remember that the word "petition" just means 'a request'. So the first three are a petition for God's glory ("Hallowed be your name..."), a petition for God's gospel to move across the world ("thy kingdom come"), and a petition for God's grace ("thy will be done"), asking God to help us reflect Christ's character in our lives.

So this week we come to the second half of the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew's gospel it falls in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke's gospel it comes after the disciples ask Jesus: **"Lord, teach us to pray."** (Luke 11:1-4) This prayer, although we pray it pretty much as is from Matthew's version, was probably intended by Jesus to be a template or a framework for our

own prayers. He wanted us to learn that first we must pray for what God desires – for his glory; for his kingdom; for his will. If we don't do that, any prayers we offer will just be our own wishes rather than focusing them through the lens of what God desires.

So please turn with me to Matthew chapter 6, beginning with verse 11, where we begin by:  
**I. Praying for the Needs of Our Body**

**“Give us today our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)**

The first thing that strikes us is that this request is

**A. For each day**

This seems like the most straightforward of all the six petitions. Yet there's an interesting story in the Greek wording. The word translated 'daily' is a Greek word, **epiousios**. But it's not a common Greek word. For years and years the only place it appeared was in Matthew 6:11. The translators were not even sure it meant "today". Then a fragment of papyrus was discovered which had a woman's shopping list written on it, with what she had to get at the market that day. And next to the items was the word "epiousios", just as we might write "Things I have to do today."

God had tried to teach this message to his people before. During the Exodus when the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God provided the people manna, a type of heavenly bread. Every day they gathered what they needed. If they picked up too much and tried to store it, it would spoil. So the Jews learned that every day, God would provide water and food.

We don't have manna as a daily reminder of God's provision. We can store a side of beef in our freezer if we want to! And our water runs out of taps! Yet to pray this prayer is to remind ourselves that God is the source of all that our bodies need every day for sustenance. Beyond that, though, it's a prayer that challenges us not to be anxious about the future.

What are you fretting about this week? If you're like me you might be worrying about the future...what if my child doesn't get that job? What if I have cancer? What if their marriage falls apart? What if? We cannot prevent hurt to the people we love no matter how we try to protect them by ourselves. This prayer reminds us that God gives us what we need for this day. And he'll give us what we need again tomorrow, for that day. He's got it all in hand. And praying about God providing our needs reminds us to be thankful to him, for our jobs (even if we hate them), for our health to be able to work (even when we're feeling lousy), for the abundance that we have. It's a prayer that works for every day.

This petition is also

**B. For us**

You would think that the Lord's Prayer would be filled with intercession for other people. Just think how many times we ask God to do something specific in another's life. But the Lord's Prayer *is* a way of praying for others, because we say "Give **us** this day..." When we pray, we are not to pray just for ourselves and our needs. We are to pray for all of us. And we're not praying one thing for ourselves, and something different for others. We are praying for the same outcome in all of our lives.

I take this to mean that to pray just for our own needs or the needs of people we love is quite selfish, in a way. When we pray for all of us to receive the same provision, then we are beginning to see the world as God sees it...not just a collection of individuals all clamoring for their own privileges, but as a single body whose head is Christ. And the members of that Body are learning to desire for others what we also want for ourselves.

Something else happens when we pray “for us.” It becomes a prayer

### C. For action

And it results in two types of action:

First, it results in us getting up and doing something. Part of the consequence of the fall in Genesis was the promise, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.” (Genesis 3:19). That labor produces food for us, whether we’re out planting on a farm or toiling in an office to earn the money to buy food. God ultimately provides that plot of land or that job, but it includes us working. We aren’t meant to lie around praying for God to meet our needs. He intends us to work. It’s part of his provision.

Second, if we are truly praying for everyone’s needs, not just mine, then it dawns on me that I have the means of meeting that need for others. We live in a country where most of us are not wondering where our next meal is coming from. On the contrary, many of us are wondering if we could skip a meal and lose weight. Yet when we pray “Give us our daily bread”, and we recognize we have more than enough of it, then we realize that WE are supposed to be the means of helping God answer this prayer in the lives of others...because we’re praying for us, not just me.

