

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

WEEK 1: ABOUT PRAYER

Without exaggeration, this is the 10th introduction I've written for these talks, which gives you an idea of how frustrating it was to get to this point. Its not that there isn't enough information about prayer in the Bible, it was just that the first 7 starts didn't bring out that prayer is not just a Bible topic: it is a living, dynamic process that keeps alive our personal relationship with God. That being the case, what right or qualification have I to talk to anyone about their personal relationships – especially with God? I could have taken the cue from people who had written books on prayer, but any I've read or talks I've heard have only made me feel even more inadequate in my prayer life. And the last thing I wanted to do was to put people off prayer. More prayer, not less is needed these days.

I then realised that I don't have the right or the qualifications – BUT JESUS DOES –which, to me, was a clear signpost to the Lord's Prayer. More false starts because of a niggling thought. Would starting with extolling a perfect prayer make us feel even more inadequate and maybe discourage rather than encourage us to pray? So I did something I swore I would never do again – I bought another book on prayer. You be the judge of whether or not I was led to it, for this one started where I was at, and maybe where you are at too. Here's two extracts from the first chapter.

Before beginning this book I mostly avoided the topic of prayer out of guilt and a sense of inferiority. I'm embarrassed to admit that I do not keep a journal, do not see a spiritual director, and do not belong to a regular prayer group. And I readily confess that I tend to view prayer through a sceptic's lens, obsessing more about unanswered prayers than rejoicing over answered ones. In short, my main qualification for writing about prayer is that I feel unqualified – and genuinely want to learn.

The preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones summed up the confusion: 'Of all the activities in which the Christian engages, and which are part of the Christian life, there is surely none which causes so much perplexity, and raises so many problems, as the activity which we call prayer.'

Yancey goes on to talk about the discrepancy between the blessedness that the theory of prayer promises and the confusion and frustration which Martyn Lloyd Jones identifies. I took encouragement from the fact that if these writers make these kinds of statements, then they recognise that there are Christians like me out there, who are not satisfied they have got prayer right. From past experience I know there are many things that hinder prayer and the existence of

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books show this is more than an isolated problem. It does seem that prayer for Christians is not always the satisfying and fulfilling experience it should be. So, in the light of these statements and the books mentioned here, I thought it might be helpful if we first considered some general points about prayer found in Scripture. These, hopefully will give us a greater appreciation and understanding of what Jesus taught us to pray about. By identifying Jesus' prayer priorities and examining them in more depth, we not only will see why it has been held as the model prayer by the Church to the present day, but also, why it can guide us into the kind of prayer that will always be acceptable to God.

So, to start with, in general, possibly, our perplexity about prayer could stem from the fact that we are not given a set of rules and regulations about it in Scripture. We can infer from Scripture about the time, the place, the posture etc., that can be employed in prayer. Reading through the Bible, however, you'll find lots of variation in each of these situations. For example, David prayed all day on one occasion. Daniel prayed at noon. Paul and Silas prayed at midnight. Jesus sometimes prayed all night. God heard the prayer of Hagar in the wilderness, Jonah in the belly of a fish; Hezekiah on his death bed; David in a cave and lying in bed, Paul on a ship; a thief on a cross. Jesus prayed in deserts, mountains, solitary places and at a home in Bethany. And, when Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He gave only two caveats – that prayer should be made in private and it should not consist of repetition of set words or phrases like a mantra.

Matthew 6:6-7

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.....And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.....

Three things stand out from these statements. The first is privacy. This activity is a private meeting between the pray-er and God. Secondly, the meeting is a relational one. A child coming to a Father. Thirdly, God doesn't want someone else's words repeated over and over again. He wants to hear what is going on in our hearts and minds at that particular moment. Paul tells us sometimes this can take the form of groans and sighs rather than words. (Romans 8) In what seems like a flippant remark, Yancey says that God is happy if we just 'turn up.' Yet, Jesus' words explain this, in that a desire for a private meeting with God to talk about the most intimate aspects of our lives, and making time for it, are the most important elements needed for a more fulfilling prayer life. And

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sometimes prayer can take the form of what we call a companionable silence – just sitting in God’s Presence.

That many words of a repetitive nature are not acceptable brings us to another way in which prayer can be less than satisfying. This can be a substitute for refusing to be honest with God or ourselves. Honesty is an absolute essential ingredient because Jesus Himself is Truth and in John’s Gospel the Holy Spirit is consistently referred to as the Spirit of Truth.

John 16:13

But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is.....

Psalms has been called the ‘prayer book’ of the Bible because every human emotion and condition appears in some form or other. God heard David in all these situations:

Despair “My God, my God, why have you FORSAKEN me.” 22:1

Depression & Disquiet “Why are you CAST DOWN my soul and why are you DISQUIETED within me” 42:5

Anger (towards an enemy) May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow 109:9

Joy Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the JOY of my heart. 119:111

Sorrow My soul melts away for SORROW; strengthen me according to your word. 119:28

Awe But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in AWE of you. 5:7

Longing As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul LONGS for you, O God. 42:1

Rejoicing But I will REJOICE forever; I will SING PRAISES to the God of Jacob. 75:9

David was not afraid to reveal his real self to God and God expects the same from us. In the devotional on the Psalms Warren Weirsbe says of Psalm 34

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that “there are five burdens we must entrust to the Lord to receive blessings from him...” The five things we need to be totally honest with God about are “our frustrations, our feelings, our future, our foes and our failures.” Let’s face it, could we trust any single human being of our acquaintance with the intimate details of any or all of these things? Who but God would understand and be able to do something about them?

With God it is useless to be anything less than honest. Psalm 139 spells out that God knows us in a way that we can never know ourselves.

Psalm 139:13

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

Hebrews 4:13 summarises it.

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

What we can do in view of this is pray David’s prayer in Psalm 139:23:24

**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

If the root cause of our difficulty in prayer is not admitting or refusing to acknowledge we are holding back something of ourselves from God, something at the core of our being that the Bible calls ‘the heart’, then this prayer, if sincerely meant, will remove that difficulty for God will grant it. It will probably mean adjustments in some areas in our personal lives – internal and external. And it may or may not take time and much effort to make those adjustments, and the process probably will have to be repeated more than once during a lifetime. But while God may ‘put us through the mill’ in order to bring us into a completely open and honest relationship, He will do it in love and give us the power of the Holy Spirit to persevere.

Probably the most important thing that we need to be honest with God about is our commitment to co-operating with His overall goal of conforming us to the likeness of His Son. That means we have to accept that, while we have a Father-child relationship with Him and this does entitle us to certain privileges, there is also a particular role associated with that relationship. Again the model is that of Christ to the Father. Jesus saw prayer as being in a relationship with Someone who genuinely loved Him and had the best interests of His life and ministry at heart, even when it meant suffering death on a cross. Jesus also saw that relationship as a partnership aiming for the same goals, but playing separate

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roles in that overall plan. Because of the magnitude of His task, Jesus also knew He needed the empowerment and guidance that only a constant contact with the Father could give, in order to complete it. It was that obedience to the will of God revealed through prayer, and the willingness to conduct His life and ministry according to God's plans for it, that a glorious outcome became possible, not only for Jesus but for the whole world.

Paul tells us that Jesus 'humbled' Himself and unless we are humble enough to accept that we are the junior partners in God's plans for our lives, our prayer lives will go off track. But, bringing ourselves and all that concerns us to God in prayer, includes Him in those areas of our lives and reinforces our commitment to Him through co-operation with His purpose of making us like His Son; and it emphasises our dependence on Him for all that we need for our life's journey. Once we view prayer as a relationship, with God as the senior partner, who knows exactly how to get us to our ultimate destination, we need to perhaps re-assess how we see our roles as the junior partner.

Jesus' and the Father's roles dovetailed so precisely, that the whole work of salvation was satisfactorily completed. That is the kind of relationship God wants with us. In our cases, the best thing that God can do for us is to take our lives and conform them to that of Christ and, by doing so in the course of our lives, to bring us into an eternal face-to-face relationship with Himself. As we saw in Revelation, everything that we face in life is designed towards that end. Fitting us for eternal fellowship with God is the reason for our Christian existence, for God's word tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9

Corinthians 2:9

But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

That assurance alone should make us want to try to get to know the things that will ensure that when that time comes, we will "fit in." And in order to "fit in" we need to get to know God better and the only way to do that is through spending time with Him in prayer and obedience to what is revealed in His Word. It is a privilege to come to God in prayer, but our right to approach Him rests in Christ's righteousness, not our own. That also means that we have no right to demand an answer from God, because God's sovereignty and grace determine the outcome of a prayer.

