

# TEACH US TO PRAY THROUGH DEPENDENCE

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By Pastor Stan

Matthew 6:11

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## **INTRO.**

-- Our vision at North Center is "To glorify God by making disciples who know Christ, grow in Him, and show their love for Him." To help us understand how we become this kind of a disciple we use a diagram called "The Disciple's Cross."

-- To keep our lives centered on Christ, to keep us close to Him and growing in Him, God has given us several critical resources that are pictured as the arms of the cross. Those resources are: (1) God's Word (the Bible); (2) Prayer; (3) Fellowship with Other Believers; and (4) Witnessing to the World. Each year we emphasize one of these resources and seek to learn more about it and make it a greater part of our lives. This year, 2015, we are emphasizing prayer. Of the four resources represented in the arms of the cross, perhaps none is more neglected or misunderstood than prayer.

To help us understand and practice prayer more effectively, we are beginning this year with a series on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6 (p. 811)

This chapter is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which covers chapters 5-7. In the middle of that sermon Jesus gives what we call the Lord's Prayer as a model to instruct us in what prayer is and to teach us how to pray.

vv. 9-13

-- The first thing Jesus teaches us about prayer here is that true prayer is not about us but about God. The first three petitions in the prayer are centered on God and concerned with Him:

1. For His Name to be "hallowed" (for His name to be exalted and held as holy and for His glory to be our greatest desire)

2. For His Kingdom to come (for God to be Lord of all and over all in our lives)

3. For His will to be done (for our will to be surrendered to His)

-- This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name - to pray according to the model He has given us - to desire God, His Kingdom and will before and above everything else. Only when this is true are we ready to pray properly for ourselves. The three petitions concerning God are followed by three petitions for ourselves. The first of those petitions is in verse 11.

v. 11

-- This simple petition contains four significant implications for us.

## **I. The First Implication: God's Sovereignty**

-- The first implication in asking God to provide us with bread is that God is sovereign, that He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, that all life comes from Him and ultimately depends on Him.

**Colossians 1:16-17** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

-- In an awesome act of creation God brought the entire universe into existence - its billions of galaxies and trillions of stars. At His command living creatures filled earth's waters, land and skies. He formed human life in His own image. When the Lord created the universe, He also created the principles, laws, and forces upon which it operates. God not only created the universe; He also sustains it. If somehow God could cease to exist, the universe would also cease to exist - it would be like the "Big Bang" in reverse.

-- It is this creating, sustaining God to whom we pray and lift our petition.

## **II. The Second Implication: Our Dependence**

-- Inseparably connected to the implication of God's sovereignty is the second implication in the prayer for bread: our dependence on Him.

#### A. Most Americans Don't Need God.

-- Most Americans don't recognize their need for God. We have a regular income that provides food to eat and a place to live. We feel rather safe and secure. We have insurance in case of an accident or illness, and we have a retirement plan for our old age. If we don't go to church or read the Bible or pray, we still get along. We just don't need God - or so it seems.

The reality, as we have just seen from the passage in Colossians, is that we need Him even if we aren't aware of it or won't admit it. But life also has a way of reminding us that we aren't as independent and self-sufficient as we think, of bringing us face-to-face with our need for God. Your company is restructured, and you get the news that you are no longer needed. Your child has an accident and is lying in an ICU bed barely holding on to life. You find a lump in your body, and the biopsy reveals a serious malignancy.

I knew a woman who didn't really feel a need for God and discovered that she had advanced cancer. She went through several different treatments, but none of which was successful. The cancer continued to grow. She volunteered for an experimental treatment, which was her last hope. And guess what she also did. She started reading the Bible and praying. She came face-to-face with her need for and dependence on God.

#### B. What Jesus Reminds Us in the Lord's Prayer

-- But Jesus reminds us in the Lord's Prayer that we need God not just for serious problems like cancer. We need God just as much for the most simple and basic matters of life - for something as simple and basic as a loaf of bread.

