

## Praying Kingdom Prayers

[Pre-Meal Prayers clip]

I think a lot of us can relate to that, can't we? The truth is, there's a lot of confusion about prayer—I suspect that's nothing new. I don't think prayer comes naturally for most people. It's something we have to learn, which is why Jesus' disciples, who were all devout Jews from the time they were born asked Jesus to teach them to pray. And what did he teach them? What we call The Lord's Prayer. Let's say it together:

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  
<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.’  
*“For yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen”*”

So far, we've learned that Jesus didn't intend this prayer to be a quick liturgy we pray in service and nothing else. But it's a model for what we should pray about.

If you haven't heard seen the first two messages in the series, go to our website or YouTube channel and watch them and get caught up. And especially, if you haven't seen Keith's message about restoring passion to your relationship with God from last week, you need to go back and watch it. It's fantastic stuff!

Today, we're going to be talking about what we call "Petition." I know that's not a word we use a lot and it maybe seem like a foreign language to you, but it just means "praying for ourselves and others."

Now, I often have people ask me to pray for them and, of course, I'm very happy to do it. But sometimes they ask me to pray for them because I'm a pastor and they think that because I'm a pastor, I have a special connection to God that they don't have and because of that connection, my prayers will be more effective. But it's just not true.

In fact, a number of years ago, when I was pastoring in Iowa, we had a guy in our congregation who started a softball tournament to raise money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. It was an all-day event that brought together a couple dozen teams.

Well, he always had an opening ceremony that introduced the Make-A-Wish child and his or her family. This particular year, Phil asked me to do the prayer at the opening ceremony. Well, one of the most pressing needs for this day was that it was threatening rain. I thought, certainly God wouldn't rain on this poor child's benefit tournament. But just in case, I thought I should point it out.

So, in my opening prayer, I prayed for the family and then I prayed, "And God, if you would be so kind, we ask that you would hold off the rain..." And the very second I spit out the word "rain," the skies opened and there came a torrential downpour that hasn't been seen since the time of the flood in Genesis. We played anyway and had a great time, but all that to say...you don't need a pastor to pray because if you have the

Spirit of God living in you, you have everything you need to intercede for other people. It says in James 5:16, **“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”**

But I know many people ask, *if God is in control of everything, then why we should pray and ask God for things*. Some people answer by saying that it makes us feel better or the value is in the asking. But it seems pretty clear from Scripture that God responds to our prayers. In other words, our prayer can actually change God and change the world.

Now, why would that be? Well, it starts with who we are. If you go all the way back to Genesis, chapter one, the Bible tells us that human beings are made in the image of God. Now, we’ve heard this before when it comes to the creation story, but that term, “image of God” was a pretty common idea in the ancient world and it was reserved for one person—the Pharaoh. Regular people were just regular people, but the king was the image of God and that image of God gave him the right and responsibility to rule.

But the Biblical creation story is a challenge to all the other narratives in the ancient world because the Biblical story said the image of God isn’t reserved just for the Pharaoh. All humans are made in the image of God.

That’s why we see in Genesis 1, **“<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may *rule* over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”** The image of God has to do with our responsibility to care for the world and to make it what God intended it to be.

The problem is that rather than ruling in the way God wants us to rule, we decided we wanted to do things our own way and rather than working with God to make the world what he intended, we often work against God's purposes. But we don't have God's wisdom and understanding, so as a result, the world isn't the way God wants it to be.

That's why in the second part of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, **"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread."** When Jesus talks about God's Kingdom, he's talking about what God is doing in the world. When we intercede in prayer, we participate with God in bringing about the world he intended.

This reminds us that while God tell us to bring our requests to God, the first thing on our minds and on our lips must be what God wants. Then, once we get that straight, the rest of the prayer—starting with "give us today our daily bread," focuses more on us.

That's something people often forget. If you were to listen in to most small groups or prayer meetings—this has been true of every church or small group I've been a part of—here's what people pray about. *Prayers for physical healing. #2: Prayers to get out of trouble. #3: Prayers for safety and comfort.* "So and so is traveling, so I pray you'll keep them safe during this busy holiday season."

Now, don't misunderstand me because I know the next time you're in small group, it'll be awkward when you ask for prayer requests. So, I'll let you off the hook—these are all things we SHOULD pray for. It's certainly not *wrong* to pray for these. But what I'm

saying is that we tend to get myopic when we're interceding for people. We want God to make our lives easier and take care of our physical and material needs, *but we get so caught up in the temporary, that we neglect the eternal.* And oftentimes prayers for these things crowd out our attention to the work God is doing in the world and in us.

