

Today's topic is about prayer, and I think that's the way we should begin. Let's pray:

Father God,
What a privilege it is,
to be able to come into Your presence,
in worship, and in prayer.

Lord,
We are so aware that prayer
is one of the most important things in our Christian life.
The disciples recognised this,
when they asked our Lord Jesus
to teach them how to pray.

And we know it too:
To let go of ourselves,
and to fix our hearts and our minds on You;
To commune with You;
To converse with You;
To speak with You, and to hear from You.

And Lord, I feel so unworthy/unqualified
to teach Your people today, how to pray.
And so,
as we study Your word together,
we ask that our Lord Jesus would do for us,
what He did for His disciples

Teach us how to pray.

Teach us how to pray:

- unselfishly;
- unceasingly; and
- by Your Holy Spirit.

Praying Spiritual prayers, that You will hear;
and answer;
and bless;

Teach us, Lord....

Amen.

Prayer.

If I was to ask right now, "Who feels they pray enough", I reckon it would only be the most proudly arrogant; self-righteous egomaniac, who would dare to put up his hand... Or perhaps an unbeliever, who doesn't see any need to pray at all.

I'm pretty sure that most of us would agree that we don't pray enough. And we might come up with the excuses, "I don't have time".... Well, what about when you take time out and go on holidays? Do you pray more then? Some may. Most of us don't.

And when we're praying in a group, some of us might feel a bit "self-conscious", and stay quiet. Maybe:

- we feel a bit shy; Or
- we believe other people pray better than what we do;
- and their prayers are:
 - fluid;
 - they flow
 - they don't have the umms and the arrrs that my prayers do....

Well, the lesson today, isn't about being fluid, and it's not about getting rid of the umms and the arrrs... , because Godly prayer isn't about those things...

It's not about whether one person is more fluent than another, or about whether they sound more spiritual. When Jesus taught us how to pray, he taught us **what** to pray... **That's** the thing that's important – **what** we pray.

Righto,

So, Jesus used to pray quite often. Sometimes He'd do it with His disciples; Sometimes He'd go off into a quiet place (all on His own),,,, But one of the times Jesus prayed, after He finished, one of His disciples (we're not told which one), said to Him, "John the Baptist taught his disciples how to pray. Can you do that for us?"

And Jesus replied: **"When you pray, say:**

Notice He didn't say "**if** you pray". He said "when" – **when** you pray...

Now, you might say to me, Michael, "I'm not a pray-er – I'm not gifted in prayer." You know what, Jesus says that you are. It is a gift of God – a gift to every one of His children, to pray. And part of being a Christian, is being a pray-er. Why wouldn't we want to talk to our Heavenly Father, because that's what being a Christian is all about – coming into communion with our loving Heavenly Father.

You see, it's not Jesus who limits us in our prayers – it's not Jesus who judges our prayers as being "not up-to-scratch" – that's all our doing – it's the Devil telling you that your prayers aren't good enough. Jesus – He longs to hear our prayers, as genuine prayers, umms and arrrs and all...

And so **Jesus**, He went on to give those Disciples (and us), (what we know as) the Lord's Prayer.

Now, probably the first thing you might have noticed today, is that this is quite a short version of The Lord's Prayer. The longer, better known version, we find in the Gospel of Matthewⁱ, and it's part of what Jesus taught, when He gave the famous, Sermon on the Mount...

Now, the thing is, Jesus gave **that** sermon, very early in His ministry. He'd only called a very few of His Disciples at that stage. And so, not all of them would have heard the lesson that He'd given in that sermon.

And that's why one of His disciples asks Him, "Teach us how to pray"....

Now, the Lord's prayer – it seems like it's somewhat fallen out of fashion in this day and age. It was once 'the done thing', where the whole church together, would recite the Lord's prayer, every single Sunday. Some churches still do that. We do it occasionally, but not very often...

So, **some** see it as a prayer to recite (as it is), and I reckon that's a good thing to do, as our whole church, joins together, in agreed, unanimous prayer...

Some use it as a model for prayer, and I do that sometimes, where I use it as a series of headings, setting the topic of prayer.

Father: and pray for a while on what it means for God to be our Heavenly Father;

hallowed be your name.: and give God glory for His holiness, and pray that His holiness would become evident and known in this world... And maybe even grieve, that the World, does not treat God's Name as "Holy"...

And just keep working through the prayer. And you'll find there's plenty to pray about, under each of the headings, as we work our way through it.

There are times when we pray the Lord's Prayer on our own (in private). But this prayer that Jesus taught, is about praying together. All of the personal pronouns are in plural:

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation."