We’ve seen that happen recently with A Call To Serve. Right around us are more than 200 families who do not have adequate food for their children, so we are filling backpacks with food every weekend for needy students at Bamber Valley and Harriet Bishop schools. But praying this way causes us to raise our eyes beyond Rochester, to Haiti and Chile suffering from the aftermath of earthquakes, and to children in Mongolia who need heart surgery, and to people in Guinea who lack medical care who will now receive it at the Compassion Evangelical Hospital. When we pray “Give us our daily bread” we had better be prepared for action, because it will cause us to move.

Next, we are told to be

## II. Praying for the Needs of Our Soul

**“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)**

This is a petition

### A. For each day

The Jews were used to praying the Shema twice a day: **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deut. 6:4-5)** These few sentences reminded Jews of what was at the heart of their worship of God. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus provided us with a prayer that reminds us of the important things, yet could also be used as a framework for our own prayers. It covers all life’s needs. And it is only 57 words long in the Greek.

So this was meant to be a daily prayer – maybe not specifically these petitions, but it would serve as a reminder to bring our own requests to God every day. Because every day, we need sustenance. Every day, we need forgiveness. And every day, we need protection from Satan.

This petition is also

### **B. For us**

For *us*, not just *for me*. From that small word, “us”, we understand that Jesus’ death, which obtained our forgiveness, was not just for me (even though we understand it in personal terms), but it was, truly, for us. For the whole body of Christ, in past and future ages, in every nation of the world, in every situation of life. And since it’s for us, then our forgiveness is going to be interconnected. My willingness to forgive might be the catalyst that unlocks another’s ability to forgive me...or forgive someone else.

But what does it mean, to say “forgive us our debts”, as Matthew’s gospel does. Luke’s version says “Forgive us our *sins*.” (Luke 11:4). There are actually five different words used for sin in the New Testament, and putting them together helps us understand the nuances of sin.

The first is a word meaning “missing the target”. No one can shoot straight all the time, and so sin means we’re off the standard.

The second is a word meaning “stepping across the line between right and wrong.” This means that we’ve crossed a boundary where there is a clear delineator between what we should do and what we shouldn’t.

The third is a word meaning “slipping”, in the sense that our feet slip unexpectedly on ice. It’s an accidental move, something we do when we’re tired, or under stress, or think we’re strong. It takes us by surprise.

The fourth word means “lawlessness.” This refers to deliberate sin; you know the right, and you do the wrong.

The fifth word means “a debt” or a failure to pay that which is due. (*The Gospel of Matthew*, by William Barclay, pg. 221-222)

So whether we sin deliberately or accidentally; whether we make a choice to cross a boundary or our feet just slipped, the consequence is the same. And thankfully, the remedy is the same too. It’s the same for all of us, for this petition is not just for me and my sins, but for all of us and all our sins.

It’s also a call

### **C. For action**

It’s a call for forgive others even as we are asking God to forgive us. This petition is the only one that carries some extra explanation with it, which we read in verses 14-15: **“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)**

It might sound like God is petulantly saying, “Alright, unless you forgive so and so first, I’m CERTAINLY not going to forgive you.” Much like your mom saying to you, “If you don’t eat your vegetables you are certainly not going to get any ice cream for dessert.” I recall sitting sadly across from my mixed vegetables, which is something I loathe to this day (frozen mixed vegetables, which contained lima beans, corn, peas, carrots and other revolting things) for hours after dinner because I was too stubborn to shovel them in. No, God’s not like our moms. We receive forgiveness in salvation regardless of whether or not we’ve forgiven others. But once we belong to Christ, the cause and effect starts to operate. Either we forgive others, or we won’t understand what it really costs to forgive. And, literally, we won’t be able to accept it. Pardon and forgiveness are delivered into our open hands by God. If our hands are tightly clutching hurt and bitterness and refusal to forgive, then we can’t open them even to receive our own forgiveness.