And that in itself can cause major problems, especially if we feel like Yancey that God doesn't seem to answer our prayers the way He answers others or that He says 'No' more times than He says 'Yes'. Scripture reveals that this is not

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unknown or unusual in prayer life. It has been calculated that, with the exception of the Psalms, there are no less than 650 recorded prayers in the Bible. Of those, there are at least 200 with no recorded answers. We also have to remember that God said ‘No’ to Jesus when He prayed in Gethseme about deliverance from His coming ordeal. God also said ‘No’ to Paul regarding his prayer for the removal of his thorn in the flesh. But God’s refusal led to the accomplishment of the salvation of the whole world and one of the greatest theological statements that we return to time and time again today –

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

And that applies even when we assume weakness in prayer and when we perhaps go through what have been called wilderness times when we don’t know where we stand with God and have the impression He is far away from us. It is true that prayer is easier when things are going well and things are on an even keel in our lives. But, when these other negative kinds of impressions about prayer comes or when turmoil of one kind or another or spiritual confusion and perplexity enters our lives, prayer becomes difficult and it becomes even harder to persevere in prayer. Yet that is when we need prayer the most, because regardless of how we think or feel, the circumstances we find ourselves in come from a God who loves us and will never leave us without support. Prayer is the means by which we can draw on that support.

And the Bible spells out for us exactly what support we can draw on. First and foremost, our inclination and our desire to pray is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Desire for prayer and our concern about our prayer lives not being right are both indications that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. It is His role to direct our whole worldview Godward. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, when we have the faith to believe that, regardless of all the negative aspects of our prayer lives, God is a good and loving Father who hears our prayers and will use them to accomplish what is best for us. Not only does He initiate prayer, the Holy Spirit is actively involved in them.

Romans 8:26-28

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

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The Message puts it like this

26Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. **27**He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. **28**That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Isn't it a tremendous encouragement, that even when words fail us, just by "turning up" for a private meeting with God, the Holy Spirit is delving into the deepest recesses of our being and bringing a purified prayer to the throne of grace on our behalf.

But there is more. We have a personal High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The Message puts it like this

14Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. **15**We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. **16**So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Like the gift of salvation, God is so willing for us to "take the mercy" and "accept the help" that is readily available if we want to take our prayer lives to a higher level. That is because, as our High Priest, Christ has given us the right to use His Name and His credentials when we pray, because He told us to pray in His Name. That means that, in a sense, our prayers go through a double filter. Prayer is in the power of the Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ who presents it to God. This guarantees that our prayers will be heard, because it is Christ who takes them directly to God. What is filtered out is anything that is not consistent with the will of God. But using this phrase also means that the prayer takes the posture of Christ towards God and towards the world. It is used on

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the basis that the pray-er is identifying with God's way of doing things for it helps to guard against a misunderstanding of God's nature or will.

In summary, these general points show us that we can admit that Christians do experience varying degrees of confusion and frustration with their prayer lives. Being honest with God about that is the first step towards getting the problems resolved. We have to realise that no one can teach us how to get it right all the time because we are all at different stages in our Christian journey and our personal internal and external situations and circumstances will not all be the same. Hence, apart from public corporate prayer, it is highly unlikely that all of us will pray in exactly the same way in that private situation. That is good news, because it means that we realise we are in a personal relationship. While God is concerned about every Christian, He has the time for each of us as individuals and wants that relationship to develop to the complete point of union that He had with Christ. On our part that will take time and effort. But, knowing that the ultimate purpose of prayer is to bring us into conformity with the character and nature of Christ in order to fit us for an eternal face-to-face relationship with the Godhead, makes prayer the most worthwhile activity in life. We can also be assured that concern about our prayer lives and the desire to see them improved is proof of the Holy Spirit at work in us, and His empowerment and the intercession of Christ will ensure that our prayers will reach God in a manner pleasing to Him. He may not answer them as we would wish, but whatever the outcome of our prayers, we can be confident that it will always contribute to God's "good and perfect" will for our lives.

James 1:17-18

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God has done everything He can to make prayer the best means of communicating with Him. If, like the disciples, we are asking "Lord teach us to pray" then Jesus' reply is the best place to start for, in just these few words, He included everything that can lead to prayer that is always acceptable to God.

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WEEK 2: THE VOICE OF THE SON AND THE SAINT

Over these 5 weeks, I will be using an illustration I came across in a book published in 1959 called 'All the prayers of the Bible'. It relates to the 'voices' in each section of the prayer all of which illustrate aspects of the relationship that is implied in Jesus' words. Those 'voices' in turn show us that in God's eyes there are 7 roles involved in our Christian lives. It is a very useful framework because it brings together the attitudes and demeanour associated with those relationship roles. It is through them that the intended meaning of the words taught by Jesus become not just a form of words, but something that can bring a real and living dimension to prayer. This was recognised by the early church. The first disciples and converts realised that that prayer was the means of developing the new relationship between God and humanity made possible by Christ, and what kinds of response and requests would contribute to progressively make that relationship closer and deeper.

Evidence that prayer became a primary activity of the early Church comes from Acts 2:42, where we are told converts

....devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to PRAYER.

When the problem over distribution of food arose, the disciples had to decide which of these activities took priority, the solution adopted in Acts 6:2-4 became the norm.

Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, WHILE WE, FOR OUR PART, WILL DEVOTE OURSELVES TO PRAYER AND TO MINISTRY OF THE WORD."

So the disciples' request was the origin of the twin pillars upon which the church was built – prayer and the Word of God. Last week we looked at the two caveats Jesus gave before uttering the words of the Lord's Prayer and we remarked that He did not teach them how to pray but what to pray about. That distinction is important. The NIV is a bit misleading in Matthew 6:9 where the translation reads "This, then, is how you should pray." The correct translation is "So, pray in the following manner." In other words, "Let all your petitions agree and symbolise with the things contained in the Lord's prayer." (Thomas Watson) Because this was the understanding of the first generation of Christianity, prayer became the dynamic of the growth and development of the Church. Hence, if we tailor our prayers to what is prioritised in this one, as

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Thomas Watson wrote over 400 years ago “error in prayer is prevented” and “mercies requested are obtained.”

Little did the disciples know that when they made this request, that the response they received would inaugurate a divinely ordained means of communication between God and His people that would last until Christ returned. Yet, in many ways, our familiarity with the Lord’s Prayer has diminished our concept of just how revolutionary this prayer was.

The term ‘Father’ introduces the concept of ‘sonship’, and this would have come as a surprise, and, more likely, as a shock to the first disciples. Nothing in their religious traditions would have prepared them to address God in this way. So, holy was God’s Name to the Jews that they even avoided using it, where possible. Of course, the disciples were used to Jesus referring to God as ‘Father’ but to extend that term of familiarity to the disciples was something they would never have expected. They would have known from the Old Testament that very seldom is God ever referred to as ‘Father’. It has been calculated that the term occurs only 15 times in relation to God in the whole of the Old Testament. And the term is never used in the sense Jesus uses it. Just a couple of examples illustrate this. In the Psalms, David compares God to a loving, caring and compassionate father, but never addresses Him as such.

Psalm 103:13

As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

Isaiah 63:16 refers to God as ‘Father’ but in the sense that He is the Father and saviour of the nation of Israel.

For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Isaiah 64:8 is another reference and a close reading of the text here shows that the fatherhood of God relates to the fact that He created everyone on the earth, not in terms of having a personal relationship with everyone on the earth.

Isaiah 64:8

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

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Coming from Jesus' lips, the instruction to begin praying by addressing God as 'Father', would have taken on a whole new meaning as far as the disciples were concerned. We have maybe become too blasé about this because we now know that Jesus was, in effect, saying that they could enjoy the same kind of relationship with God that He, Himself already had. And because Jesus' use of the word 'Father' occurs 165 times just in the 4 gospels – over 100 times in John alone - perhaps now is the time for us to take a closer look at these first words. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the whole foundation of prayer rests on this one title. If we get a wrong impression or perception of the kinds of relationships intended in the prayer, none of the rest will fall into place. To do that we first have to understand the **kind** of fatherhood Jesus had in mind.

His relationship with the Father was unique and was built on the bond of shared divinity. John explicitly tells us

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Paul says the same thing Colossians 1:15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and one earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

It also has to be pointed out that Jesus did not teach the word 'our' at the beginning of the prayer. We can never be sons or daughters of God in the sense that Jesus was. So we need to realise that when we say 'our' Father we are referring to the bond that distinguishes the followers of Christ from the rest of humanity. We become sons/daughters by a different means. This is made explicit in statements by John and Paul.

John 1:12-13.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

This emerges in its most explicit form in the Pauline doctrine of 'adoption'.

Ephesians 1:4-5

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For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

According to Galatians 4:6, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were active in that process.

Galatians 4:5

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son....to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba Father.....

This has tremendous implications for, in the first place, it means we cannot model our image of God on earthly fatherhood. In fact, the command is given in **Matthew 23:9**

And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven.

This command was given in the context of criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees. In Judaism, authoritative teachers could be addressed as ‘father’ and that accounts for Paul’s use of the title in 1 Corinthians 4:15 and Philemon 10. Here Jesus is prohibiting its general use for religious teachers, because, as the Reformers discovered, using evidence from texts like these, true Christian teaching comes through the Word of God, illuminated by the Holy Spirit and not the traditions of men.