Alright, the entire prayer, is in the plural – this is a prayer to be prayed together. You can pray it together as a family; We can pray it together as a church.

And prayer, should be **prominent** within the church. It's a sad thing, that we live in an age, where in the modern church, prayer is more often used as a means of transitioning from one song to another... Prayer should be much, much more than that. Prayer should **always** be a major centre-piece of our worship.

So, let's get into the Prayer itself.

Father

Isn't it a wonderful thing, that Jesus Christ brings us, fully into His family.

- The Lord God Almighty;
- The Creator of Heaven and Earth;

- The All Powerful God,
who sees and knows all things;
- The one who will judge the living and the dead

Jesus brings us into **His** family, such that we can call God "Father"...

I learned a lot about God being "Father" when I became a Father. The love a Father has; The way a Father aches for His children; The way a father wants to bless His children...

And the way a Father wants to know His children, and spend time with His children, and for them to spend time with Him.... And the way a Father loves His children, in all of their imperfections...

You see, a father isn't wanting to have a conversation with a skilled orator, who:

- uses flowery language; and
- voices cliché after cliché; and
- piles up platitude upon platitude....

A Father doesn't want His children to talk to Him like that.

Nor does a Father want His children to yell at Him...

One of the greatest joys, is for a Father to hear those stumbling words: Da-Da...

And as the children grow, umms and arrrs don't matter – a Father wants to hear:

- What's going on?
- What are the highs?

- What are the lows?
- What's causing you heartache?
- What's giving you joy?

And that's how we pray to God our Father.

hallowed be your name

“Hallowed” means “Holy” “Sanctified”... And when the Scriptures talk about “The Name of God”, it's not only about His personal Name – It's Who He is... God is Holy. There is nothing impure about Him.

And when we understand the Holiness of God, then we can begin to understand why (in the Old Testament), (and especially in the book of Leviticus), there are all those instructions on how to remove guilt; and sin; and impurities, so that the people of God (and even the High priests,) can come before a Holy God...

When we understand the Holiness of God, we're confronted by our own **un**worthiness... And it fills our hearts with thanksgiving for our Lord Jesus... That's why Jesus died for us – to take away every sin/impurity, that cuts us off from Holy God... There is no other way to come into the presence of God, than to be made holy/sanctified by the blood of Jesus...

Your kingdom come

The Kingdom of God is breaking into this world now. Every time the Gospel is proclaimed, and every time a sinner repents of their sin, and turns towards Jesus, and bows before Him as Lord, the Kingdom of God is breaking into this world.

And we pray for this. We pray for our part in it. We pray for our church. That as we serve God together, His Kingdom is coming, and growing, in this town.

And we pray for other churches – churches in this town and district – and for churches across the globe, that the Gospel would be proclaimed, and that the Kingdom of God would come...

And when we pray, "**Your kingdom come**", we're also praying, "Come Lord Jesus"... We're praying for the return of Jesus. We're praying for the wicked to be judged, and the righteous to enter into glory...

And so when we pray, "**Your kingdom come**", our hearts should be filled with both a present **urgency**, (for God's Kingdom to be breaking into this world now, and our part in that); **and** our hearts are also filled with the joyous anticipation of the coming of Jesus.

Give us each day our daily bread

In the Old Testamentⁱⁱ, there's the phrase YHWH Yireh. (Jehovah Jireh). It means "YHWH will provide".... And He does. He provides us, with what we need.

When did prayer change? When did prayer change from "Give us each day our daily bread", to "Give me a":

- new car;
- bigger house;
- money to enjoy my retirement;
- a big profit;
- a pay rise;
- a bumper season
- gimme; gimme; gimme...

The whole "name-it-and-claim-it" prosperity prayer,...
That's not how Jesus taught us to pray...

We start getting anxious if the rain hasn't come and it looks like we're going to be in for a tough season... Don't be anxious – pray what Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us today, enough food for today"...

That's how we personally experience YHWH Yireh – God will provide. When we trust God, and ask Him to provide enough for today, He **will** provide enough, for today...

But do you also see how this works as a corporate prayer? As we together, pray, "Give us each day our daily bread", those whose pantries are full, will be serving God, and God

will be answering this prayer, as those who have plenty, share with those who have not...

You see, Jesus didn't teach us to pray, "Give me enough to fill my store houses"; Give me enough so I won't have to depend on you in the future....