It’s almost as if our forgiveness from God is tailored to us in the same way that Cinderella’s shoes were tailored to her. No one else could wear them. And no one can “wear” our forgiveness, either, because God deals with us as individuals. At the same time, we cannot accept his forgiveness until we lay the basic groundwork of understanding by first forgiving others. It’s as if the act of forgiving teaches us a new love language which allows us to interpret it for what it truly is.

To the untrained eye a lump of gold in its natural state might look like a dirty old rock. Like this one, for example, which is gold in quartz. We don’t value it for what it is. We can’t see what it’s worth. But if we study geology our eyes would be opened to its value. Suddenly that ugly rock would be beautiful. We just couldn’t see its worth until we learned by doing. And we can’t properly value God’s forgiveness until we learn by forgiving others.

If this petition is a call for action, to learn to forgive, then we can go one step further and train ourselves to shortcut the need for forgiveness by learning not to take offense – by working to have nothing to forgive in the first place.

You’ve heard me blather on about the yearly backpacking trip with my siblings for the past three years, probably enough to know that it is very important in my life. It’s one of the year’s high points. But this year, 2010, it’s looking pretty likely that I won’t be backpacking with my siblings. They are doing a 160 mile stretch of the John Muir trail over a three week period. Two of them have to pick their vacation by lottery a year in advance. And the three weeks they picked fall during a time when I have commitments to other people which I cannot break. I realized a couple of months ago it just wasn’t going to work out in 2010.

But at the same time I struggled with the concept that my siblings are going to just wish me well and go without me. I mean, how could they?! I could choose to be offended for being left out. And that would be ridiculous, since I’m invited to join them and they tried very hard to put it at a time when I could come. I could get bitter about the commitments that are keeping me from backpacking. But I know that choosing to be hurt is going to get me exactly nowhere, and it could lead to far worse feelings, like bitterness.

So I’ve been trying to look at it by understanding that God wants me to be a person of integrity who keeps their promises. There’s more at stake here than what I want. You see, sometimes praying “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” teaches us not to get in the situation that requires forgiveness in the first place, by not taking offense.

When we understand that God *requires* us to forgive others before we can accept forgiveness, we start to develop empathy. Maybe we ponder why another person often takes offense. Maybe she has a deep emotional wound that is festering. Or maybe we realize I'm just too thin skinned and I'm taking offense where none is meant.

My point is that forgiveness stems from offense, and it takes two to make an offense: an offender and an offend-ee. How about being neither for a change? Neither too thin skinned, nor too rough with others? Praying this petition will make us think about the way we interact. Maybe, as we ask God for forgiveness, we can learn to avoid situations that will require forgiveness by being more grace-filled to start with.

There is one final petition:

### III. Praying for the Needs of Our Spirit

**“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13)**

Like the others, this petition is

#### A. For each day

If “give us our daily bread” is the simplest petition to understand, this is surely one of the most difficult. Why would we ask God not to lead us into temptation, when James tells us: **“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...” (James 1:13)**. So why would we pray “lead us not into temptation”?

This is a request that God does not give us a trial, or situation of testing, that we cannot bear. Trials will come, and we know that they strengthen our faith. Remember what James said: **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2)** So trials, situations where God permits our faith to be tested in order to strengthen us and develop perseverance, are to be expected. In a strange sort of way they're even to be welcomed, because they help us grow up in our faith. But sometimes trials turn into temptation. If our commitment to marriage is being tested because we have young children and no money and no sleep and no help from our husbands, that can be very taxing. But through it we can learn to become strong, if we suffer through that period of life in a godly way. However, that trial can turn into a temptation when we start thinking, “I'd rather be with that other guy!” or just “Let me out of here!” and sometimes, sadly, temptation turns to sin .