John 6:45

It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all BE TAUGHT BY GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

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1 Corinthians 2:13

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words NOT TAUGHT BY HUMAN WISDOM BUT TAUGHT BY THE SPIRIT, INTERPRETING SPIRITUAL THINGS TO THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUAL.

1 John 2: 27

As for you, the anointing THAT YOU RECEIVED FROM HIM ABIDES IN YOU, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.

The term, of course, still applies to our biological fathers, but in this prayer, the term stretches way beyond what any earthly father is involved in. Regardless of our experiences of our own fathers, we now have to re-form our image of fatherhood, taking into account what Jesus has revealed about His Father and how that relates to being ‘born again’ as a ‘new creation. In summary, unlike earthly fathers, God will never be bad or indifferent. And no matter how perfect an earthly father may be, he will never be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He will never have known us as Psalm 139 tells us, as we were knitted together in our mother’s womb or know what has been written in the books about all the days of our lives. The very terms we use about becoming a Christian as being ‘born again’ and believing as Paul asserted that we are a ‘new creation.’ means that we are part of a new community.

God is not just ‘my Father’ in a narrow exclusive sense, but “**Our**” Father.’ Yes, we do have a personal relationship with God, but we also have to realise that we are part of an ever-widening family of believers, where our personal interests have to conform to the ethos of a community which is in the process of becoming an eternal kingdom. Maybe it’s a generational thing, but that is why, like David, I squirm inwardly when I hear God referred to as ‘daddy’. In Galatians, it is noticeable that it is the Holy Spirit, not the pray-er, who uses the intimate term ‘Abba’. That term was used by adults as well as children in Judaism and, given adult Jews’ exalted view of God, the use of the term ‘daddy’ would have been regarded as presumptuous. Also, the term ‘Abba’ was adopted

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as a foreign word by the Greek speaking Gentile world because Jesus had used it, when He taught this prayer, just as foreign words have become common in the English language. It is very probable that no other meaning apart from ‘father’ was attached to the term, again given the superior position fathers held

This would have become more apparent because the title was qualified by the description, “who art in heaven”. That is when we realise that, although the intercession of the Holy Spirit and Jesus brings us into a close, intimate relationship with God as Father, we are nevertheless in the presence of a Being whose Person commands the highest respect and reverence.

We just have to think of some of the references quoted in the talks on Revelation.

Isaiah 6:1-4

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

Jeremiah 17:12

A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

Daniel 7:9

I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire.

These references and the throne room visions in Revelation 4 and 5 give us a glimpse of the transcendent majesty and glory of God. The Biblical reaction to a revelation of that glory was prostration – a reaction that is as far from calling God ‘daddy’ as you can get. Like the Biblical writers, we need to hold in balance the personal union that God wants us to have with Him with a mature, Biblical perception of who and what He is. The Biblical perception can be summed up in the words of **Exodus 15:11**

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“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?”

This comes even more to the forefront of our thinking when we come to the first petition in the prayer which has been described as the **voice of the saint**.

Hallowed be thy name. is referred to as the **voice of the saint** because to hallow means to make holy or consecrate. To be hallowed is to be greatly revered. As David pointed out in the 23rd Psalm, a name in ancient times was not just a means of identifying a person. It denoted their character and nature and from the beginning God has decreed that His Name is to be honoured in this way. The third commandment specifically prohibits the misuse of His name and Revelation 13:6 shows that to do so is a manifestation of evil.

Revelation 13:6

It (the beast) opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, BLASPHEMING HIS NAME and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

In other words rejecting the Person of God and all He stood for. We can state this because throughout the Bible God’s name is synonymous with His Person. One example is:

Deuteronomy 16:6

But at the place that the LORD your God will choose AS A DWELLING FOR HIS NAME, only there shall you offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt.

Centuries later David, in 1 Chronicles 16:29 and Psalm 8:9 highlights inextricable link between the name and the Person of God.

Ascribe to the LORD THE GLORY DUE HIS NAME; bring an offering, and come before him. Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness...

Psalm 8:9

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your NAME in all the earth!

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Move on nearly 1000 years and we find that, in the light of the Christ event, the New Testament writers equate the name of Jesus with that of the Father

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore God also highly exalted him and GAVE HIM THE NAME THAT IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Ephesians 1:20-21

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and ABOVE EVERY NAME THAT IS NAMED, NOT ONLY IN THIS AGE BUT ALSO IN THE AGE TO COME.

That too culminates in **Revelation 19:6**

On his robe and on his thigh he has A NAME inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Logically, therefore, the petition ‘Hallowed be Thy Name’ applies to God the Father and to God the Son. The Holy Spirit would also be included because He is the third Person in the Godhead and it is His role to point our focus to God and His Christ. I realise this raises theological questions about who we are praying to, depending on the Name we invoke. Given time and a lot more Biblical references, we would eventually come to a conclusion, but since we don’t have that time at the moment, we can be sure that any confusion can be avoided if we simply use the words that Jesus taught. We do have a familiar example however when we sing the chorus:

Father/Jesus/Spirit we love You, we worship and adore You:

GLORIFY YOUR NAME IN ALL THE EARTH.

Knowing that the term ‘Father’ signifies the three Persons of the trinity means that we cannot pray amiss or to the wrong Person of the trinity. It also means that we can focus on what we are really saying when we pray ‘Hallowed be Thy Name’. We may not always have the words give glory to God’s Name in the way the Biblical writers did. Again, because the relationship is personal, the

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credit we give to God in our prayers will vary according to our circumstances and situations. What we really mean by those words, however, seem to be expressed in the words of the song.

Restore, O Lord the honour of Your Name!

In works of sovereign power come shake the earth again,

That men may see, and come with reverent fear

To the living God, whose kingdom shall outlast the years.

The words of this song remind us of why the Name of God should be hallowed. The eternal kingdom comprises of those who have been adopted by God through justification by faith in Christ. In some versions of the Bible, the Gospel of Matthew ends the Lord's prayer with the words:

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

These are not included in the NIV and do not seem to be included in the Gospel of Luke. Many early manuscripts omit them as well. I'm mentioning this discrepancy here, just in case you come across it later, and wonder why we repeat something that is not always in the Bibles we read. Scholars have two views. Some say that Jesus did not teach these words leaving the pray-er to conclude in his or her own words. Possibly, this conclusion became so well used in the early church, that it became established as a doxology when believers met for prayer. Others say that, as a Jewish teacher, Jesus would have added the doxology because this was common practice in Jewish religion. Scholars believe that Matthew includes them because he was writing for mainly a Jewish audience. This is very plausible, for the words used parallel closely the doxology to David's prayer in **1 Chronicles 29:11**

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord is the kingdom and you are exalted as head over all.

Whatever explanation is accepted, there can be no doubt that it is a fitting end to the Lord's prayer because it takes our attention right back to the beginning of the prayer and reminds us of Who we have been praying to. We are reminded in the words of Thomas Watson that I've already quoted, that firstly "error in prayer is prevented" because we have a greater understanding and appreciation of the status and qualities of the God we are praying to. Secondly, that "mercies requested are obtained" because we will have been praying in God's will when

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our requests are modelled on those Jesus included in the prayer. Add to both these benefits the fact of the pro-active empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of our great High Priest, and just the beginning and ending of the Lord's prayer open up to us the possibility of a level of prayer that we have not yet experienced. And, when we look at the other petitions in the prayer and the voices and roles that should accompany them, we will have all the information we need to draw closer to God through the practice of prayer.

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WEEK 3: THE VOICE OF THE SUBJECT AND SERVANT

This week we come to the second and third petitions in the Lord's prayer - *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* If it were appropriate to have a favourite petition in the Lord's Prayer, this would probably get my vote, because, in a nutshell, it is the answer to all the world's problems. Unfortunately, because people would have to accept the relationship roles associated with it, Christians have an uphill task in trying to get that message across. Two words in particular stand out – kingdom and will. Whereas, the first words of the prayer concentrated on the One we pray to, with the petition that His Name should be hallowed, the rest of the six petitions lead us to focus on our status and qualities. And they are humbling. Unless we are prepared to recognise and accept that these are our standings before God, then our sincerity and our commitment to Him are thrown into doubt. The two we come to this week - subject and servant – are a severe blow to any pride we might harbour. Both indicate a subordinate position in relation to a ruler and master and would normally denote inferiority in a worldly sense – hence an almost universal refusal to accept them. But as we examine them in the context of the Lord's prayer, we will find that because of who our Ruler and Master is, these are two of the most honourable and beneficial titles that we could possibly have. And that becomes clear when we examine what it means in the context of the kingdom of God.

None of us would deny that the world needs to know about that kingdom and experience it for themselves. The Psalmist knew that in his day too.

Psalm 34:8

O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

David could make this plea because he knew God. Today, no one outside the kingdom of God can pray this prayer for these petitions are the natural outcome of having God as our Father. It is a relationship that He wants to see extended to the rest of the world and this can only happen as people enter into His kingdom. So, for me, these petitions point towards evangelism, mission and discipleship. We have already seen last week that just the beginning and ending opens up a whole theology of the Godhead. Scholars have said there is a whole body of divinity in the few words of this prayer and when we come to these petitions, we start to envisage the whole purpose of salvation history and the direction it is to take.