Before moving to Minnesota and to North Center twenty-six years ago, we lived in Maryland. My office was across the street from a synagogue. The rabbi lived next door to the synagogue, and he and I became good friends. I still remember that whenever we would eat together the prayer that he would pray - a traditional prayer that Jews commonly pray before eating a meal. My Hebrew isn't anything like his, of course, but here's what he would pray:

"Baruk ata Adonai Eloheinu  
Melek ha'olam hamotzi lehem  
Min ha'aretz.

Then he would translate into English:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God,  
King of the universe,  
who bringeth forth bread from the ground."

-- Think of all the factors that must come together for us to obtain a loaf of bread: someone has to plant seed; proper amounts of water, sunlight and temperature are needed for the seed to grow; someone must harvest the grain; someone must mill the grain and make flour from it; someone must prepare the dough from the flour and bake it; someone must transport the bread to the store; and someone must place it on the shelf. And who is overseeing all these agricultural, climatic, and economic factors - God! And that brings us to the third implication.

### III. The Third Implication: God's Providence

-- The request for bread implies that God providentially watches over, cares for, and provides to His people all that they need to fulfill His purposes for them.

-- God's providence is suggested in the image for God that Jesus uses throughout the Sermon on the Mount - that of a Heavenly Father. That, of course, is how Jesus instructs us to address God in the Lord's Prayer.

v. 9, "Our Father in heaven"

Then at the end of the chapter Jesus again uses the picture of God as a heavenly Father to assure us that He will provide for our needs.

**vv. 25-26** "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

**vv. 31-33** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When we come to Christ and acknowledge God as our rightful ruler, the sovereign omnipotent God also becomes our Father and assures us that He will provide for our needs.

#### IV. The Fourth Implication: Our Contentment

-- And that leads us to a fourth implication in the petition for bread: our contentment.

##### A. Not a Request for "Health and Wealth"

-- The request that Jesus instructs us to pray is not a request for the "health and wealth" prosperity that so many in the American church are seeking.

**James 4:2b-3** You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

That describes the church in America - we don't pray, and when do start to pray, our prayers are self-centered and materialistic.

-- How different is the instruction that Jesus gives us in the Lord's Prayer. The only petition for something material is a request for something simple and basic - bread.

##### B. Discontentment

-- Discontentment largely comes from a focus on and over-riding pursuit of things that are non essential, things that are optional, ephemeral, temporary. The discontented person fails to distinguish between needs and greeds.

##### C. Contentment

-- The contented person, on the other hand, distinguishes the essential from the non essential, the important from the optional, the eternal from the temporary.

**1 Timothy 6:8** But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

**Philippians 4:11b-13** I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

**Hebrews 13:5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

-- The secret to contentment is to make Christ not money or material things the focus of our life and to remember that He will never leave us or forsake us.

##### D. "Daily"

-- One last thing I want us to notice in this request is that contentment means to live life one day at a time: "...give us this day our daily bread."

###### 1. The Word "Daily"

-- The only time that the word translated "daily" occurs in the Bible is in the Lord's Prayer. In fact, scholars couldn't even find it outside of the Bible until a archaeologists discovered a papyrus fragment that appeared to be a housewife's shopping list, and next to several of the items was this word, probably meaning that she would buy just enough for one day's supply. Jesus is asking us to live by faith - to trust God for today's needs and to let go of anxieties about tomorrow.

###### 2. The Lesson of Manna

-- Remember the story of the manna? When Israel was wandering in the wilderness, every morning God provided manna - probably a bread-like substance scattered on the ground. The people were instructed to gather enough for just that day. If they hoarded it, it would spoil. God wanted them to trust Him day-by-day. Jesus is telling us to do the same thing. Look at the end of the chapter in verse 34.

v. 34

#### CONCLUSION

These are the lessons contained in the simple prayer for bread:

The lesson of God's sovereignty

The lesson of our dependence

The lesson of God's providence, and

The lesson of our contentment.

May God grant that we would pray and live in the light of these great realities.