One of my favorite prayers in the Bible comes from Acts, chapter 4. Not long after Jesus had gone into heaven, Peter and John were out preaching the Gospel and kicking butt for the Kingdom. Well, the Jewish religious leaders didn't like the fact that so many Jews started following Jesus. So, they had Peter and John arrested and brought before the council. After hearing from them, the council threatened them, warning them not to preach about Jesus but let them go because they were afraid the people would riot.

Well, Peter and John knew they were facing powerful opposition, so they went back to the Church and told them what happened. The Church responded by praying. Now, if this were us in the American church today, there's a good chance our first response wouldn't be to pray. We might complain about our religious freedom being violated. We might call a lawyer or some religious freedom advocacy group. Or we might just stop and say, "Well, I guess we're not allowed to do that."

But the prayer of the early church was amazing. Listen to it. They prayed, **"Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. <sup>25</sup>You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:**

**“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?**

**<sup>26</sup>The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’**

**<sup>27</sup>Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.**

**<sup>28</sup>They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**

Here’s the part I find the most amazing, **“<sup>29</sup>Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup>Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”**

Now, pay attention here...don’t miss this: When we pray, we are always tempted first to pray for what’s right in from of us—for what’s happening right now. We make our *will* the center of our prayers.

And for most of us, what is our will? We want lives of peace, safety and security. We want a predictable future. That’s natural for us. The problem is that safety and security don’t result in the life God wants for us. Peter and John and the rest of the Church weren’t concerned about their safety, they were concerned with what God wants, and so they prayed to that end. One commentator says it this way, *“It is only when God is given his proper place that all other things fall into their proper places.”*

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he started with God’s will. **“Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Week one, we learned that what

we know about God determines how we will pray. So, when we sit down to pray, we should start by asking, "What does God want?" Well, how do we know what God wants?

As Christians, we learn it from the Bible. What does the Bible tell us about God what God wants? Of course, God wants a lot of things, but let's just take a look at five.

**(1) First, God wants everyone to be saved.** 2 Peter 3:9 says, **"<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** And 1 Timothy 2:3-4, **"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."**

So, are there people in your life that need Jesus? Do you pray for them? That's a Kingdom prayer, but Jesus also says in Matthew 9:37-38, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."** If you want your prayers to count for something, what could be more significant than someone's eternity? Have people on your prayer list that you're praying for their salvation. And listen because he might just be sending you as a laborer into the field.

**(2) What else does God want? God wants a good and just society.** We see all over the pages of Scripture that God commands his people to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the prisoner, and people who are pushed to the margins of society. The same passage from 1 Timothy 2 starts by saying this, **"<sup>1</sup>I urge, then, first of all, that petitions,**

**prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup>for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”**

So, pray for our leaders—the people who make policies that have an impact on how just our society is. In fact, a good rule is that you should spend more time *praying* for our leaders than you do *complaining* about them.

Now, I know there are some of you who are thinking, “Yeah, but if the Apostle Paul wasn’t living under the Trump administration. If he were living under the Trump administration, he never would have written this.” And you’re right, Paul didn’t live under the Trump administration. Actually, the book of 1 Timothy was written during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, who was known among other things, for skewering Christians on poles, covering them with tar and setting them on fire to light his parties.

Our elected officials aren’t perfect, but they have an incredibly important job. And while their job isn’t necessarily to pass Christian laws, their job is to shape a society where people can live peaceful lives and pursue godliness and holiness. So, if you know of a corrupt or unjust leader, you don’t have to pray that they’ll be successful in being unjust, but that they’ll see their errors, repent and change. Pray for justice in the world.

**(3) What else does God want? *He wants his people (his Church) to be unified so the world would see the truth of the gospel.*** In John 17, Jesus is preparing to be arrested and crucified and prays one last prayer for his disciples. Among other things, he prays this,  
<sup>20</sup>**“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through**



**their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”**

Just like our government, I think it’s just as easy to complain about “the Church.” In fact, it’s become fashionable to disparage the Church today. The truth is, much of the criticism is earned. People are rightly horrified when they see things like the sex abuse scandals in the Catholic Church and the fact that the Church tried to sweep it under the rug and failed to protect victims. We should be horrified by that, too. But the answer isn’t for believers to distance ourselves from the Church.