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It is impossible to really pray for a kingdom to come if we don't realise what the kingdom of God is, how we enter it and how we are meant to develop as subjects within that kingdom. It is only as we explore the answers to these questions through the petitions in this prayer that we realise how profound and far-reaching Jesus' words are

We are reminded immediately that the first sermons in the New Testament preached by John, and continued with Jesus, were: "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." John prepared the way for the One who would inaugurate the means by which sinful humanity could achieve reconciliation to a Holy God. A kingdom was to be established on earth and entry into that kingdom was through faith in Christ. Kingship was restored to God's people with the coming of Christ, but now entry into the divine kingdom was to be opened up to the whole world for as long as that world lasts. And this kingdom was to take precedence over not just any earthly kingdom, but all earthly concerns as well –

Matthew 6:3

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

At the end of His life, Christ Himself gave the great commission in **Matthew 28:19-20**

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Obedying this command brought the Church into being for that very purpose. That is why, in my opinion, "Thy Kingdom come" is the prayer of evangelism and mission. God doesn't have a parliament or all the other institutions of state but He does operate through churches, missionary societies, organisations and agencies and individuals who take the gospel of Christ to others in the words, songs, prayers and practical service. So when we pray 'Thy kingdom come' we are praying that the preaching and teaching of the Church and all the other Christian forms of outreach, will continue the work of John and Jesus in proclaiming God's way of gathering together a people destined for citizenship in an eternal kingdom. We are praying not just for something vague to come tomorrow or next week, month, year or decade ahead but for God to bring someone, somewhere on this planet into His kingdom this very minute - now.

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Jesus' invitation to come to Him for salvation is there 24/7 for as long as this world lasts.

While we can accept that the Church is the agency through which God is bringing people into His Kingdom, we have to clarify that statement. It has to be emphasised that the Church itself is not the kingdom of God. In a general sense the Church is a visible manifestation of the kingdom of God, but without meaning to be judgemental, the Christian church is so divided and sometimes lacking so much in Christian love and charity, that it gives a very poor impression of subjects of the kingdom of God. That is why we have to make the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. It is the same distinction that we made when we considered who had the right to call God 'Father'. We have to face the fact that the visible church is made up of many people with many differing views of who God is, and the way of salvation. It may be the tangible evidence for the existence of the kingdom, but the kingdom of God is invisible according to what Jesus told the Pharisees.

Luke 17:20:21

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is', BECAUSE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU.

This can create problems if, because of its invisibility, people view the kingdom of God as a vague concept that only has relevance for a distant future. According to Jesus' teaching, particularly in His parables about the kingdom, it is something that is to be regarded as real as the United Kingdom, but, unlike the United Kingdom, will last for all eternity. When Jesus taught His disciples this prayer, He wasn't talking about some airy-fairy gathering, but something that would become very real and practical in the lives of those who entered it. Both Jesus and John the Baptist told people to repent because the Kingdom of God was at hand, it was near, it was here.

And there is only one way to make that kingdom a reality for us. The New Testament clearly teaches that unless we are prepared to enter the kingdom by the means God has ordained, then we cannot consider ourselves as citizens of that kingdom and subjects of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We need these credentials to enter.

John 14:6

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except THROUGH ME.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God; there is also ONE MEDIATOR between God and humankind, CHRIST JESUS, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all....

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we are JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Romans 10:10

For one BELIEVES with the HEART and so is justified, and one CONFESSES with the MOUTH and so is saved.

The kingdom of God on earth is thus comprised of those who can produce these credentials. Immediately we do so, we can live in the expectation of eternal life when Christ returns and His kingdom becomes visible to all. And that is a guaranteed right of every subject in the kingdom of God confirmed in God's Word by Paul in **Philippians 3:20 and Ephesians 2:4-7**

But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

No citizen on earth can be in safer hands, and no subject has even been given the right to eternal life in an eternal kingdom.

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But with this guaranteed right, comes responsibilities. Earthly citizens have to subject themselves to the laws of the land and the ethos of that nation. There's a lot of talk at the moment about "British values". So subjects in the kingdom of heaven have to adapt to a new way of life. Entering the kingdom of heaven makes us a 'new creation' which means a new way of thinking and a new way of becoming the kind of citizens God wants us to be.

The overriding law and ethos of this kingdom is love. John 3:16 is the pivotal verse. The proof of being a true citizen of heaven is willing obedience to the law of love.

John 15:12-13

12"This is MY COMMANDMENT, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:17

I am giving you THESE COMMANDS so that you may love one another.

1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH; AND YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.

And it is only this ethos and law of love that can lead us to pray sincerely - "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. How are we to understand what this means? Well, Hebrews 1:14, gives us an example of how it is already being done in heaven.

Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

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Furthermore, we have a perfect example in the earthly ministry and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:5**

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

And he goes on to tell us what that was in verse 7

Christ “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”

Jesus clearly stated on several occasions that His purpose in life was to do the will of the Father even if it meant being a servant in the most menial way. Washing the disciples’ feet illustrated this.

John 4:34

34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

John 5:30

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

John 6:38

38 for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Washing feet was a job usually given to the lowliest Gentile slave. It was an act of such obvious humility that Peter was offended by it. His pride made him want to dictate to his Master, what His act should entail. This is the complete opposite to the petition “Thy will be done”. We cannot dictate to God what we want Him to do for us and how He is to do it. Nor can we impose on God our terms and conditions for doing His will

And that also involves how we approach God. **Philippians 4:6** gives us the right approach

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your REQUESTS be made known to God.

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The key word in this text is “requests” which is a polite, respectful and even formal way of asking for something. From Christ’s example, they are also to be made with the view that God’s will in the matter will prevail. This is illustrated by Jesus’ request made in the Garden of Gethsemane that He would not have to face crucifixion, but accepted “Not my will, but thine be done.”

The voice of the servant is the voice that says I am willing to accept Your will regardless of what circumstances or situations it will lead to. None of us can do the will of God in the same way that Christ did, but praying “Thy will be done...” brings us face to face with whether or not we are aspiring to have the same attitude as Jesus. As a servant, do we trust our Lord and Master enough to believe that, regardless of what does or does not happen, that His will is always directed towards our best interests. If we do, as Paul tells us in **Romans 12:1-2**, it will involve the sacrifice of self if we are to be totally committed to God’s will for our lives.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as A LIVING SACRIFICE, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MINDS, SO THAT YOU MAY DISCERN WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD—WHAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.

If we are reluctant to pray “Thy will be done...” for whatever reason; and unequivocally and unconditionally mean it in our own personal lives, then it is completely hypocritical to pray that this will be the case with others.

To pray this petition with a servant’s heart involves trust and obedience. I’ve quoted Oswald Chambers’ statement that it is not intellect but obedience that brings us closer to God. And this is summed up for us in the hymn ‘Trust and Obey’.

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,

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What a glory He sheds on our way.

While we do His good will, He abides with us still,

And with all who will trust and obey.

.....

But we never can prove the delights of His love, UNTIL ALL ON THE ALTAR WE LAY;

For the favour He shows, and the joy He bestows are for them who will trust and obey.

God's good and perfect will took Christ to a cross. We do not know what God will require of us in terms of service. What we do know is that God has already determined how we will serve Him when we enter into the kingdom.

1 Peter 4:8-11 sums this up in these words:

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:10**

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (RSV)

In practical terms, according to Peter, hospitality, speech, service using whatever talents God has given, all used according to the will of God and in the strength of the Holy Spirit, is how God's will is being done on earth at this very moment. Also prayer on behalf of others, is an act of love for them. What we do for others because, as Christians, we know it is what God would want us to do, is, in effect, being the answer to our own prayer. As I said before, if we are not willing to go this extra mile, then we miss the opportunity for God's will to be done on earth.

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It has to be acknowledged that sometimes opportunities will be missed and our service will not always be perfect. But God looks for what He can give credit for. Jesus notices the cup of water given to a thirsty person in His name. I think it was in the book “The Purpose Driven life” that the writer said that, unfortunately, living sacrifices can crawl off the altar. But, in spite of the times we do miss out or the times we fail, repentance leads to forgiveness and that in itself puts us back in good standing in His kingdom and brings us back into the position of doing His will.

Seeing Christians bringing people into the kingdom through evangelism, mission and practical services is evidence of the kingdom’s existence on earth.

As I said earlier, the kingdom is going to become visibly real. So when we pray “Thy kingdom come” we can also be praying it in the sense of Revelation 22:20 “...Amen, Come, Lord Jesus...”, which is a prayer that the kingdom of God will be manifested in all its glory and made visible to all when Christ returns. Given the present state of the world, that day can’t come soon enough. We will see God face to face and we will see the extent of the assembled kingdom – innumerable people from every people, nation, tribe and tongue as Revelation puts it. And we will experience the full righteousness, goodness and justice of God’s will, for we will have left behind all the things that have resulted from humanity’s refusal to do His will in this world – no more war, terrorism, brutal crime, abuse, tears, sickness or death. All the problems of this world banished forever. We will be in an eternal kingdom of safety and security because our sovereign is God Almighty and He cannot and will not fail to keep the promise of eternal life He has made to all who are in Christ.