He taught us to pray: **Give us each day our daily bread**

Can you imagine, how small your tax problem would be, if that is what you received: Each day, enough to eat...

and forgive us our sins

I've noticed (over the last couple of years), there's a teaching around at the moment, that seems to be getting regurgitated in all sorts of places, that "God has forgiven all of our sins: Past, Present & Future". I don't know where that teaching ever came from. But basically, it's telling us that we don't need to ask for forgiveness any more, and that asking for forgiveness after our initial salvation, is a lack of faith (that we were forgiven in the first place).... What a load of rubbish.

Surely we recognise, that every time we come before a Holy God (A God Who's Name is hallowed), we become very aware of our own sin.

I wish that when I became a Christian, it meant that I would never sin again... Well, that didn't happen for me. Did it happen to you? Of course it didn't.

And that's why, even as Christians (or **especially** as Christians), we need to repent of our sins – turn away from all unrighteousness, and ask God for forgiveness.

And when we repent of our sin and ask for forgiveness, we are confident – We do it, knowing that God is faithful and just, and will forgive us of all unrighteousness..

Actually, that verse is worth taking a look at.

1 John 1:5–10 (ESV)

⁵ This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

That pretty much explains why we pray, “forgive us our sins”, doesn't it?

...forgive us our sins

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

Even as we pray, Jesus is reminding us, that “the forgiven”, are “the **forgiving**”.

If God has forgiven us so much, we also, **must** forgive.

Years ago, I just dropped in on someone at their farm (I didn't know them), but that's what I do sometimes – just drop in, in the hope that I can share with them, the Gospel.

Anyway, they'd obviously heard the Gospel before, because they told me (up-front), that they could never be a Christian, because there's someone that they could never, ever forgive...

And they said to me, “Is that right? If I'm a Christian, that I have to forgive people?” and I said, “Yes, that's right.” And they said, “Well, I could never do that.” And they told me about what this person had done, and it was pretty bad...

And I said to them, “You're telling me now, that you can't ever forgive them. I'm telling you, it's Godly, to forgive. The problem is, you're expecting to be 'God-like' before you

become a Christian – before you've experienced the forgiveness of God, yourself. It just doesn't work like that."

The way it works, is we realise that we, are totally undeserving. Even our **un**willingness to forgive others, is sin. And we repent of our sin, and rely on the mercy and grace of God. And the Lord forgives us of our sins. We're forgiven. We are set free...

But if I continue to hold on to that unforgiveness, I'm **not** free.

And that's why we are saved by faith. We repent of our unforgiveness of others, because in faith, we know that God will set us free from that... And wow, what a freedom it is – what a release it is, when by the Holy Spirit, God in us, helps us to forgive others.

I'm reminded of the parable Jesus told, of the Unmerciful Servant.

In Matthew 18:

The King forgives the Servant a debt he couldn't possibly ever pay back. And that's us – there's nothing you or I, could ever do, to set us free from our sins. But by Grace, God forgives us.

But then the servant didn't forgive his **fellow** servants, so the king had him thrown in jail to be tortured until he paid off his debt (which could never be paid), and Jesus finished by saying:

Matthew 18:35 (ESV)

35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

And so, when we pray and ask for forgiveness, Jesus is teaching us, we also, in this prayer, forgive others, who have sinned against us. We can never be free, unless we do.

And lead us not into temptation."

What does that mean?

James 1:13–15 (ESV)

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Alright, it's not God who tempts us. each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

So, what does it mean, to pray, **lead us not into temptation."**? Essentially, we're praying, that by the Holy

Spirit, we would flee from temptation. We recognise that as humans, we continue to be susceptible to sin.

Temptation is ever before us. Temptations come from the world; from the Devil; and from what Paul calls, "the flesh" – that part of us that desires to do evil...

- For a drunk to flee temptation, stay away from the pub;
- For a man and woman (who are attracted to each other) to flee temptation, don't put yourselves in a position, where you are alone, and nobody will see what you do...
- For a materialistic person, to flee temptation: stay away from the shops, and unsubscribe from the sales emails that turn up daily in your inbox...
- For a greedy person, to flee temptation, rather investing your profits, give to the poor, and use your finances to fund the church and ministry...

You know, there's a very common saying that says, "Christians aren't perfect – just forgiven." Do you know what book of the Bible that comes from? It doesn't.

And for years (ever since I was a boy), that saying has been used to excuse ongoing sin...

The prayer that Jesus gave, isn't about excusing ongoing sin – it's about being set free from it. **lead us not into temptation**

Help us to guard against sin, by not putting ourselves in a place of temptation...

So there you go: That's how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. It's not about fluency; It's not about spiritual sounding phrases – it's about **what** we pray...

Let's pray:

"Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread,

⁴ and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation."

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 6:9

ⁱⁱ Genesis 22:14