The New Testament uses two prominent images for the Church. The first is the “Bride of Christ,” and in Ephesians, chapter 5 it says, **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her…”** What this means is that Christ didn’t just die for you as an individual, but he died for his Church.

The other image for the Church is the “Body of Christ,” which means the Church is called to do the work Jesus did on earth. It’s supposed to be the tangible expression of the Kingdom of God. And when you come to faith in Jesus, like it or not, you are a part of the Church. So, when the Church fails to do the work of Christ or even worse, when it does the opposite of what it’s called to do, we can’t *distance* ourselves from it, but we should fall on our faces and repent on behalf of the Church.

And then we should pray hard for the Church. We should pray for our leaders who represent the Church. Pray for us to have the strength to avoid the temptations of power,

sex, and money. Pray for your brothers and sisters here in this Church—that we would represent Christ well.

**(4) *God wants his people to grow.*** In staff meeting this week, we looked at five different prayers the Apostle Paul prayed for the Churches he was writing to—I've listed them in your notes. If you want to know how to pray for people at Waite Park Church, read through those five prayers and see what Paul believed was important. In fact, you have my permission as a small group to cut out some of the small group questions and read through Paul's prayers for his churches and pray those prayers for each other.

For instance, Philippians 1:9-11, New Living Translation, **"*I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding.* <sup>10</sup>*For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.* <sup>11</sup>*May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*"**

Notice what Paul prays for his people. He prays that their *love* would overflow. He prays that their *knowledge* and *understanding* of God would keep growing. He prays that they would *live consistently with their faith* and that their character would grow closer to that of Christ so God would be glorified through them.

How often do you share prayer requests like these in prayer meeting or small group? Think about the prayer times you've had over the last month. How many of the

requests people shared have anything to do with their desire to be more like Christ? Why is that? Why do we act like it's so much more important to pray for God to fix our bodies than to pray for God to fix our soul? I wonder how much more the Church would be like Christ and how much better God would be glorified through the Church, if we regularly prayed these things for each other.

**(5)** *Finally, God wants to give good things to his children.* Now, I hope you understand what I'm doing here. I'm not at all saying that God doesn't care about your knee surgery or that you're travelling to Michigan next week. It's natural and good to pray for these things and when we do, we acknowledge our dependence on God.

In the passage earlier, Jesus describes God as the father who knows what we need. He tells us that if God cares for birds and flowers, why would we think he doesn't care about us? His ways are not our ways, but we can trust that God has the best in mind.

That's why Jesus tells us in verse 11, **"Give us today our daily bread."** Now, we might miss this, but the NIV does a good job of translating the Greek, which emphasizes the fact that this is a *daily* prayer. Give us *today*, our *daily* bread. Not next week's bread, but bread for today. And in it, we learn dependence on God.

But I know there are some here today who *desperately* need to pray for more than just daily bread because your life is a constant struggle. Or maybe you're dealing with a situation that's wrecking you, but you don't know what to do.

Part of the issue for many of you is that your picture of God determines how you pray. What I mean is that you might not know God as your loving father in heaven. Your picture of God is God the distant king. Of course, you're right that God is the king of the universe. But if you can't claim God as your heavenly father, who knows what you need and cares about the details of your life, your prayers will be polite and timid and you probably won't be persistent, because you don't feel worthy to approach a God like that.

Right after Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer in Luke, he continues teaching on prayer by telling this parable. **"<sup>5</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' <sup>7</sup>And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.**

**<sup>9</sup>"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.**

**<sup>11</sup> "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, though you are evil,**

**know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

This is a bold statement by Jesus, but it’s not predicated on God being a divine vending machine where you put in your prayer and you receive what you want instantly. No, it’s based on a relationship with the God of the universe, who is also your heavenly father. This means prayer isn’t like showing up unannounced before the king who will send you to the pit of despair just for asking.

But it means you can walk right in and ask. In fact, Jesus encourages us to beg and plead and argue with God. It means you can wrestle and try to convince God like we see a number of people in the Bible do. And because God is a good father, he wants to give what is best. Jesus’ point is not that you will get exactly what you want. But like a wise parent, he knows that what we want isn’t always best, but being persistent in prayer means that we will receive what truly is best—an intimate relationship with God and a heart that aligns with his.