Looking at these two petitions in this way shows that mission, evangelism and discipleship are encapsulated in these few words. When we pray this petition we are praying for God to be bringing more people into His kingdom through disciples who are already obeying His will by reaching out to others in whatever way He leads. We can also all be sure that what we are and what we do as subjects and servants for the glory of God, is extending the Kingdom resulting in God’s will being done on earth.

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WEEK 4: THE VOICE OF THE SUPPLICANT

The whole progress of our Christian growth and the whole process of being conformed to the likeness of Christ puts us into a position of utter dependence on God's grace to make us into the people He wants us to be. And to do that we have to realise what we need to co-operate with Him and to pray accordingly. This petition - Give us this day our daily bread – takes us to Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help IN TIME OF NEED.

The key word is 'need'. James tells us:

James 1:17

Every good gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.

The emphasis in James is on 'good' gifts. That means that even when things that are not good come our way – like sickness, for example – they can be a force for good when God is brought into the equation. So, at the outset, when we pray this petition, we must believe that God will only give what is good and/or what He considers to be beneficial for us. Logically, that means that what He doesn't give from either outright refusal or delay; or does not answer at all, is because it would not contribute to our well-being in some way and might even do us harm. We also have to realise that unanswered prayer for others is not always because our prayers are not needed or heeded, but because our ways of dealing with a situation or our perceived solutions to their problems, could interfere with or hinder God's better ways of working with them. Oswald Chambers warns against being 'amateur providences,' for only God knows exactly what is required for the good of a person at any given time.

Isaiah 55:9

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

And we are constantly in God's thoughts.

Psalm 139:17

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

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We cannot fathom how much thought God has given into how to save us and make us fit for living in eternity with Him. That is why when we pray these words, we need to ‘return the compliment’ as it were, by thinking through what we are actually praying for. What are the gifts we want God to bestow, for the very first word ‘Give’ indicates we will receive what we pray for as a gift? Who do we pray for, because the words ‘us’ and ‘our’ indicate that our prayers cannot be selfish. Does ‘this day’ and ‘daily’ simply mean for today only’ especially when we are praying for an on-going situation or circumstance. And what do we mean by ‘bread’. Just these questions show that there is a breadth and depth in these 7 words that take us far beyond our own little worlds.

Taking them one at a time first shows us that we really do come to God as a supplicant, for we would have nothing but for the grace of God. The very air we breathe is from Him. Our senses, our time, our talents, our food, drink and clothing; our shelter, family and friends, work, social networks etc., which provide the means to get through life, all come from Him. Over and above these temporal things are the spiritual gifts that are ours in Christ. In this world it is said that there is no such a thing as a free lunch, but every gift that comes from God is totally free, which is amazing considering that we cannot earn them or deserve them. Even more amazing is the fact that He is never weary of giving:

New every morning is the love, our waking and uprising prove

Through sleep and darkness safely brought.

Restored to life and power and thought.

Great is Thy faithfulness.....morning by morning new mercies I see.

Furthermore, He delights in giving for He gives even to His enemies. Thomas Watson says “the dew drops on the thistle as well as the rose.” And because God is God, there will never be an ‘out of stock’ or ‘no longer available’ sign on what He can provide. His resources are infinite and can never be exhausted.

Haggai 2:8

8The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts.

Psalm 50:10

10 For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

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In short, as soon as we utter the word ‘Give’ we are making requests from the One who is more willing to give than we are to receive and to the One who can provide all our needs in Christ Jesus. He is truly Jehovah Jireh – the source of all providence. But do we need to pray this petition if all our needs have been met already? If ours have been met then this is the time to thank God for all that He has provided. Thanksgiving is not mentioned in the Lord’s prayer, but this particular petition invites us to thank God for past and present fulfilment of needs and to trust Him for all that we will need in the future. However, just because our needs have been met does not mean that the needs of others have been met. This is where the universal nature of this petition comes to the fore.

Who is ‘us’ and ‘our’. The answer is – the whole world. It is measured by the question to Jesus “Who is my neighbour?” Now this can be a problem. How can any individual pray for the needs of the whole world every day? The need for peace, for adequate food, water and shelter, the need for protection against the evil acts of human beings and for those working in dangerous environments and health to cope with all the problems. Then there is the provision of the resourcing and equipping of people to carry out God’s tasks in the world, and you could probably add much more to this list. To ask God specifically to give what is needed in every situation in the world would simply overwhelm us. We can certainly pray in general for peace, for supply of life’s necessities, for help in times of disaster etc., but God gives us knowledge of specific people, situations and circumstances – for example, the plight of Miriam in Sudan back in May-June this year – and these are the things that the Holy Spirit can prompt us to pray for. God works on an individual basis and prayer laid on one heart is not necessarily the same as what is laid on another. While I have no Scriptural reference for it, I can believe that the prompting of the Holy Spirit will lead collectively to all the prayers necessary for releasing God’s grace and mercy to those in need, reaching the throne of grace. From this we can see that ‘us’ and ‘our’ reaches out from our family and immediate circle of social interaction to our community, to our nation, to our world.

And we need to pray ‘this day’ for our needs are ‘daily’. In this modern age in the western world, we do not need to live day by day. Fridges and freezers keep our food for weeks or months on end. Up until recent times, people could talk about a job for life. So, in many ways we do not have to pray daily for the basic necessities of life. Other needs, however, differ from day to day as the ways of the world impact on our lives. Seeking God daily means we acknowledge that we are dependent on Him and that takes humility. We are the supplicants; He is the Supplier. It is also the sign of trust that as He has provided for our needs in the past, He will do so in the future.

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That element of trust is important. Praying for what is needed daily reminds us that today is all we are promised. Boast not thyself of tomorrow for you don't know what a day may bring forth.

It also helps to put into perspective Jesus command to Take no thought for the morrow Matthew 6:34.

That does not rule out the common sense things that we have to prepare for, but refers to building up things for the future like the parable of the man building bigger barns, an example of self-sufficiency and reckoning without God. So daily prayer for needs opens up the opportunities for thanksgiving, for increasing our faith and trust, for bringing to God the needs of others; and for understanding and obeying God's word in a practical way in our daily lives. Also when we do have to plan for needful things for a future time, there is an acknowledgement of 'God willing' to those plans.

What is bread? I don't know if any of you remember the sitcom 'Bread'. It had all to do with making money and a slang term for money was 'bread'. Although, not used frequently nowadays, the term 'breadwinner' referred to the man of the house earning enough to keep his family. In terms of this prayer, bread is a generic word. It represents not just the basic necessities to keep a person alive, but refers also to other needs which make us human. We also have mental, emotional and spiritual needs, so the prayer for bread is a prayer that the needs of the whole person will be supplied.

But while God is more willing to give than we are to receive, there are certain caveats to be considered when making this petition. First, we have to make the distinction between what is really needed and what is merely wanted. We cannot use this petition to request gifts that pander only to our own needs. As mentioned above, the words 'us' and 'our' show that our prayers must not be taken up completely by our own subjective needs. God expects us to be channels of the grace and mercy He gives to us in providing for our needs. Many pray for outward things merely to satisfy the self. How is our time, health, wealth and happiness used in the world? If they are used to pursue personal desires for fame, fortune, status etc., these are things that God may grant, but divine blessing will not accompany them. On the other hand if they are used to benefit others – even to giving a cup of water in His Name – God will grant and bless them, and even add to them as they are poured out for the benefit of others.

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Secondly, it is also necessary to recognise that the needs of some Christians are greater than others. Seeing this should never be an occasion for envy because God's word states, those who have been given much bear a heavier burden of responsibility as stewards of what has been given. Jesus' parable of the talents is an illustration of this and He has said that:

Luke 12:48

.....From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Thirdly, we cannot expect God to hand us everything on a plate. God expects us to co-operate with Him in the provision of needs.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 says

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you.

1 Timothy 5:8 “ if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Strong words. For the normal means of sustaining life, the means of God's provision is through our labour. And this was ordained by God in Genesis 3:18

19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

God will not bless wilful or deliberate idleness or acquiring needs through illegal or immoral activity. The former lives at the expense of another and the latter has what has been taken from another. Neither is an example of loving your neighbour as yourself.

All of this raises the question of how we identify what our real needs are – what is the 'bread' we are to pray for. The physical ones for the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter, health, without which we can do nothing – are obvious. Jesus recognises this but shows if God provides feeding for birds

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and more magnificently than Solomon for short-lived lilies – how much more will He provide for the needs of humanity.

Luke 12:24 -31

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! **Consider the lilies,** how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. **But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.**

So, when bread is mentioned in the Bible it often refers to the need to eat to stay alive. But in many other instances, it goes beyond this. Human beings are not mere physical entities. We have minds, wills, emotions and spirits and each of these too need daily attention because what happens in our daily lives impacts in some way or other on each of these aspects of our being.