Knowing that we live in a sad world where our lives are affected all the time by sin, this is a very important and practical prayer for every day. “Please don't put me in a situation where I will bring dishonor to you because of my sin.” Because it's not just me I have to worry about, but Satan. Look at the second half of this prayer: **“And deliver us from the evil one.”** Some versions of the Lord's Prayer just say, “And deliver us from evil,” but the scripture is quite clear that it is “the evil one.” Evil has a name, and that name is Satan, which means both “adversary” and “accuser”. As our adversary he seeks to break us through temptation to sin. As our accuser he seeks to break us through guilt and shame. He wants us to disown Christ. And he wants Christ to disown us...not that it could happen.

God knows we need protection from the evil one every day, even if we don't. So if the evil one is going to try constantly to come between us and God, then we need to pray daily that he won't.

It's also a petition

#### **B. For us**

Again, we are praying this not just for ourselves, but for all who belong to Christ – his body, the church. In praying for “us” rather than just “me”, we get a more realistic view of the things others struggle with. Sometimes it's hard to relate to what others are going through, but in prayer we get a more empathetic sense of their heartaches. In praying for all of us to be protected from temptation, we will understand more about each other, and act more kindly as a result.

There is a momentum that happens when more than one person prays: **“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:19-20)** When we join our prayers together in a single purpose, it adds weight, and Christ promises his presence with us. It's a wonderful reminder that our faith is not a solo affair.

But this petition is also

#### **C. For action**

As we pray this prayer we will start to ask, “What can I do to make this so? How do I protect myself from falling into temptation?” This prayer should lead us to make lifestyle changes that will help us avoid temptation. And praying it for all of us directs me to action steps that I can take to keep both myself and others from stumbling.

How do we protect each other? Through accountability with another person. Through confession to another person. Through prayer, both for others, and together with others.

So, when we start praying the Lord's Prayer each day,

#### **IV. What can we expect to happen?**

First,

##### **A. Our needs are met**

We start to see the relationship between our prayers and God answering them. We're not going hungry; we're receiving forgiveness; we're kept from disaster through sin. Our needs are met.

Next,

##### **B. Our vision increases**

We begin to see others differently. That's why Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. He didn't mean imprecatory prayers, either; the kind of prayer that says, “I hope, Lord, that you will put HER through the pain she's put me through!” No, on the contrary, he tells us to pray prayers of blessing for our enemies. Jesus said, **“But I tell you: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5: 44-45)** When we ask God to lavish on them joy, and peace, and blessing, we start to feel sort of kindly towards them ourselves. At the very least, we might gain a bit of empathy. And the byproduct is that when we begin to act like sons of God, we show we are becoming sons of God.

And finally,

**C. Our faith grows**

When we pray for these simple things, we can see that God is answering our prayers every day. So many of our prayers are for outcomes that we don't know we'll get – we ask for health, or long life, or for the right spouse for our kid. Interspersed with these long term prayers need to be short term prayers for our sustenance, our deliverance, our forgiveness. Things that we need every day. Issues that we can see God answering every day. Then once we are used to praying in all things, we can start praying for the really big items: that God would give daily bread for the whole world. That God would bring his kingdom in the whole world. And then, my friends, we are thinking like God thinks.

So bow your heads and listen now, as I pray through the Lord's Prayer in a different way:

***Our Father in heaven***, help me to remember that you are my Father, with all the love and protection and care that word implies.

***Hallowed be your name***. I want to live in such a way that you are glorified in this world. I don't want to cast shame on you or your Son Jesus Christ.

***Your kingdom come***. Help me to speak your gospel to others, so that those in rebellion against you might come to see you as their Father, too.

***Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven***. Help me to live in obedience to you, that by my example I might encourage others to follow you.

***Give us this day our daily bread***. I never want to forget that everything I have comes from you. Make it new and precious to me every day. But help me to remember that this prayer is for the world, not just for me, so that I might do my part to provide for those who have less.

***Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors***. I can only understand your forgiveness if I've forgiven the people I need to. Help me to forgive.

***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one***. Please do not lead me into a situation of testing that will prove more than I can bear. I trust you to protect me from Satan.

***For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever***. I know who you are, Lord; I am safe in your powerful hands. May you be glorified by my actions each day. May the whole world cry "Glory". *Amen*.

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