Think of everyday expressions we use. “At my wit’s end”, “heading for the hills”, “climbing the walls”, “distraught”, “devastated”, “didn’t know which way to turn”, “at the end of my tether”, “between a rock and a hard place”, “tempted just to leave them to it”, “too tired to care anymore”, “dread going into that place”, “stop the world I want to get off”. Every one of these and similar expressions come as a result of situations and circumstances we have to face in life. We have to face the fact that we are living in a world that is hostile to the Christian way of life. Nowadays, with political correctness rife, Christians often find themselves in situations that instantaneously require the right word, the right thought, the right way to act, the right decision to be taken etc. That is where spiritual needs come to the fore. Godly wisdom, strength, courage, encouragement, restoration, forgiveness, support, inner peace etc., are all there for the asking.

James 1:5

5If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

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Habakkuk 3:19

19 GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.

1 Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

Romans 15:5

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus...

As we face perplexing situations, God can provide us with the discernment, insight and wisdom to sort things out in our minds and come to rational decisions or a balanced perspective on the situation. In difficult situations where people are against us, Jesus promised in John 16:33

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"

In mental or emotional turmoil, Paul tells us in Philippians 4:5-7

.....The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Those final words "in Christ Jesus" gives us the basis for expecting God to answer prayer for our holistic needs. We have already seen that we pray 'in Jesus' Name.'" And an essential part of our daily needs are spiritual. Praying in Jesus' Name reminds us that our spiritual health depends on the need to keep close to Him. A song 'Just a closer walk with Thee' sums this up.

Just	a	closer	walk	with	Thee
Grant	it	Jesus,	is	my	plea
Daily	walking	close	to	Thee	
Let it be dear Lord, let it be					

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Why, because Jesus is the Bread of Life. John 6:48-51

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

We are reminded that when He broke the bread, He said it was His body broken for us. Through His sacrifice, Jesus supplied humanity with its greatest need – the gift of life – eternal life. As Ephesians 2:5 reminds us - **by grace you have been saved**

Like our physical, mental and emotional selves, our spiritual selves also need feeding and God too has supplied that need through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 Jesus said

Matthew 4:4

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Unless we take the time and make the effort to feed our spiritual life as healthily as we do our physical life, then growth, development and progress in our Christian lives will end up in stagnation or death. Without a daily intake of the nourishment given by God’s Word, we cannot expect to grow and develop our spiritual progress towards what God intends us to be.

Again, it has to be said that spiritual needs differ from individual to individual for they are relevant to the personal relationship we have with God. If this need is something we are not conscious of then perhaps the words of the great Welsh hymn could guide us towards identifying it.

Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, feed me now and evermore,

Feed me now and evermore.

Given what has come out of this 7 word petition, we can see that it has profound implications for what we pray for. What I have said only skims the surface, for it is a petition that addresses not only our external physical existence, but delves deep into the innermost recesses of our being. Just the use of the word ‘bread’ to express an actual need, invites us to bring the needs of body, heart, mind,

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soul and spirit before the God who is so willing to supply every need, even the ones we are not aware of.

And the most appropriate conclusion to that invitation takes us back to the text quoted at the start of this talk.

Hebrews 4:16

16Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help IN TIME OF NEED.

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WEEK 5: THE VOICE OF THE SINNER

Probably, this is the hardest petition to pray sincerely and wholeheartedly, especially when feelings and emotions about a hurtful or evil situation are raw. It is the first petition that faces us with a choice between God and self. It faces us with the unpalatable fact that we may have to forgive the unforgivable. So, how do we come to terms with that?

Well, this is also the first petition that addresses the health of our souls.
Matthew 10:28

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus is referring to Satan, the instigator of sin and that is why when we come to *-Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us -* we are literally dealing with a matter that determines the life or death of the soul.

Take a look at this prayer

Dear God
So far today I have done all right.
I haven't gossiped. I haven't lost my temper. I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or overindulgent.

I have not whined, complained, cursed, or eaten any chocolate.

I have charged nothing on my credit card.

I am very thankful for that!

But in a few minutes, Lord, I am going to get out of this bed, And from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help.
Amen

A very 'tongue in cheek' kind of prayer. Yet it brings home the reality to us that as soon as we open our eyes and become mentally aware in the morning, we come face-to-face with the potential of sin. And when we turn to the Scriptural form of the prayer we get the meaning of what that actually involves.

Matthew 6:12

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

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Luke 11:4

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. (NIV)

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. (The Message)

Because the eternal well-being of our souls is involved, probably the first thing we need to understand is what these terms imply. The Message doesn't mention debts or trespasses or sins, possibly because these terms all come under the umbrella of the word 'sin'. But each term used points us to a profound aspect of our sinful nature which is an irrefutable Biblical verdict on our humanity.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:10

...as it is written: "There is no one who is righteous, not even one;

But the good news is that God has provided a remedy for sin in giving Jesus Christ as an atonement for sin which, first and foremost, concerns the nature we are born with, inherited from Adam, often called original sin. This is the kind of sin Jesus has atoned for on the cross and that is why we can talk of a new birth as a new creation in Christ. This is not just reforming our human nature. This is giving us a new hereditary nature – inherited from Christ Himself. **John 1:13** explains this as

...not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

And because of this, the focus of our lives tend towards God and all that He stands for, rather than working against Him. As a Christian, through justification, we are completely freed from the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. The Bible also tells us that the shed blood of Christ covers all our sins past, present and future. Bearing in mind, that this is a petition made by those who have already accepted this offer and God's way of resolving the problem of sin in their lives, we can turn to Matthew's words:

Matthew 6:12

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

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This immediately alerts us to the fact that we owe God a debt we can never repay. To remove the inner disposition we were born with is humanly impossible. Only the second Adam, Jesus Christ could change that. “There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin” is a good illustration of the magnitude of the debt we owe to God for justification – being judicially declared sinless – because it cost the Son of God His life. So, none of us would deny that even should we work for the whole of eternity and bankrupt ourselves doing so, we could never repay the debt we owe to God for cleansing us not just from the sinful nature we are born with, but also for the continuing forgiveness for offences we commit against Him for the whole of our lives. Since we sin in some way or other throughout our lives because we will never be perfect, it is obvious our debt could never be repaid.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— NOT THE RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST.

The fact that we will never be perfect in this world leads us into the complicated area of Christian sinning. That may seem a contradiction in terms, but the fact that we are told to pray - *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us* - means that this is something we need to carefully consider. Understanding the meaning of trespasses – which amount to sin – helps. Originally trespasses meant the committal of offences against a person or a set of rules. I know it is stating the obvious, but for the Christian this means offences against God and His laws. We probably use the term ‘trespasses’ rather than ‘sins’ in our prayer because of Matthew’s comment on this petition in 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Paul affirms this use in Romans 4:25

25who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

2 Corinthians 5:19

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19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Ephesians 2:1

You were dead through the trespasses and sins

Colossians 2:13

And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses

I don't think anyone in this room would argue that they have never committed offences against God and/or broken His rules since they became a Christian. So the very meaning of the word 'trespasses' identifies us as sinners, albeit sinners saved by grace.

Going from there, it is legitimate to ask that if we are justified and clothed with the righteousness of Christ in God's eyes and all our sins have been dealt with at the cross, why do we still need to pray this petition and what are we actually praying for? The most straightforward answer to the first question is that although we are justified, we are not yet sanctified. That is something that takes a lifetime to complete. Although, when we stand before God, Christ will present us spotless and blameless, that will not happen without effort on our part. We are a work in progress, and as citizens of the kingdom of God, we are expected to co-operate with the Holy Spirit to become the kind of people fit to inhabit that eternal kingdom. The new nature that we have been given has to be nurtured and nourished to maturity as we live on earth. That means that in the here and now we have to play our part in getting out of our systems everything that is not Christ-like. That is what the process of sanctification is. If we want to know the extent to which this will happen, we can quote Oswald Chambers who has said that God educates us down to the scruple. In a Christian lifestyle this applies to every word, thought and deed in our lives. For example, talking to all in general Jesus said of words,

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

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Specifically, Paul warns Christians in 2 Timothy 2:14 and 23

Keep reminding them of these things (spiritual teaching). Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel.....

Just this one example points us to the fact that we can offend God without actually realising it. And this can lead to a situation when, in scrupulous examination of our consciences, we honestly cannot say what kind of sin we have committed and need forgiveness for. This is possible because 1 John 3:21 tells us

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Yet in chapter 1 are these verses

1 John 1:8-10

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all righteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

You can see the dilemma. On the one hand we can be unaware of sins, yet it seems to be the height of presumption to come before God believing you have not sinned. How do we reconcile the two? One way is by recognising the standard we are striving towards with the help, guidance and, sometimes, the rebuke, chastisement and correction of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The standard is "Be holy for I am holy." When, genuinely, our consciences do not condemn us, we still have to realise that our righteousness falls far short of God's standards. We need continual forgiveness for that fact. Jeremiah tells us why, and the Psalmist gives us the perfect way to deal with that situation.

Jeremiah 17:9

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The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it?

Psalm 19:12

But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Our inner selves are known only to ourselves and to God. But it would seem that if we are satisfied with a lesser standard of holiness than that which we are commanded to strive for, that amounts to self-righteousness and that in itself is a sin.

Conscious sin is much easier to deal with. We know right from wrong and a Christian conscience makes us sensitive to what would offend God. In one sense, new Christians are more conscious of sins of appetites – what pleases the senses. They know they have to make lifestyle changes. This may involve friendships for we are warned in 1 Corinthians 15:33

Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.

Other changes may fall along the lines of the words used or the way they are said; the places it may no longer be appropriate to frequent; habits or addictions, which ultimately harm the body, which is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, which now need to be broken. While God often does remove aspects of our appetites that offend Him immediately, very often, it is a long and painful process to “work out our salvation” until those things no longer hold us captive to them. However, when we remember that it is God who is working in us to do His good will, our obedience in the smallest degree will release the help we need to overcome the rest. There is truth in the saying that if we supply the willingness, He will supply the power.

As we mature in the Christian faith, we become more aware of what could be called inner sins. The standard here is that of Philippians 2:5

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

Jesus’ whole mind was focused on who His Father was in character, nature and will. Jesus recognised His subordination to the Father during His earthly

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ministry even though He was sinless and had nothing to confess or ask forgiveness for. We cannot match Jesus regarding sinlessness, but we need to have the same focus on all that God is and does. I mentioned, being satisfied with our own righteousness or piety being a sin against God. So too is failing to show or express gratitude and appreciation for all that He has done for us through Christ. The realisation of the magnitude of our debt to Him should never be taken for granted. If it is, then confession and repentance and request for forgiveness should follow. Sometimes this slips to the backs of our minds, but its absence nevertheless takes glory away from God for our salvation. I know this sounds like splitting hairs, but this is an example of God educating us down to the scruple.

Also, when we pray for daily bread, we often end up discontented with the provision. Bearing in mind that all we are and have are the result of the grace of God. While God can accept that we sometimes feel He has not been as good or kind to us as He has been to others, what He cannot accept is on-going, unworthy beliefs about His character or His dealings with His creation. Discontent is a symptom of lack of faith and trust. Discontent with what God has provided or the circumstances He permits for us impugns His character in terms of goodness, kindness, mercy, compassion and love and grace which is His unmerited favour to a sinner.

At its most extreme, it amounts to blasphemy for it denies the very essence of the God who cares deeply for His human creation. Yes, it is true that the essence of God is love but again, this has to be seen in the context of His holiness. In these days of cults and alternative beliefs, extra- or unbiblical ways of perceiving God can sometimes be very plausible. For example – God is a God of love, therefore He would not condemn anyone to hell. That leads to a belief that there is no punishment or judgement of the evil that exists in the world. That, in turn, leads to a denial of the existence of the source of evil, Satan himself. And this is a complete contradiction to all the Bible teaches. And not to believe what God's word says about these things is tantamount to calling God a liar.

That is why Paul tells us to bring every thought into captivity. Just these examples show that wrong thinking about God, which can lead to wrong feelings or beliefs about God demonstrate how prone we can be to inner, often unconscious sins. But again, when a correction is needed to bring these things to our conscious attention, they too can be overcome when we listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. While it is true that all our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, we still need to remember that forgiveness will not be available

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to us until it is asked for. We need to be made aware of sin so that it can be sorted out as soon as we become aware of it.

Now, you might be wondering why I haven't got to the second part of the petition yet. Well, believe it or not I already have. The key word in the second part is 'AS' – meaning extent, degree to which, amount, or length of time etc. And until we know the full measure of the extent to which we have been forgiven and the amount of sins God has forgiven us in a lifetime, we will not be able to comprehend the degree to which we are to forgive others their trespasses against us. Jesus said don't criticise the splinter in another's eye without recognising the plank in your own. Someone else has said that when you point the finger at another person, three fingers are pointing back at you.

So all that we have talked about so far, is an illustration of our obligations to forgive others for what they say or do against us. As a result of our discussion a couple of weeks ago, I've added a bit more to this part of the talk. What it brought to mind, was an incident in a TV programme. The guy with the beard is a presidential adviser who is a Jew in the programme. The topic of Yom Kippur came up. He said it was the day of Atonement when Jews asked forgiveness from God. He added that what people didn't know was that the day before Yom Kippur, Jews were expected to ask forgiveness of each other. This makes perfect sense of Jesus instruction.

Matthew 5:23-24

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; FIRST be reconciled to your brother or sister, and THEN COME and offer your gift.

This is relatively straightforward in personal situations, but as Terry observed, it is more complicated when we are faced with brutal aggression on an international scale. Regarding the Jihadists and others like them, it is right to pray for peace, that evil will be thwarted and, even the reaction of praying for forgiveness from them that Rob told us about, is the Biblical response in the light of Jesus command to love our enemies, and His prayer for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. Paul in Romans 12 tells us why we need to do that.

Romans 12:18-21

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD'S WRATH,

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for it is written: “IT IS MINE TO AVENGE; I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. IN DOING THIS, YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” (Proverbs 25:21-22)

Peace with everyone is a matter of will. Will we or won't we forgive? God doesn't expect us to condone, excuse or fail to take action against evildoers, but He does expect us to be prepared to forgive them. The magnitude of our debt to God, the fact that we ourselves offend Him throughout our lives, plus the fact that a gracious and loving God, because of Christ, is willing through confessed and repented of sin, to forgive us and to help us daily to become more Christ-like, means we have to forgive others. But, as the text in Matthew shows, once we have done our bit, we are right with God. And according to Paul, that, in turn, means that all responsibility for that situation passes from us to God if the other party refuses offers of forgiveness or carries on with evil behaviour. On the other hand, if we don't forgive, then there is the danger of harbouring anger, resentment, vindictiveness, desire for revenge, a malicious wish to do them harm. These do us more harm if they go unchecked and lead to us sinning, for they violate the command to love our neighbour as ourselves, even when that neighbour is an enemy.

So, this petition, goes to the very core of our being. It is the surrender of the self to God and forgiving others is a practical outcome of “Thy will be done on earth...” It may be a hard struggle and a painful experience, but it will have a glorious outcome. One day it will redound to the praise of Jesus, who as Jude 24 tells us, will present us to the Father, **“without fault and with great joy.**

WEEK 6: THE VOICE OF THE SOJOURNER

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through

“Guide me oh Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land”.

David's first sermon on 1 Peter reminded us of this fact. You could say we've just got a temporary visa, and it would be great if we could just be like tourists - here temporarily to see the sights and just move on. But we do know that we have not been promised an easy journey. We will all face the joys and sorrows, the ups and the downs, the smooth and the rough and tough circumstances and situations that are part and parcel of the world we live in. But God has given us everything we need to get through and this petition is the one that points us to the power we can call on to make sure we arrive safely to be with Him.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

We need to pray it with all the fervour we have got because the one thing that every Christian will face is temptation. Temptation is what causes us to sin against God and that is why we need guidance and the power of God to get us through the spiritual minefields on the road we are taking. “Forgive us our trespasses” is always about the past – something we have already thought, said or done. In this petition, Jesus has made provision for the present and the future for He knows we are vulnerable to the fact that the world, the flesh and the devil are there to frustrate our efforts to be what God wants us to be at every turn. So what are we asking for in this petition?

Unfortunately, the way we repeat it does not make this very clear. “Lead us not into temptation” suggests God deliberately tempts us and probably arises from our English translations which tells us that after His baptism the Spirit “led” Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. While the Holy Spirit directed Jesus into a location where He would be tempted, it is important to note that He was tempted by the devil – not by God. We are warned in

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone.

God permits sin, but He does not promote it (Thomas Watson). He is the pattern of holiness, so how can we say He leads us into temptation that can become sin? What God does permit, however, is the testing of our faithfulness to Him. Peter wrote about trials and suffering and tells us this is

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1 Peter 5:7

so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The first part of the petition is asking God to steer us out of the way of temptation or to be kept free from it. Given that our human nature can still sin, this prayer is like a pre-emptive strike against a tempting circumstance or situation becoming the occasion for sin. However, knowing that the closer we get to God, the greater efforts Satan will make to tempt us to sin, we also need to pray for help and protection when we do have to face it. This petition would include the prayer for help not to yield to it, for as the hymn-writer put it

Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin.

Secondly, we need to pray for deliverance or protection and rescue when we are in the midst of temptation. We need this because the meaning of the second part of the petition is obscured when it comes to the word 'evil'. The correct translation of the Greek word should be 'evil one', for the form of the word indicates a person, and it is the one commonly used for 'Satan' in the New Testament. The fact that Jesus refers to him in this prayer is all the proof we need that we do face a formidable spiritual foe.

Once we take these considerations, into account, we can be sure that our journey on earth takes us through a variety of temptations, all instigated by Satan, who is far more devious and dangerous than anyone gives him credit for.

Paul warns us that our struggle is not only against flesh and blood, but against

Ephesians 6:12

....the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

In 1 Peter 5:8-9 we are told we have an adversary who prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour and he adds that we have to resist him.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him standing firm in the faith.....

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It is said that being forewarned is being forearmed. Again, it is only by knowing what we are up against, that we can fully understand why this petition is absolutely essential if we are not to end up as defeated Christians. Thomas Watson, a 17th century puritan, lists 27 ways the devil instigates temptation to sin. It's frightening because some of it is so subtle that it is a wonder any of us survives it. For example, it was tempting to spend the rest of this talk on the ways listed, but that would have meant giving this time to the devil rather than to God and to Christ. Instead, we have to focus this petition Godward and the answer to the first question in the Westminster Confession of faith is that our chief end is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." If we accept that Satan's chief motives have the malicious and vengeful aims of denying God the glory due to His name and ruining us as His new creation; and that all his time and effort are directed towards these aims, then we can start to appreciate the need for guidance to avoid or deal with temptation when it does come, and deliverance from it when we find ourselves in the midst of it.

Answers to two further questions also will help us to appreciate why Jesus included this petition. The questions are: Why does Satan hate us so much and what does he target? Satan hates us because, firstly, like Paul we have identified our condition as sinners before God and have accepted His solution to the problem it raises, namely, Jesus Christ.

Romans 7:24-25

**Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Furthermore us that as a result of our acceptance of God's verdict on our condition and His way of dealing with it "we are a new creation, no more in condemnation" in good standing with God.

2 Corinthians 5:17

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

And in Ephesians 2:10

....we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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Being what God wants us to be and facing down the temptation to be otherwise gives to God the glory due to him – and that is something Satan will do everything in his power to prevent. Every time we resist the temptation; every time we overcome in what we might consider the smallest or most trivial detail, God's glory is upheld. Our loyalty or faithfulness to God's words and ways bring glory to God and that is why the answer to the second question is that Satan's primary target is faith. This is nothing new. Paul recognised and was concerned about because he wrote to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 3:5

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain.

Faith is what keeps us willing and acting and living our lives for God's glory for it is faith that keeps us trusting in and depending on God's words and promises regarding all that is ours as a result of accepting the salvation through Christ that He has given to us. Thomas Watson calls faith the 'king of graces' because it is the mainspring of all that we are and all that we think, say and do as Christians. That is why it is a primary target. But, unfortunately, the only way that anything, including faith, can be proved to be real or effective is through testing'. God has decreed that testing is part and parcel of the Christian journey. Think back to Christ's messages to the Churches in Revelation. The rewards are for those who have overcome. If there was no testing there would be nothing to overcome. And Jesus assured the disciples and us that He had overcome the world and that His followers could do so too. It may seem gross exaggeration to say that faith overcomes the world and conquers it, but that is exactly what is said in

1 John 5:4-5

for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

If you want a running commentary on how faith does this, all you have to do is read the achievements of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. So, it's logical to conclude that anything that can undermine our faith and trust in God will be used by Satan to do just that. Going back to the Westminster Confession, the other part of the answer to its first question is that the chief end is to enjoy God forever. If Satan can rob us of that joy he will do so. Look at how he did it in

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the Garden of Eden. When you think of it, Adam and Eve were the only human beings ever to live in a perfect world where they had a perfect, sinless relationship with the Creator God. Then along came Satan who used such plausible and reasonable speech that Eve was completely deceived by him. In the Garden of Eden God tested loyalty which amounts to faith, trust in His Word and recognition of His authority. Adam and Eve were tempted to be disloyal or unfaithful to God and to follow Satan. They were tempted to disbelieve God regarding the consequences of eating the fruit of the tree. They were tempted to question God's authority, and, having fallen prey to each of these, they were tempted to usurp that authority by disobedience. As we all know to our cost, they failed that test miserably.

Contrast that with Job, whose faith and commitment to God was challenged by Satan. God had given Job all his heart could desire. Would faith hold in their absence? Job then was tested regarding his person, his family and his possessions. His wife wanted him to curse God and die. His friends were anything but comforters. Everything was taken away from Job, but one thing remained – his faith in God's provision, goodness and faithfulness.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him 13:15a

In this case Job passed the test with flying colours, giving us an example to the present day of trusting God when things are dire. That is when we are open to the temptation to be discontented with God's provision, doubt His love for us and disbelieve the promises He has given us in His word, all of which may lead to us taking matters into our own hands and doing what we think God should have done for us. And all of these things diminish God's glory, not enhances it.

The third greatest example of testing in the Bible is that of Christ Himself. Christ's baptism was His commission and equipping to carry out His God-given task of the salvation of the world. His commitment to God's providence in what He would face and His willingness to carry out the task regardless of cost was to be tested to the utmost. If He had failed any one of these three tests, we would not be sitting here now. We have no idea of what Jesus went through after 40 days fasting in the wilderness. He was extremely vulnerable, so making stones bread was not just a temptation to perform a trivial miracle – He was later to feed 5000 with five loaves and 2 fish. This was a temptation to provide by His own desire and effort, the means of satisfying His physical need for food. Jesus refused to be self-sufficient and remained dependent on God for

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His daily bread. To cast Himself down from the temple was the temptation to elevate self. We all know the following celebrities and superheroes have in our own day. It was no different then. Jesus was tempted to put self on the throne. He remained loyal to the Father already seated on the throne of heaven. And to resist the temptation to serve and worship Satan, who was prepared to give Him the whole world, gave Him the right to warn us

What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul.

Yet, in spite of this stupendous victory, overcoming all Satan threw at Him, Jesus knew Satan would not give up. Luke tells us that Satan left only “until an opportune time (4:13b). We know throughout Jesus’ earthly life, He was constantly facing opposition of one kind or another, with another major testing in the Garden of Gethsemane. ‘Not my will but thine be done’ were the words that signalled the beginning of the end for Satan.

It is perhaps because of His own experience that this petition was necessary and why the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that:

4:14-16

We have a great High priest.....Jesus the Son of God....For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.

It is why Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:10 and 16 that we need a full set of spiritual armour “**so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes**” for it is the shield of **FAITH** that enables us to “**extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**” Flaming arrows are called fiery darts in other Bible versions. Whatever term is used, however, it means that such temptation comes suddenly and with such force that it is hard to put up immediate resistance. Paul illustrates this when he talks of doing the things he doesn’t want to do. When everything in us is telling us that what we are faced with is not what we willingly or knowingly would agree to because of our faith, then it constitutes a fiery dart coming from a source outside of ourselves.

But there is a caveat here. Not every temptation we face comes directly from a satanic source. Both Jesus and James tell us that often we, ourselves, are the source of the temptations we encounter, and Satan uses what we permit in our own natures. That is what is called giving the devil a foothold.

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Mark 7:20-23

And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

James 4:1

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but don’t get it, you kill, and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

And in 3:6-10, James tells us that our tongues are **“a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person.....”**

I know all too often I am tempted to say things I shouldn’t and in a tone I shouldn’t use. Given that we use our tongues from the moment we get up in the morning, the potential temptation to use it wrongly is ever present. Evil exists in this world because humanity fails to confront it and call it for what it is and/or humanity actively co-operates with Satan to spread evil. Christians who confront any form of evil are more often than not persecuted for it to some degree. But the most common task of all Christians make a personal stand and resist when temptation comes our way. And the only way we can do that is by the power of God – hence Christ’s inclusion of this petition. None of us knows how temptation will present itself to us in the future. That is why this petition, for the want of a better way of putting it, points to prevention rather than cure.

When we remember that our walk through life is by faith and not by sight, we can see why temptation is fundamentally an attack on our faith. And when we realise that this can only be developed and strengthened through trials and temptations, we can appreciate why Jesus included this petition in His prayer. When we pray these words that Jesus taught, they make us more aware of where we are vulnerable to temptation, and where we need to deny Satan a foothold. They also make us aware of the power we can draw on to resist him. We may be apprehensive of how we will cope with temptation which will surely come. Someone has said that when temptation came knocking, they sent Jesus to open the door. A simplistic way of putting things, but if we accept that Jesus is the Word become flesh, then when temptation arrives, it can be resisted by the word of God for God has already given us some wonderful answers to this prayer.

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Particularly reassuring are the words in 1 Corinthians 10:13

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

And because we are 'in Christ' we have the promises of Scripture.

2 Timothy 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

2 Peter 2:9

....then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment

Isaiah 43:1-2

...Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine. WHEN you pass through the waters I will be with you; and WHEN you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. WHEN you walk through the fire you will not be burned....

Spelt out for us in Romans 8:38

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And at the end of it all

James 1:12

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

That is the ultimate destiny of those who have travelled through this world with God as sons & daughters, saints, subjects and servants, supplicants, sinners and sojourners. I tried to think of anything else that could have been covered in the

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Lord's Prayer but couldn't. Jesus covered every angle of who and what we are when we belong to Him in just these few words. If that is not inspired I don't know what is. And our response to that? The most fitting end is that given to the prayer itself.

For Thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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